Board Meeting Remarks
Talking Points For Michael J. Martirano,
Superintendent

Date: Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Introductions - Newly Promoted Administrators

- I would like to start by introducing promotions of our staff for the 2020-2021 school year. First, I would like to introduce Paul Linkins, Coordinator of Academic Intervention Programs.

- Mr. Linkins most recently served as a Pupil Personnel Worker in the Howard County Public School System, and he previously held roles as high school counselor and elementary school assistant principal. He has also worked in Baltimore County Public Schools as a middle school behavior interventionist.

- He is joined here today by his wife, Sarah, daughter, Evie (E-vee), and sons, Henry and Bennett.

- I would like to introduce Cindy Bouchard (Boo-shard), Instructional Facilitator for Birth to Five Services.

- Ms. Bouchard comes to us from Anne Arundel County Public Schools, where she spent 20 years in the Birth to Five programs as a speech pathologist in the Infants and Toddlers Program and Program Manager for Preschool Special Education. Ms. Bouchard is a member of the State Interagency Coordinating Council, and has been a member of the Local Interagency Coordinating Council and Early Childhood Coalition in Anne Arundel County.

- Joining Ms. Bouchard this evening is her husband, Rich, and daughter, Casey.

- I would like to introduce Kion Mackell (“mc-KELL”), Leadership Intern at Bonnie Branch Middle.

- This is Mr. Mackell’s 15th year in education, having previously served in positions at the elementary, middle and high school levels for Prince George’s and Anne Arundel Counties. His roles have included Physical Education Lead Teacher, Mentor Teacher,
Alternative One Teacher, Behavior Intervention Specialist, County Wide Restorative Practices Trainer, High School Football Coach and Acting Assistant Principal.

- Joining Mr. Mackell this evening is his wife, Alaina.

Now I’ll move into the remainder of my report.

**COVID-19 Update**

- The [HCPSS Reopening Plan](#) for the 2020-2021 school year has been posted on the HCPSS website, fulfilling all of the requirements of the Maryland Department of Education’s Maryland Together: Maryland’s Recovery Plan for Education ahead of the August 14 MSDE deadline. MSDE has sent our plan to its review team to provide feedback.

  As you know, our reopening planning is a dynamic process, and central office staff and school administrators are working through the many decisions, preparations and details that must be finalized to prepare for a successful virtual opening on Sept 8. As always, we continue to lead with equity and prioritize the safety and well-being of students and staff in making every decision. All new information is being posted on the HCPSS website.

- Additionally, we have a [Help Site](#) that is continually updated with answers to frequently asked questions. Newer FAQs are highlighted and included in our weekly HCPSS News emails to families and the community. I encourage families to check back often for answers to their questions.

- **Meals**
  - As of yesterday, August 17, we have served over 200,000 free grab-and-go summer meals through our 14 meal distribution sites at locations throughout the county. Our summer meals program will continue through August 28.
  - For the fall, we are preparing to offer meal services through all 76 school meal locations.
  - Registration for the Free and Reduced-priced Meals (FARMs) program has reopened. We have updated FARMs program information on the HCPSS website, and are providing paper applications at our meal distribution sites. Many more
families are eligible to participate in FARMs due to the pandemic, and we want every family who could benefit from this service to apply.

○ In addition to meals, students participating in the FARMs program qualify for a wide range of resources and discounts, including tuition, internet and more.

○ I encourage families to visit the website at www.hcpss.org/farms/ for information and support provided in several languages.

● Technology

○ As you know, the $13 million in COVID-19 Federal Relief Funds we recently received, in addition to grant funds received previously, will allow us to eventually achieve a 1:1 student-device ratio in pre-K through grade 12, and retain a 1% reserve of computers for replacement. This will ensure that every student will have the technology they need to be successful in this new instructional environment.

○ The national supply of Chromebooks continues to be limited, and we are working to obtain new and prepare available devices for distribution as quickly as possible. We plan to roll out devices to elementary students first, and will achieve 1:1 distribution at the elementary level by the first day of school. Middle school distribution will be next, followed by high schools, with distribution prioritized by need.

○ To date, we have already distributed 9,572 Chromebooks to elementary students, 3,776 to middle school students and 3,777 to high school students who expressed a need during the spring semester or over the summer.

○ Additionally, with the support of the Bright Minds Foundation, we are able to provide internet access to households currently without it, through the deployment of Comcast Internet Essentials and hot spots.

○ We have shared information about devices with families so that they identify their device needs. All families - including those with middle and high school students - who require a device or internet access for virtual learning should identify their need by logging into HCPSS Connect.

● Childcare
During recent Board meetings, Board members have engaged in public discussion about the need for more supports for families – particularly childcare. As you know, the urgent need for childcare across our county continues to be a top consideration and will impact the effectiveness of our virtual instructional solution this fall.

Last week, we announced arrangements with Howard County Recreation and Parks and Columbia Association to provide childcare in some of our school buildings. This is a tangible and real way to support our families that we will be able to deliver as long as all safety protocols are followed, daily school operations are not disrupted, and our virtual educational programs can be delivered without interference.

We recognize the critical need for childcare across the county, but must balance the reality of risks to health and safety for students, staff and families, which were the basis for opting for an all-virtual instruction model for the fall. We have agreed to accommodate space for a limited – and what we believe to be a manageable – childcare program under the circumstances and will continually assess the program for opportunities in the future.

