

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Catherine E. Pugh**  
*Mayor, City of Baltimore*

**Marnell A. Cooper**  
*Chair, Baltimore City Board of  
School Commissioners*

**Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

Dear Colleagues,

Last December, I shared with you that in our budget development for next school year, we were facing a gap of approximately \$130 million between our anticipated funding and our estimated expenses. This morning, I am meeting with lawmakers who represent Baltimore in Annapolis, to review the budget and discuss the challenges we face. I wanted to share the information I presented to them directly with you, the dedicated employees who are essential to the success of our schools.

Those of you who have been with the district for a few years know that we've faced budget gaps before. For the past several years, we have responded with short-term solutions, like reductions in contracts or spending freezes. We have also had some staff layoffs, concentrated at the district office.

Those short-term reactions have in some ways made our work this year more difficult, because their focus on cutting costs for a single year has not addressed the underlying problem: Quite simply, for the past several years, our revenue has declined while our costs have continued to rise.

This year, with the help of an outside firm with deep expertise in school funding, our budget team is exploring creative solutions that will have a lasting impact on the financial health of the district. I am confident that some of those ideas will improve the district's financial stability in the longer term, but savings resulting from those solutions will take a few years to implement and take hold.

In the meantime, as a public agency we must present a balanced budget for next year. We will do this in part by prioritizing spending in areas where we can have the greatest impact on student success – including maintaining full-day pre-k, moving forward on schedule with the 21st Century School Buildings Plan, approaching our work in ways that address the needs of the whole child, renewing instructional emphasis on literacy as a tool for success, and improving opportunities for staff development. We will continue to put schools and students first. But because of the size of the budget gap, we will again need to implement some of the cost-reduction solutions we have used in the past, and we know we will not be able to find the necessary savings in the district office alone.

You, the people doing the hard work every day, are the district's greatest assets. It is also the case that staff costs are the district's greatest expense. Because of this, reductions in those costs will need to be made across bargaining units and unaffiliated staff, at both the district office and in schools. While we are looking at options including furloughs and salary freezes, a significant reduction in force is expected. We are working hard to find options that will enable

us to retain the greatest number of staff possible, including continuing to advocate at both state and city levels for the increased education funding that Baltimore's children need and that is so necessary for the long-term vitality of our city. I will provide you with information on how to partner on these efforts and will keep you informed of progress. However, I must tell you that without additional funding, we are anticipating layoffs numbering a thousand or more, most of which will affect school-based staff.

Please know that we are putting all of our efforts into solutions and will work diligently and with the utmost sensitivity as we move forward. Although the gap and the necessary reductions represent a serious organizational and emotional challenge, our work remains the same: We must all continue to do what educators do—that is, everything we can to give our students high-quality educational opportunities, because that's what they deserve.

I know you will have many questions about how all of this will affect you, our students, our schools, and our district. I promise to share information with you throughout this process, to provide resources for you, and to create opportunities for you to share your feedback and ideas.

For those of you interested in learning more about the budget development process and what we've learned through our work with the outside firm, [please visit this dedicated website](#) that explains

- Where our funding comes from and why it's remained flat for several years
- What has led to the increase in our expenses
- What we remain committed to providing our students as part of a high-quality education

In these challenging times, I can't say this enough: Thank you for all that you do every day for our students.

Sincerely,  
Sonja Brookins Santelises  
Chief Executive Officer