

Annual Address

Administrative & Supervisory Meeting 2010
Baltimore County Public Schools

The Second Decade of the 21st Century
Making the Right Things Happen

Dr. Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent
Perry Hall High School – Friday, August 20, 2010

According to the Maryland State Department of Education, 83 percent of 3-year-olds in Baltimore County are ready for school. They are coming to us ready. Our obligation to them is to offer rich, meaningful instruction and to reach every benchmark.

Good morning, and welcome. I extend a special thank you to the Board of Education members for joining us today and for their dedication to our students and schools.

I want to begin my remarks this morning with praise for the excellence of our teaching staff, beginning with our Teacher of the Year Ralene Jacobson and our past Teachers of the Year. These individuals represent the thousands of outstanding teachers whose work is at the center of this school system.

I also want to take a moment to congratulate last year's Teacher of the Year, Cecily Anderson of Catonsville Middle School, and her husband, Joseph Anderson, who teaches at George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology. Cecily developed a project involving Catonsville Middle School, Eastern Technical High School, and Carver Center, which won first place in an international technology competition. In addition, Joe was named the 2010 Maryland Preserve America History Teacher of the Year. Congratulations to both of them.

Throughout our system, we have 8,850 teachers willing and ready to innovate and to put their all into their lessons with students. These are teachers who come to school each day and work hard to make good decisions, develop trust, model high expectations, and build supportive relationships with our students. Their hard work is reflected in the sustained progress seen in our 10-year performance trends.

Just as we saw in the video, everyone on our staff has a role to play in the success of this school system. My comments today are meant for all of us together as a team: teachers, administrators, and staff, those in the schools and those in central offices.

The title of my remarks this morning is The Second Decade of the 21st Century...Making the Right Things Happen. This title was inspired by a favorite quote of mine from 19th century education leader Horace Mann. He wrote, "Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen."

Are we doing the right things in our schools for our students?

The complete answer to that question is revealed only as our former students become adults – as we see who they become and what they achieve.

I want to remind you that the students in our schools are indeed our students. Those who are seniors this year were first graders when this administration began. Almost their entire K-12 education has come under our watch.

Here, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, we can look back at the first decade and know that history is kind to us. We have empirical evidence of the

success of our students. I have always said that our work must stand the scrutiny of our critics, and it does, thanks to your hard work. My thanks, like every message in this speech, extend beyond those in this room to all of our teachers and staff.

Here are just a few of the highlights of our achievements:

- Our 10-year performance trends show that we are accomplishing what all school systems aspire to accomplish: steady progress in raising student achievement. That can easily be seen in our rising High School Assessment and Maryland School Assessment scores as well as our dramatic increases in Advanced Placement performance and participation.
- Half of our traditional and magnet high schools are on *Newsweek's* 2010 list of top high schools in America.
- Increasing percentages of our students are going to college against higher standards. Eighty-five percent of our graduates immediately pursue higher education.
- Among the nation's largest school districts, we have the sixth highest graduation rate (according to *Education Week*) and the third highest graduation rate for African American males (according to the Schott Foundation).
- Our 2010 graduates reported \$86.4 million in scholarships, including \$9 million for AVID students, up from \$3 million last year.
- Eleven schools have been named National *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon Schools, and 15 schools have been recognized as Maryland Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence.
- Our school system has been recognized as one of the "Best Communities for Music Education in America" in 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010.

Our success is no accident. With our *Blueprint for Progress* as the stabilizing foundation, we have been working diligently over the past 10 years to achieve, look ahead, and position ourselves to anticipate what is coming.

But that is what we have done, and, as Horace Mann warned us, we cannot simply be content. The past is gone. Both good and bad. What we did. What we didn't do. Our achievements. Our challenges. What we have done is part of the history of public education in Baltimore County.

What matters now is what is in our present and what comes next: how we will build on our strong foundation and successes, and how we will continue to grow and change.

School systems have always been challenged by variables like government mandates, the economy, emerging technologies, and education reform.

It is not simply an issue of doing more with less. The question is: how can we do better with what we have? With our limited resources, how can we be more strategic, more focused on taking the actions that will have the most impact?

We must continue looking ahead with and for our students, mapping the future with them. This includes equipping them with 21st century skills, like problem solving, creative thinking, collaboration, ethics, communication skills, and computation proficiencies.

Advising students so that they see their potential and know their options – this is a part of the work we have always done. How can we strengthen advisement opportunities? How can we ensure that they are part of the fabric of schools?

Another action that we know will have significant impact is preparing our students to be global citizens. For example, our cultural exchange program with China involves 17 schools.

Our young people need to know that, somewhere in the world, there will be others, just as skilled and knowledgeable as they are, ready and willing to do the same work for less. When our students step out into the world to build careers and make their mark, it is no longer Dulaney vs. Woodlawn or Hereford vs. Sparrows Point. Our students are competing against students around the world, against global standards for excellence.

Efforts such as our cultural exchange program with China are also important because they help break down barriers to human connection. They help our students see their shared humanity with every other person on this planet.

One step we have already made toward the continuous improvement of this school system relates to our system priorities. It is the change we have made toward a more strategic focus on each level of instruction: elementary, middle, and high schools. While some may see this as a reorganization, it is more of a re-focus, a refinement, an opportunity to employ more effective strategies and more efficient use of resources.