Before we agreed to host some childcare opportunities in our buildings, Howard County Recreation and Parks and Columbia Association developed and submitted appropriate safety and health protocols for their programs that met standards set forth by the MSDE and the CDC. While HCPSS custodians are ultimately responsible for the buildings, the organizations will collaborate with our custodians and take primary responsibility for the cleaning of their areas.

We are also partnering with the Howard County Office of Children and Families and the Maryland State Department’s Office of Child Care Region 6 to survey childcare programs in the county about the need for full-time school-age care this fall. The survey results will be used to assist families seeking child care for the fall and will support us in providing professional learning for licensed child care providers and licensed family child care providers who will be caring for school-age children.

- **Immunizations**: In partnership with the Howard County Health Department (HCHD) and the Maryland Partnership for Prevention (MPP), we will offer several immunization clinics, at no cost to families, for any student who may need vaccines. These clinics will
take place outdoors at some school buildings during the week of September 21. Multiple vaccines will be offered at no cost to families.

- **School Supplies:**
  
  - For the 2020-21 school year, all elementary schools will use a single list of school supplies, and all middle schools will also use a single supply list. The number of supplies on each list have been reduced to keep costs down for families and reflect those most essential for virtual learning, and by leveraging Canvas and other digital tools as much as possible. The supply lists have been posted on the HCPSS website and are being communicated to families this week.

  - Please note that high schools do not have general supply lists, because different classes have unique requirements. High school teachers will inform students of any needed supplies at the start of the school year.

  - Several partner organizations are working with schools to support school supply needs, so families who need help in obtaining supplies should contact their school administrator. We appreciate the support of Bright Minds through their Access to Learning fund, which provided thousands of school supplies and at-home learning materials to families during the spring and summer months.

- **Testing:** We are working with the College Board and ACT to support fall administrations of the SAT and ACT tests in HCPSS facilities. These preparations include collaboration with our Operations teams to ensure test administrations will be fully compliant with health and safety guidance including social distancing. Staff are reviewing new PSAT options from the College Board to determine how to offer the assessment to HCPSS juniors. We will soon have more information to share with families once these plans are finalized.

- **In-Person Opportunities:** The decision to implement a fully virtual instructional solution is not ideal for any student, but it inequitably impacts vulnerable student populations. In alignment with Phase 2 of the Governor's reopening plan and following all health and safety guidelines of the Howard County Health Department and CDC, we are exploring multiple opportunities to provide some important in-person opportunities for students and families. The opportunities being implemented or explored include:

  - Limited childcare opportunities
  - Special education services
  - Support for the Teen Parenting Program
○ Counseling and other mental health supports
○ Fall administration of the SAT, ACT and PSAT for college entrance and scholarship opportunities
○ Meal distribution
○ Support for homeless students
○ Other opportunities as they arise

These opportunities will provide support for the students who need them the most and begin to lay the foundation for the eventual return to a hybrid or in-person instructional model for all students, once it is deemed safe to implement on a large scale basis.

This effort is tightly aligned to my agenda of equity. As stated in our definition, equity does not mean equal or giving everyone the same thing. Virtual instruction is likely to be difficult for most students, but could be especially detrimental for some students. I intend to explore anything that we can do to safely offer supports in other ways, for the students who need them the most.

Other topics

● The Summer Innovative Pathways Virtual Commencement Ceremony was held on the evening of Wednesday, August 12. Many people tuned in to our website to watch, and the event was also broadcast on our cable tv channels. The graduation is still available to view on our website by going to www.hcpss.org/commencements.

● It was my pleasure to address our newly-hired teachers, school counselors and psychologists, and related service providers this morning during Virtual New Educators Orientation. The first year of teaching is always very challenging, and more so this year starting in a virtual environment, which is very different from the environment these educators prepared and trained for. This year’s orientation is a good start, and we will continue to give them all the support they need. HCPSS teachers are the best of the best, and I am very confident that our students continue to be in excellent hands.

● A new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion webpage has been launched at www.hcpss.org/diversity. The new page includes details on our work around DEI, professional development, restorative practices and more. While this information previously was available throughout the website, having it on one page ensures staff, students, families, community members and other parties can easily find information
they are looking for and will see all the work we are doing, not just bits and pieces. This page will be updated as needed.

- I’m pleased to announce that our new website for Board policies: policy.hcpss.org, is now live. This site builds upon work previously done to ensure policies were accessible and mobile-friendly, and improves the browsing capability and provides a basic policy search feature.

- Last Thursday, August 13, it was my pleasure to join County Executive Calvin Ball, Howard County Library System President & CEO Tonya Aikens, Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services Director Jackie Scott, and Lisbon Elementary Principal Deb Anoff to formalize our partnership for the Lisbon Elementary School “Food and Fun To Go” program.

  This partnership is a collaboration among the County government, Library system, Lisbon United Methodist Church, The Grill at Lisbon and Lisbon Elementary School, to provide meals for families at Lisbon Elementary and neighboring schools. In addition to meals, the Library provides a family STEAM activity each week.

  We are living in difficult times affecting many Howard County families, including many who have not previously needed support. We deeply appreciate the support of our community partners in reaching out a helping hand to Western Howard County families in need.

- This concludes my remarks.