

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Cheryl A. Casciani
*Chair, Baltimore City Board of
School Commissioners*

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

March 8, 2019

Dear City Schools Families, Students, Staff, Partners, and Friends,

Thank you to the many of you who turned out at school and district meetings over the past several weeks to share your ideas about priorities for next school year. Your input was critical as we planned budgets to direct funds in ways that will most benefit our students. Principals have now submitted their plans, and in the coming weeks they will share their budgets with you. To find the date of your school's community budget review, please contact your principal or visit www.baltimorecityschools.org/budget.

As we were finalizing budgets this week, we learned that additional state funding may be available for next year. This is an initial step toward implementing recommendations from the Kirwan Commission, a group brought together by the state to advise on what is needed to provide students with a world-class education in the 21st century. Our review of the proposal indicates that almost all the funds will be directed toward specific things – for example, full-day pre-k, special education, tutoring, and to pay for certain jobs. If this new funding is approved, we will work with schools to determine whether and how their budgets might change, and school leaders will share updates with their school communities.

Another important development happened yesterday, when the American Civil Liberties Union (the ACLU) and the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund filed legal action against the State of Maryland on behalf of City Schools families. The lawsuit asserts that the state has violated the law and state constitution by not providing adequate funding for Baltimore's public schools. About a decade ago, the state stopped adjusting education funding for inflation. The result has been annual funding shortfalls, which the state itself estimates at \$290 million or more each year. This long-term under-funding means that Baltimore's children do not receive the resources and support to which they are entitled—and that are routinely available to students in other school districts. We also receive far less than we need to address the poor condition of our buildings, and we estimate it would cost \$5 billion to provide new or fully renovated 21st-century buildings for all our students. The result is that most of our students continue to go to school in decrepit buildings without drinkable water or adequate heating and cooling.

Last evening, we put out [this statement](#) in support of the legal action. Also, earlier this year we outlined our vision of a world-class education for Baltimore's children in our [“Investing in Our Future” report](#).

Over the years that I have served you at City Schools—both as chief academic officer and now as CEO—I have been inspired by the passion and dedication that are so visible in our school communities and our city. Almost a decade ago, students, parents, staff members, and partners rallied in Annapolis in support of the 21st Century School Buildings Program. Today, we have

opened 9 new or completely renovated school buildings, with more than a dozen currently in design or construction. Two years ago, the community banded together when we identified a multi-million-dollar budget gap, helping both to make difficult decisions at schools and to advocate for additional resources. Today, while we have far fewer resources than we need, we have worked hard to prioritize investments we consider to be most important, including initiatives in literacy, social-emotional learning, and rigorous academic programs that are making a real difference for our students. I know that many of you are planning to attend the statewide [March for Our Schools](#) in Annapolis on March 11. I will see you in front of the State House at 6:00 p.m., as we join with parents, students, staff, and stakeholders from across Maryland to advocate for the funding our students need and deserve.

Thank you for everything that you do for our students and our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sonja B. Santelises". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer