

It is an honor and pleasure to present the State of the Howard County Public School System.

I would like to thank all of you for attending this special and important occasion. It truly shows your commitment to public education. Howard County is rich in many ways, but I believe our most valuable resource is our dedicated, caring community. Our school system enjoys a level of community support that would be the envy of most other school systems.

I'd like to give a special thanks to the Bright Minds Foundation. Bright Minds is dedicated exclusively to supporting Howard County public schools and students. Over the last year we have asked Bright Minds for their support for several of our new initiatives, and they have stepped up to the plate admirably. These projects include:

- Our new "Read With Me" early learning initiative, by providing a book to each young family at three pilot schools.
- A need-based scholarship for JumpStart participants to cover textbooks and fees for those taking classes at HCC.
- The "Computers for Students" program provides free computers to students and families eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals.

### **System Snapshot**

I'll begin with a quick overview of our schools and students. We have 77 schools and approximately 58,000 students.

Our student body is wonderfully diverse:

- 22 percent of our student body is Asian
- 24 percent are African American
- 11 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino
- 37 percent are White; and
- 6 percent identify as two or more races

Our county is the fastest-growing in Maryland. But growing even faster are the number of students who live in poverty and face other significant challenges. Over 22 percent of our students receive Free or Reduced Meals (FARMs), which is a measure of poverty. 9% receive special education services. Our students represent 143 different countries and speak 129 different languages.

We are Howard County's largest employer, with nearly 12,000 full and part-time employees including 4,800 teachers.

Our system is a business in a very real sense, with an \$862 million operating budget which includes \$600 million from the county and \$72 million capital budget. Our per pupil expenses are \$15,300 per year. We receive the largest proportion of county dollars, and we are committed to fulfilling the public trust through fiscal responsibility.

But because our business is providing a high-quality, equitable and nurturing education for every child, our decisions must take into account the heart as well as the bottom line.

Unfortunately, Maintenance of Effort funding falls short as we struggle to balance a growing population, increasing student needs, a high-quality staff and an employee Health Fund deficit, in an economic climate that puts pressure on county and state government budgets. I appreciate the efforts of the County Executive and County Council for their efforts to provide \$18.2 million above MOE. I want us to begin having a conversation on how we can advocate for change at the state level, to help ensure that we can take care of the needs of our young people in a constantly-changing world.

I've been with HCPSS just 16 months, and I can frankly say our school system is now a different place than it was just over a year ago. I am pleased to say that HCPSS is back and the state of the school system is strong. We have come a

long way, and we can point with pride at progress that spans across academics, student well-being, school capacity, operations, finances, community engagement, and transparency.

We've been celebrating that progress as we've welcomed our students and families back to school.

### **Year 1 Progress: School Capacity**

- We've just opened a new school, Hanover Hills Elementary, to relieve school overcrowding and address the needs of the rapidly growing eastern portion of our county.
- We have accelerated the construction and opening of our next High School, so it will now open in 2023.
- We are preparing for a replacement school for Talbott Springs Elementary, scheduled to open in August 2022, and an addition and renovation at Hammond High School that is scheduled for completion in August 2023.

Thank you, County Executive Kittleman, for your leadership and collaboration with our school system and County Council, which makes these improvements possible.

### **Year 1 Progress: Student Well-Being**

We have improved the safety of our schools by:

- Consolidating all security and risk management functions under a new Director
- Tightening building access, thanks to \$2.5 million in county funding
- Strengthening school security protocols
- Building on our partnership with Howard County Police Department and establishing formal protocols for police visits to schools

We have enhanced supports for the students with greatest need by adding special educators, social workers and nurses at our schools, and expanding mental health resources and supports in collaboration with our community partners. We have added new Special Education Family Liaison and Executive Director of Community, Parent and School Outreach positions.

We have greatly strengthened our emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion by adding a new Executive Director and building greater capacity among leaders and staff throughout the school system.

### **Year 1 Progress: System Operations**

We have addressed an escalating deficit in our employee Health Fund. Expenses for the current school year have been fully funded, and we have begun a multi-year plan to reduce the accrued deficit and set a fiscally sustainable course, all in partnership with our County Executive and Council.

In fact, I'm pleased to announce today that our \$50.5 million deficit that was projected last fall has been reduced due to our fiscal prudence and I will be able to announce that reduction soon.

We have restructured our Central Office to improve alignment and focus on the classroom. We have reduced some central office positions, added some in key areas, and restructured our school administration under three new Area Superintendents to provide a birth-to-graduation focus.

Each of the accomplishments I've listed is important. I am proud of our system and staff for the progress we have already made. But facts and figures can't really get to the heart of our work as educators, or why our continued progress and a focused path forward are so critical.

Every student is waiting for someone... teacher, principal, custodian, or someone in their community to look out for their needs in setting priorities for our school system and for our county.

We need to deliver because *each one* of our 58,000 students needs us to do everything in our power to help them succeed academically, thrive emotionally and socially, and prepare to graduate, to go on to college or a good job, and have a happy and prosperous life.

