

HCPSS Superintendent Contract Renewal Comments

Dr. Michael J. Martirano – February 10, 2022

First of all, I want to individually and personally thank members of the Howard County Board of Education: Chair Cutroneo, Vice-Chair Watts, Members: Dr. Lu, Ms. Mallo, Ms. Mosley and Dr. Wu for your affirming vote tonight. Also, I want to recognize Board Member Delmont-Small who is unable to be with us tonight. Board Members, your combined talents and dedication to our students is simply awe inspiring. You have created a collaborative and synergistic leadership environment where continuous improvement is an expectation and a norm and not a platitude or just rhetoric. You have led during some the most tumultuous times of a historic pandemic and yet your resilience has been displayed and flexed each day of your term. No one fully understands the tireless hours you have devoted to complete the work on behalf of our students. For that I say thank you.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge our Student Member of the Board, Mr. Peter Banyas. Peter, your steadfast focus on representing the student voice is beyond impressive. As you know, I am a strong proponent of the student voice and your insightful comments always provide information that I consider in my decision making and for that I say thank you.

Next, I want to elevate our amazing and dedicated teachers, administrators, nurses, support staff, operations staff, central office staff and every individual who supports our students. Your tolerance for ambiguity in an ever-shifting landscape full of multiple challenges has been nothing short of watching a well-rehearsed symphony in action every day, in each school, and in every classroom and location across our beautiful school system. Time and time again, I have had to come back to you to ask for more as the fluid and dynamic variables of the pandemic emerged daily. You rose to the occasion and you just kept giving. I know it has be hard and you are my heroes. I am forever grateful for your persistence and tenacity and for that I say thank you.

Additionally, I want to add texture to the mosaic of our school system by lifting up the members of our bargaining units. To the President of HCEA, Colleen Morris, I say thank you. To the president of HCASA, Nick Novak, I say thank you. To the president of AFSCME, Robert Coleman, I say thank you. The work of labor relations can be hard and viewed as contentious, daunting and adversarial, but yet in the Howard County Public School System we have broken those perceptions by creating a collaborative environment where we seek shared solutions for our employees. I am very proud to be a part of such dynamic and fruitful interactions. Even though we may not always agree, we always desire to find common ground. That does not happen by accident, but by design.

Also, I would like to acknowledge and thank our County Executive, Calvin Ball, whose partnership with me throughout my tenure as superintendent has been reassuring and a true example of collaboration that serves as a model for replication for other counties. To our County Council and our Howard County Delegation, I say thank you for your support and dedication to our students.

Last but not least, I want to lift up the amazing members of my Cabinet, my Leadership team of Chiefs, my Deputy Superintendent Karalee Turner-Little and my brilliant executive assistants, Kathy Agans and Carrie Slaysman. The work has been 24/7 over a sustained period of time and yet you have never thrown in the towel because you knew our students, teachers and staff were depending on us to lead in a compassionate, thoughtful, intentional, and focused manner. Your loyalty, trust, support and intelligence has been inspiring in ways that you will never know and for that I say thank you.

I have lived in Howard County for a total of 24 years and I love our wonderful and diverse county and my roots have grown deep and strong. It is my home. What seems like only yesterday, my wife and I moved to Howard

County where we raised our three children who attended schools in the Howard County Public School System. Today, my children are adults and thriving with their own families and I attribute a large portion of their success to the educational foundation they received in the formative years of their educational journey to the Howard County Public School System. I have consistently transferred my hopes and dreams for my own children to the 57,000 young people in the Howard County Public School System. I have always led with the mantra that “if all children have a safe harbor, then none will be at risk.” Our school system must remain and always be a place for hope and a safe harbor for every child. ALL and I mean ALL young people in our school system must be seen, acknowledged, included and accepted. “The Howard County Public School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, immigration status, religion, physical, mental or educational disability, pregnancy, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status or socioeconomic status in our educational programs including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, in the workplace or in our hiring practices.” This is our statement on non-discrimination. Now, more than ever we must lift-up this statement and go even further by keeping it front and center in all of our actions to support the belief that each child can and will learn and to ensure that our commitments of acceptance and inclusion to our students, families and staff are fulfilled and realized so that every student may thrive. This is my guiding tenet. Nothing short of this is an option.

In conclusion, my fervent commitment to working for the betterment of every student in our school system is focused, sharp and intense. In Howard County, we may not always agree on every issue, but through the discourse and the spirit of cooperation we recognize that we are all in this together and we must do what is best and right for our students. There is much work that needs to be done and with an eye to the future, we must lead our school system past the pandemic and address all the requisite and innovative initiatives designed to meet the needs of our beautiful and diverse student body. To that end, I look forward to working together with our communities, our families and all our stakeholders and with our Board of Education to continue to support all of our students and our most vulnerable students by creating more and more safe harbors. The work continues, the focus is precise and the urgency of now is pervasive and built on a foundation of equity in all that we do. To lead is to serve and I am honored and humbled to continue to serve the children of Howard County as Superintendent of Schools. Thank you very much.