So that is one important step we have made, and here are others for this year:

- Ensuring continued alignment with each aspect of Maryland’s “third wave of reform”;
- Fully developing and implementing the Education Assessment and Student Information (or Easi) system, with necessary professional development;

- Preparing students for HSAs and MSAs, while new assessments are being developed;
- Piloting evaluation tools in response to the new state education reform act; and
- Reinforcing our efforts in sustaining the ISO quality standards.

Baltimore County Public Schools is the first large school system in the nation to receive ISO certification in human resources, technology, purchasing, and curriculum and instruction. This is yet another demonstration that we are a performance-driven school system.

These system priorities are evidence that we are at the forefront of defining what public education is and what it can and should be. We have, in fact, been invited by the NBC network to be a part of its national summit on education, taking place next month in New York.

Just one note I want to add about our priorities is that we will all take greater ownership of our own performance under the Governor's new education reform law.

The approach, once again, must be that we are not resting. We are not pausing, nor are we waiting to see what will happen. We are fully accepting and embracing the mantle of leadership. We are, and we will continue to, make the right things happen for our children.

A big part of that is re-connecting to the core, remembering the purpose of public education. As Horace Mann described it in the 1800s, public education is to ensure that all people have access to knowledge and the arts.

In the 21st century, what the *Blueprint for Progress* is all about is making sure that all BCPS students have access to high-quality, rigorous instruction and educational opportunities.

All means all. That is what distinguishes public education, and we have proven and continue to prove that education for all is achievable. If you want to summarize the Baltimore County Public Schools experience, we are modeling what is possible in public education in America.

For Baltimore County Public Schools to continue its improvement and to be even more successful, we must all, as leaders, be passionate about what we do. All of us – as leaders in our classrooms, our offices, our schools – as leaders at whatever level we work in the organization, all of us are committed and united in our leadership. We must work to complement each other and support each other. Together, we can accomplish everything we want for our students.

Our values and beliefs undergird all that we do. When we talk about rigor, we have to talk about expectations. Our expectations are in our *Blueprint for Progress*, and are

captured in the written curriculum. We have to make sure that the rigor and expectations are also in the taught curriculum. If the written and taught curriculum do not incorporate our values, rigor, and expectations and have clear standards, we will not meet our goal of preparing students to be college- and career-ready in our global society.

Being truly effective for our students requires us to look beyond the quick, easy, and familiar answers. At this year's Principals' Academy, speaker Marco Torres challenged us to stay in the question, meaning we need to always look for more effective answers by challenging ourselves to be focused on the issues.

Here are our big questions: What are the right things we need to make happen for our students, and how can we make them happen?

And here is our overarching answer: regardless of your responsibilities in the system, the right thing is to make appropriate decisions and have productive attitudes to ensure that our students perform at higher levels in all subject areas.

And the other right thing is to develop a level of trust in our relationships with students to ensure that they are able to respond to the rigorous and relevant instruction we provide.

If we stay in our questions, if we continually seek better and more effective answers to these questions, we will dare to be learners and trailblazers ourselves. We will learn to see challenges as opportunities to be creative, to be innovative.

This decade, in a still new century, is a great opportunity for us to chart our own course as we fulfill the purpose of public education. Trailblazers do not follow prescriptions. They make their own way. Success occurs when people look for ways to be effective, to make things work for them.

As we move forward and as we continue to expand our thinking, I encourage everyone to remember that students are not just here to receive knowledge; they are here as active participants and creators.

An excellent example of this is what happened last school year with Project L.i.V.E. Working closely with our partners in the software development arena, we challenged students at Woodlawn and Western high schools to develop detailed proposals for video games that would teach specific aspects of our curriculum.

What these students did could be a model for all of us. It is a reminder to all of us to learn, create, and share – in our classrooms, our schools, our offices, our areas, and beyond our system, with the world!

Let us consider ourselves a learning organization, a learning community.

Consistently, we find that when we ask our students to do more, when we expect more from them, they deliver, and move forward to the next level. It works the same way for us as educators and administrators. When we seek the next bigger challenge, we grow.

We tell our students that anything is possible for their future. Do we believe that for ourselves and for our school system?

I talk every year about the importance of positive attitude. I talk about it every year because that is how strongly I believe in its power. Demonstrating positive behavior supports our values. Modeling responsible decision-making and ownership of our actions reflects our quality of leadership. Accepting others as equal human beings reflects our character. Together these powerful elements contribute to our effectiveness and success. And when we model them collectively, they become a reflection of our dignity, which is the highest achievement of our human condition.

Modeling – for our students and for each other – has great power.

My final question for you is: what are you going to do this school year in your position, in your offices and your schools, to make the right things happen for all children, as we begin the second decade of the 21st century?

The future depends on our staying in that question and demanding nothing less for ourselves than the best.

As you reflect on this question, my charge to you is to stay focused:

- Stay focused on the direction provided by the *Blueprint for Progress*.
- Stay focused on improving academic achievement for all students.
- Stay focused on preparing all of our students to be competitive and successful in a global society.

There are no substitutes for us; we are the leadership team. There is no bench; we are it. We are on the field, and our children are ready.

So I say to you, we will continue our legacy. We will continue to model courageous decisions, with a strong sense of responsibility, integrity, and accountability.

We will continue to provide positive experiences for our children.

We will make the right things happen for all our students in Baltimore County Public Schools.

Thank you, and have a great year.