Each one of our children has a unique story and comes to school bringing individual hopes, dreams, strengths and challenges. We have just 13 short years to connect with, understand, teach, nurture and guide each student on a path that leads to lifelong success and prosperity, rather than to failure, wasted potential, or even incarceration.

We need to get this right because our children are waiting for us.

### **HCPSS Strategic Call to Action ([www.hcpss.org/scta/](http://www.hcpss.org/scta/))**

Our Strategic Call to Action guides the work and priorities of our school system and is the basis for much of the progress I've already described. I would like to thank the Board of Education for their support throughout this process.

Each of the next four years that I am Superintendent, the same themes will emerge because they are the foundation for everything we wish to accomplish.

We will continue to build upon the foundation we've already established by aligning our actions and priorities, and establishing performance measures to track our progress. This approach will help to ensure that each of our staff members work in unison to support every student's academic success and emotional well-being, through decisions and actions that are consistently transparent.

We are focusing all of our actions and resources toward achieving 15 Desired Outcomes that span three key areas:

- Student-Centered Practices
- Inclusive Relationships
- Responsive and Efficient Operations

We have a number of specific initiatives underway that I'll summarize.

### **Free & Discounted Benefits for Qualifying Families**

Our success as a school system will lie in the answer to the question, "How are we responding to the needs of each and every student in our care?"

Currently, 22% of our students identify as living in poverty but we believe the number to be much higher. Too many children in our schools are homeless, hungry, witness to violence, and generally distressed.

We are working to eliminate the stigmas associated with applying for the free and reduced-price meals program (FARMs) and to create greater awareness of the benefits for those who qualify, to help more students and families receive the much-needed supports that are available to them. These include school meals and free or lower costs for educational enrichment programs, college costs, free computers from Bright Minds and other benefits.

We are continuing to expand our summer food program. We served 66,000 meals this summer, compared to 50,000 last year. We are adding more fresh fruit and vegetable bars in schools - every elementary school will have one by the end of this school year.

These supports can make the difference between a child who comes to school in distress and unable to concentrate, to one whose basic needs are met so he or she can focus on learning.

### **Mental Health**

Many children in our schools are battling depression, identity issues, bullying and stress. The numbers of even very young students affected are growing. Without the required supports, how can we ever expect them to thrive academically?

We will continue to provide greater resources directly into our schools through additional staffing and community partnerships, in order to surround our students with the knowledge and supports they require. We are adding new social workers and nurses and are working with Howard County Health Department to add school-based mental health centers, and we will continue to expand on these resources over the upcoming years.

### **Restorative Discipline**

Currently, there is a troubling disproportionality in our student discipline practices, which is evidenced by data. We are working to establish a restorative culture, so that every student, employee, and community member in every classroom, school, office and neighborhood will feel safe, connected and focused on relationship-building.

Dr. Kevin Gilbert, our Executive Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is leading our work in this area.

### **Early Learning**

Many children enter kindergarten lacking the skills and abilities to begin their academic career on track.

Parents are a child's first teacher. We are collaborating with community and healthcare partners to provide new parents with resources and supports to help them foster their child's early development, beginning at birth.

For example, we are launching "Read With Me: Howard County," a pilot at three schools to provide a book each month to families of young children, in partnership with county government and Bright Minds. Read With Me joins ReadyRosie, Talk With Me, and our new partnership with Howard County General Hospital, under the countywide Launch Into Learning umbrella of programs to nurture learning from birth through age 5.

### **Innovative Pathways**

Many students lack options or resources to successfully advance after high school to college or a living-wage career. We are working to increase options through multiple career pathways, early college opportunities, and by generally expanding opportunities for all students.

We will build on the success of JumpStart, our dual enrollment partnership with Howard Community College, and add more Career Academies and apprenticeship programs that give strong options for students, including those who are not headed to college.

Many of you serve on our Program Innovation Advisory Board, and we appreciate your support and collaboration in opening new opportunities for our students.

## **Student and Community Voice**

Too often, decisions on school system policy and procedures are made with limited input from parents, students and community members.

We have been working on several levels to bring the benefit of many voices into school system decisions and ensure the transparency of our operations. We have added new Special Education Family Liaison and Executive Director of Community, Parent and School Outreach positions.

We are preparing to launch seven new Superintendent's Advisory Councils to involve many more stakeholders in developing initiatives and solutions aligned to our Strategic Call to Action including advisories on Special Education, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Teachers, Paraeducators, Students, Program Innovation, and Mental Health. These advisories will give us the benefit of new ideas and perspectives from many different voices including parents, teachers, and community leaders and advocates. Membership will rotate so we can hear from as many different stakeholders as possible.

Our children are counting on every member of our community to give them the best start in life. Our children are waiting for all of us.

As community leaders, you play a critical role. We need your partnership and support by:

- Helping our students to prepare for the workforce by providing internships and work experiences.
- Giving us your input about our curriculum needs and policy.
- Using the power of your influence to advocate for children and education in state and county budgeting.

Thank you for your collaboration in ensuring a bright and lasting future for education in Howard County.

Michael J. Martirano , Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Howard County Public Schools