

June 11, 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We have seen an increase in reports of employee misconduct this year, and I would like to update you on the steps we have taken to uncover employees who might be compromising the safety of our children. In almost every case that has occurred, it was a student or staff member who came forward to express concern about possible criminal acts by an employee.

We believe the increase in reporting is a direct result of more training for employees on how to recognize symptoms of an abused child or the behaviors of someone who is possibly abusing a child. Nationally recognized training was offered to every Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) employee this school year, and is now part of our established training program. For students, we have provided age appropriate lessons in the health and counseling curriculum to help them recognize and report inappropriate contact.

In every instance of misconduct, our first concern has been for the victims. That is why we partnered with the Center for Children almost immediately after learning of the accusations against Carlos Bell last summer. The Center for Children has provided free and confidential services to victims and their families. We continue to partner with the Center for Children to support victims of sexual abuse.

We are committed to keeping our community informed and engaged in our school safety efforts. We have worked hard to be as transparent as we can while still maintaining the confidentiality that is required for the accused offender as well as the victims in these cases. The CCPS website, www.ccboe.com, includes an Investigations page that has the most accurate and up-to-date information we can share.

We encourage students, staff and community members to be a part of our See Something, Say Something campaign. People are responding by reporting suspect behavior. Every concern is fully investigated by the Charles County Sheriff's Office. On our CCPS website as well as in letters to the community, we encourage anyone with knowledge of inappropriate behavior or wrongdoing to contact the proper authorities. During any investigation of an employee, we reassign the employee to our administrative offices.

Here are a few other steps we have taken to increase student safety and security.

- We have hired a Director of School Safety and Security. Our new director, Jason Stoddard, has 24 years of law enforcement experience and most recently served as the Commander of Homeland Security and Intelligence for the Charles County Sheriff's Office. He will offer plans for improvements and advice where we need to make improvements. He will also conduct training for our employees, parents and volunteers. The director will work closely with our School Resource Officers, who are valuable team members.

- We have created a community-based School Safety Advisory Council composed of 27 community members with credentials in security, mental health, cybersecurity, law enforcement, victim services, the military, public safety and other related professions. These dedicated members are joining staff to offer an outside look at our school system and to give us recommendations for change. The group is making short-term suggestions while working on long-term solutions. The council is an independent check on our safety procedures and policies.
- We require mandatory fingerprinting and background checks for all employees, substitutes, temporary employees, mentors, athletic trainers, coaches and contractors.
- We have formed a partnership with the Center for Children to offer more access to mental health professionals to help children in need.
- This week, we launched an anonymous reporting tool on our website to encourage more people to report anything they feel might compromise student safety. The tool is available at <http://www.ccboe.com/index.php/see-something-say-something>.

We are taking a strong look at all of our processes and practices. We have tightened our procedures and expanded our transparency. Our goal is to increase awareness of inappropriate conduct and how to report it. While cases of sexual abuse or misconduct are reprehensible, we believe that sharing what we can of this information is essential to creating a culture where we work together to keep our schools safe for students and staff.

Thank you for your support of Charles County Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Hill, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools