

February 23, 2023

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff:

This message comes to you on behalf of Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) and the dedicated school system employees who are represented by the Education Association of Charles County (EACC) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). We wanted to take this opportunity to address concerns regarding student behaviors in our schools. But first, if you are not familiar with the EACC or AFSCME, they are our local employee unions that represent teachers, certificated staff and support staff. Every CCPS school is filled with staff who come to work each day to make a difference in the lives of our students to support their learning and growth.

While all CCPS staff are fully committed to the well-being and engagement of every student, we are experiencing an increase in students' social-emotional needs along with poor decision-making and negative behaviors. More specifically, we are seeing students acting out in class, assaulting staff and each other, and bringing prohibited items to school such as weapons or drugs. While this remains a small percentage of our student body, such actions and behaviors impact the entire school community.

Administrators and staff are consistently enforcing rules in place regarding student behaviors outlined in the CCPS *Code of Student Conduct*. This document is [posted here on the CCPS website](#). We have further increased the number of mental health supports and staff since returning from the pandemic because we understand that our students were impacted through this timeframe. We will continue to provide embedded supports throughout our schools. However, I along with our union leaders, reach out to you – our community – to ask for your support and engagement as we address the negative behaviors that prevent our students from reaching their full potential.

We need your support in emphasizing that schools are not the place for weapons, drugs or violence. Further, the assaults by students on staff and/or their peers is simply unacceptable. Not only does it cause both physical and mental trauma to those involved or who witness the acts, but it also normalizes the behaviors, enhances negative stereotypes about our youth and reinforces notions that our schools are not safe. While many students may not be exposed to drugs or weapons at home or in the community, these items are being brought into schools more frequently and anyone could be exposed to them. As a school system and as a community, this is not and cannot be the new normal for our students. Or for any of us. Simply stated, we have much talent in our youth and we need concentrated efforts to support our staff to ensure all students are thriving and will be ready to pursue their interests after graduation.

We are asking parents and our families to help us for the betterment of all students and our schools. The following are ways in which you can help.

- **Stay connected with your child's teachers.** Ask them about your child's progress and ways you can support their academic and personal growth at home. Schedule a parent conference if you have concerns. Reach out to a school staff member, administrator, counselor or other resource if you need additional advice or resources to support your child and their needs.
- **Talk frankly to your child about the dangers associated with drugs.** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, known as SAMHSA, has resources you can use to prepare for these talks with your children. The "Talk. They Hear You" campaign focuses on substance

abuse and drug awareness. These materials are posted at <https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>.

- **Attend the March 9 CCPS Behavioral Health Conference.** This event will feature workshops for parents and students about mental health and wellness, and drug awareness. Mike Veny, a mental health and wellness expert, will provide a keynote address. The conference is 3 to 6 p.m. March 9 at Thomas Stone High School. [Learn more here](#).
 - SAMHSA also has a dedicated webpage with resources such as videos, talking points and other materials families can use to talk with kids about mental health and wellness. Visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/families>.
- **Mark your calendars to attend a March 16 CCPS parent workshop focused on technology safety.** Guest speaker Vincent DeVivo of the U.S. Attorney's Office will present Innocence Stolen: Protecting our Children Online from 6 to 7:30 p.m. March 16 at Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School.
 - The presentation discusses topics that could be disturbing to children including predatory behavior, sexting, cyberbullying, internet predators and social networking.
 - Presentation content is not suitable for children.
 - Registration is encouraged. [Click here for more details](#).
- **Find out how you can volunteer or mentor with CCPS.** Every CCPS school has a volunteer program coordinator who oversees its volunteer processes. More information is posted at <https://www.ccboe.com/parents/volunteer-information>.
- **Join your child's Parent-Teacher-Organization (PTO).** Every CCPS school has a PTO that needs parental support. Learn more at <https://www.ccboe.com/parents/parent-teacher-organization>.
- Ask your child's teachers, administrators and staff about available clubs, booster groups and other activities in which you/your child can be engaged and active in the school community.

We all want every student to succeed and have a positive educational experience. This takes a solid partnership between our families and educators. Thank you for taking the time to read this very important message. If you or your child needs help, please reach out to a staff member at your child's school. We are here to support you and your family.

Sincerely,



Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Sean Heyl
EACC President



Sarah Burch
AFSCME President