

# Board Meeting Remarks

Dr. Michael J. Martirano, Superintendent

**Date:** Thursday, October 8, 2020



## Recognition and Celebrations

### National Board Certified Nurses

- Today I'm delighted to recognize 14 of our school nurses who recently earned their National Board Certification for School Nurses.
- This credential reflects incredible competence and professionalism. To earn this certification, a nurse must demonstrate a high level of education, clinical practice experience and knowledge.
- I'm very proud that Howard County boasts a total of 32 Nationally Board Certified school nurses.
- Please join me in recognizing our most recent nationally certified school nurses:
  - Nicole Cysneiros
  - Camilla Dacombe
  - Jonna Debenedictis
  - Annette Grzybinski
  - Karin Hanger
  - Florence Hanssen
  - Laura Kutz
  - Alix Latona
  - Cindy Lazzari
  - Diann Rocha
  - Laura Ruiz
  - Kathleen Simon
  - Karen Stark
  - Ida Waldron

### JumpStart participation

- As you know, our JumpStart dual enrollment program enables students to earn college credit while still in high school, giving many students, including those at greatest need, a valuable head start on a college education at a greatly reduced cost.
- I'm pleased to report that for the Fall 2020 semester, 1,325 students – representing all of our high schools – are enrolled in JumpStart and are taking nearly 3,000 courses for college credit.
- Approximately 2,200 of these courses are being taken through the Howard Community College campus and the remainder are being taken within HCPSS high schools. This Fall HCPSS students will earn over 9,700 college credits.
- One benefit of this year's 4x4 schedule is that we are able to offer a second set of HCPSS-based dual enrollment courses in the Spring semester, giving students additional opportunities to earn college credits in our buildings, as well as through Winter and Spring HCC-based courses. This will increase our total dual enrollment participation numbers for this school year.

### **Partnerships report**

- The HCPSS Educational Partnerships 2019-2020 Annual Report is now posted on the HCPSS website. The report shares visual examples of the countless ways our community partners commit their time, talent and resources to help care for our students and staff. Each school's partners are listed, as well as systemwide, curricular and program office partnerships. We are fortunate to be teaching and supporting students in a community so dedicated to education, and I extend my personal thanks to each and every partner for your support.

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### **COVID-19 UPDATE**

#### **Online learning**

- During the week of September 28-October 2, approximately 99% of our students took part in one or more application activities, which include Google Meet sessions or learning activities on Canvas, DreamBox, or Lexia Core.
- On October 6, which is the most recent update available, approximately 97% of students were marked as present for student attendance.

#### **Technology for online learning**

- We continue to work toward achieving a 1:1 student-device ratio by the end of this school year. The status of device distribution is as follows:
  - Chromebooks have been provided to schools to distribute to all elementary students, grades preK-5.
  - We have already provided Chromebooks for 49% of middle school students. Middle school distribution will be completed within the first quarter.
  - We have provided Chromebooks for 32% of high school students to date. All high school device distribution will be completed within the current school year as devices are received from our vendor.
  - We have also provided nearly 500 hotspots and over 540 Internet Essentials vouchers to schools for distribution to their families who need support in acquiring internet access, in an effort supported by the Bright Minds Foundation.
- Any family who needs a device or internet access - including families with middle and high school students - is asked to express their need via HCPSS Connect. Families unable to access HCPSS Connect, or who need assistance for requesting a computer or internet access should contact their child's school for support. More information about [student technology](#) is provided on our website.

### **Small Group In-Person Supports**

- We are preparing to open the initial contingent of our planned face-to-face small group programs for students who urgently need the kind of support that can best be provided in person. The two major components of the small group initiative are:
  - School-Based Learning Centers, for students who have experienced significant barriers to attendance or virtual learning, and/or receive mental health or behavioral supports in schools, and
  - Special Education programs.
- We have completed our surveys of selected parents and staff to ask their interest in participating in School-Based Learning Centers. Based on the data collected, we are preparing to open school-based learning centers at 19 schools, including 11 full-day centers and 8 part-time centers. In total, these centers will serve approximately 250 students.

