June 2020

Dear Baltimore County Public Schools Students, Families, and Staff:

Weekly, I have been sending messages updating you on our COVID-19 response including our Continuity of Learning Plan, but this message is different and honestly, it is urgent. This communication is sent to share some thoughts and information as we all watch and process what is currently happening in cities and towns across America. I am sure you have watched the scenes from across the country, and now the world, following the horrific deaths of three African Americans; two during interactions with police and one while jogging in a neighborhood. The killings of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky, and most recently, George Floyd in Minnesota, have sparked protests and marches around the country and we are all watching these incidents while still dealing with the impact of COVID-19. For some in our area, these images may reopen some of the same wounds and thoughts we had following the death of Freddie Gray and the protests right here in the Baltimore region. In fact, these incidents are happening far too frequently and need to be addressed. For me, it is clear, now more than ever, that we as a country must have open, honest, and authentic conversations about racism and its devastating influence and continuing impact including in our educational systems.

Similar to poverty and a lack of access to healthcare, the pandemic has disproportionately impacted communities of color. These disparities show up in our schools in much of the same ways. This is why as a school system we have and will continue to focus on equity for all students and schools in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). This means we will advocate for tools to close the educational gaps and provide access to resources for all our students. We will also continue to have direct and honest conversations about institutional racism and practices in BCPS and how we can break down these barriers that have existed far too long.

For our part, we are offering resources for students, families, or staff to help with processing what is happening around these issues of race, the pandemic, and our school system and country’s response to both crises. We cannot allow our students to try to understand these events alone and without providing a safe place for them to ask questions. The resources we provide include being able to connect to a counselor or BCPS staff if there is a need to speak to someone directly. To access these resources, we have links on our Web site connected to social emotional well-being. Please go to our homepage at www.bcps.org and scroll down to the Safety Focus box on the right-hand side. The first bullet under the section is the Social Emotional Resources link. There, you will find various local, state, and national resources and contact information, including for our BCPS staff.

Understandably, these are tough conversations and not everyone will be ready to hear them, but we must move forward and listen to our students. Often, our students are ahead of the adults and want to have these conversations. We must provide the safe environment and resources for this to happen. Let’s move Team BCPS and our country forward. As a school system we cannot do this alone. Indeed, we are stronger together!

Sincerely,

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D
Superintendent

Raising the bar, Closing gaps, Preparing for our future