- We are tentatively planning to open the first of these centers next Monday, October 12, and phasing in all 19 over the following weeks. Among the factors that impact the specific timing for opening the program at each school are the availability of transportation and health room staffing.
- We have also surveyed parents of students who receive special education services, and staff who serve these students. Based on the staff availability and family interest data collected, we are currently developing in-person services for selected students attending Homewood Bridges, Cedar Lane School, and other specialized special education regional programs.
- Once these initial programs take root in our schools, we will continue to refine them and grow from there, with a goal of making in-person offerings available to more students at additional schools.
- We realize many more students would benefit from in-person supports, and many additional families are interested in having their child participate. I want to clarify that our ability to offer a face-to-face program at a school is dependent upon limitations in space, the availability of staff, and health and safety requirements, and thus we unfortunately aren't able to include all of the students whose families expressed an interest.
- As a reminder, all students may access one-on-one or small group support during the synchronous support times reserved during the daily schedules.

### **SRO Review process**

- Our series of stakeholder discussions is underway about the roles, purpose and outcomes of School Resource Officers (SROs) in our schools, as part of an extended review of the SRO program that we initiated, in collaboration with County Government, during the September 24 Board meeting.
- The first of these stakeholder sessions was a virtual focus group for families and students who attend schools that have SROs, which took place on Monday, October 5. Next week, we will hold two additional virtual focus groups, a session for staff at schools with SROs on October 13, and a community session on October 15.
- As you know, to help us ensure a balanced discussion, participants in each focus group are divided equally among those who support and oppose as well as including some who are neutral regarding the issue.

- On November 12, we will hold a virtual community town hall, which will enable participation by additional stakeholders, including those who were not selected to participate in a focus group.
- An update on the outcomes from the focus group sessions will be provided during the October 22 Board meeting.

### **Hybrid/Transportation survey of intent**

- We are evaluating possibilities for a hybrid instructional model for the second semester, which begins February 1, 2021, which could include opportunities for hybrid in-person instruction. This information will assist the Board during their upcoming discussions about possible models for the second semester.
- On Monday, October 12, we will distribute a short form to all HCPSS families to understand their intentions regarding sending their students back to school or continuing fully virtual learning. It is important to note that this form is separate from the small group instruction survey that select families already received.
- Additionally, it is crucial for our planning to know whether students who qualify to receive bus service would use it. The data from this form will facilitate planning, and is not a commitment for the second semester. Families will have the opportunity to change their reply following the Board's deliberation on second semester plans. We will be asking families to complete this form by Friday, October 23 at 4 p.m.

### **Meals**

- I want to start this next topic by urging any family who may be eligible to register for the Free and Reduced-priced Meals (FARMs) program as soon as possible. Title I funding for the 2021-2022 school year will be based on our number of students qualifying for FARMs as of October 31, 2020. Title I funding benefits schools having a substantial proportion of FARMs participants through resources such as additional teachers, reading and mathematics tutoring, supplemental instructional materials, enrichment programs for families, and more. Details and a link to the FARMs application are provided on the [Food Services](#) page on the HCPSS website.
- I am pleased to announce that the stopgap U.S. government funding bill signed into law last Thursday, includes almost \$8 billion in nutrition assistance. The additional funding allows USDA to extend the meal waivers, currently due to expire at the end of December, through the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

- Thus, we will be able to provide meals at no cost to any HCPSS student, and all children 18 and under, through the entire school year, assuming continued availability of USDA funding.
- Since Fall meal service began on September 8, we have served over 230,000 grab-and-go meals to provide nutrition for students to support learning.
- Beginning next Monday, October 12, Food and Nutrition Services will add a snack and dinner to each daily meal offered Monday through Friday, in addition to breakfast and lunch.
- Additionally, weekend meals will be included with meals provided on Fridays, and in pre-ordered meals picked up on Thursdays.
- Also beginning on October 12, Food and Nutrition Services will adjust the pre-order schedule. Meals for multiple days need to be pre-ordered at least two days in advance for pickup on Mondays and Thursdays. Pre-order meal pickups will be offered only on those two days, to enable Food and Nutrition Services to improve service and efficiency.
  - Meals pre-ordered for Monday pickup will include breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.
  - Meals pre-ordered for Thursday pickup will include breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks for Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
- These changes will enable Food and Nutrition Services to provide additional meals to support our students, while balancing staffing and food resources.

### **Testing**

- Over the last two weekends, HCPSS facilities were used to deliver the College Board's SAT administration to over 2,500 students, 1,800 of which were from HCPSS. I again thank the staff and community members who have volunteered their time to work for the assessment vendor the College Board, to safely plan and deliver these assessments.
- Elementary and middle school students took the MAP assessment at home this week. The information gathered will help us track student progress throughout the year.
- 24,000 students have completed their assessments, this is approximately 80% of all eligible students.

### **Access to Learning Fund and Bright Minds Golf Tournament Update**

- The Bright Minds Foundation Access to Learning Fund provides for education access supports for HCPSS students during the coronavirus school closure. This fund has so far raised more than \$116,000 from community donations and a Kahlert Foundation dollar-for-dollar match. These donations have enabled our system to provide many supports for our students, school supplies, communication devices to support speech and social-emotional learning, and hotspots and three months of internet service for many of our families. Bright Minds' support through the Access to Learning Fund has been immeasurably valuable in helping to address the needs of many of our most vulnerable students. I encourage businesses and families in our county who are able to, to support Bright Minds' efforts.
- The Bright Minds annual Golf Classic took place yesterday, raising over \$26,000 to support the foundation's programs benefiting Howard County students and schools. We were privileged to be joined by Torrey Smith, a University of Maryland graduate and a former Baltimore Ravens wide receiver. Torrey and Chanel Smith are Howard County residents and we are excited to build a partnership with them and their foundation as we continue to look for new opportunities to support our students and families.
- I want to thank Bright Minds' for their efforts to raise funds to support our students, staff and community. Community support is always one of our system's most valuable assets, and is especially important as we continue forward together through this challenging period.

### **Social distancing/health reminder**

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our community, and while the trends for numbers of cases in Maryland are generally encouraging, the virus continues to spread. Students, staff and family members have a special place in my heart, and your safety and well-being mean a great deal to me. I want to continue to remind our community to please, always remember to wear a mask and follow social distancing guidelines. Additional information about precautions can be found on the Howard County Health Department [website](#).

### **Athletics**

- The recent announcement by Maryland State Superintendent Dr. Karen Salmon and Governor Larry Hogan to allow the start of high school athletics to begin yesterday, October 7, has generated much discussion in our community and questions about

whether Howard County will begin athletics sooner than the second semester, as was originally decided.

- Last week, we distributed information to the community that we were continuing to participate in statewide discussions before revisiting our decision on the return of in-person athletics. Tonight, I will provide an update on those discussions and our considerations.
- Last Friday, the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) issued a letter to the State Superintendent urging her to consider an alternate plan, crafted by the supervisors of athletics programs from around the state, to begin in-person athletics on December 7. This plan has several benefits including:
  - Longer athletic seasons than the state's previously-announced two-semester plan that would begin on February 1 and include all sports,
  - Sufficient time for districts to solidify the health metrics that they will use to base decisions for the return to in-person instruction and athletics,
  - Ample time for staff and schools to safely and properly reintroduce student-athletes to the physical rigors of competitive high school athletics including proper conditioning,
  - Sufficient opportunity to ensure health protocols are adopted and implemented at every school and athletic facility and that we have sufficient coaching and training staff available, and
  - Necessary time to develop thoughtful plans for transportation, crowd limitations, facility use, and competition schedules.
- Howard County will not be participating in the State's new plan, which began yesterday, October 7. Instead, we will continue to advocate for the State's adoption of the proposed December 7th plan and target all of our preparation efforts for that date. If the State declines to adopt that plan, HCPSS will participate in the original two-semester plan adopted by the State that begins on February 1.
- At this time, only three districts in Maryland have made the decision to return on October 7, including Garrett, Allegany and Washington counties. The larger counties in the state have committed to the state's second semester start date, including Anne Arundel county on Tuesday evening and Frederick County on Wednesday evening.

- For now, HCPSS coaches are still permitted to engage virtually with prospective team members for 60-90 minutes one day each week through January 22, 2021.
- It breaks my heart that I am not able to initiate the safe resumption of athletics immediately. I fully understand the benefits of athletics and other extracurricular activities for our children. We are moving towards a plan to ensure that these opportunities can begin safely and continue for the duration of the season.

This concludes my remarks. I want to remind our community to please, always remember to wear a mask and follow social distancing guidelines.