November 9, 2021

Dear Steuart Hill Academic Academy Families, Students, and Community Members,

City Schools is committed to making sure that every school across the city provides our students with high-quality educational experiences that enables students to thrive, supports their learning and encourages their personal growth.

Part of our work in reaching this goal includes an annual review of the district’s schools and programs that looks at a broad range of considerations, including academic performance, school climate, school programming, enrollment trends, conditions of school facilities, the range and balance of school options in different parts of the city, and the 21st Century School Buildings Plan.

Steuart Hill has been a very small school with low enrollment for several years. The small size of the school impacts our ability to provide students with strong and well-rounded academic programming, because schools are funded on a per-student basis. When schools are a healthier size (around 400-500 students for an elementary school), per-student funding allows school leaders, working with their communities, to prioritize rich and varied programming in schools. Additionally, the Steuart Hill facility has major challenges. The building suffers from foundation ground water issues and periodically water floods into the school spaces. The facility also needs major systems updates, including new windows and a new roof.

Steuart Hill is located near two other elementary programs in healthier facilities with space to safely accommodate additional students. Franklin Square Elementary/Middle is a community school with Bon Secours Community Works as the lead agency and is housed in a facility with many recent updates. Frederick Elementary School is a neighborhood charter school operated by Baltimore Curriculum Project and housed in a 21st century building and is also a community school with Bon Secours Community Works.

Tonight, based on the results of this year’s review, I am recommending that the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners consider closing Steuart Hill Academic Academy at the end of this school year, and splitting the zone between Franklin Square Elementary/Middle and Frederick Elementary. I believe this will increase student and family access to schools in better buildings with the capacity to have increased per-student funding to sustain rich, robust, and varied educational programs less than a mile from students’ homes.

If the closure is approved, starting in the 2022-23 school year, students in Steuart Hill zone who live east of Gilmor Street would be rezoned to Frederick Elementary, students live list west of Gilmor Street would be rezoned to Franklin Square Elementary/Middle School. I am also recommending that the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners consider returning the Steuart Hill building to the city of Baltimore in summer 2022.

As a member of the Steuart Hill Academic Academy community, your feedback on this recommendation is critical. A meeting will take place at your school on Wednesday, November 17 at 2:45 p.m. where you can learn more and get answers to your questions.

In addition to attending meetings to better understand the reasons for the recommendation, you can also view the report that has been provided to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (“Board”). The report is
titled Annual Review of Schools: Review and Recommendations, 2021-22 (“Report”). The Report outlines the recommendations and the factors the Board must consider in this process. The Report is available on the district’s website (www.baltimorecityschools.org) and upon request can be reviewed at your school.

You can provide written feedback to the Board from now through 5:00 p.m. on Friday, January 7, 2022. Written comments must include full identification of the sender and should be directed to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, 200 E. North Ave., Room 406, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, or sent by email to portfoliorecommendations@bcps.k12.md.us.

In addition, there are two opportunities where you can give oral commentary to the Board on the recommendations.

- Public hearing: Thursday, December 2, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
- Special work session: Wednesday, December 15, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, all Board meetings are being held remotely. Please check the Board calendar or BoardDocs on the City Schools website for call-in information to observe the meetings which can be found here: https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/board-meetings. The opportunity for oral testimony will be closed after completion of the December 15 special session.

After consideration of all of the factors and other information learned through the process including public feedback, the Board will vote on these recommendations at its meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022. If the Board votes to approve these recommendations, district office staff will be available to meet with you to ensure that the transition process is smooth and meets students’ and families’ needs.

Thank you for supporting our schools and students. We look forward to working in partnership with students, families, and school communities to create a district of high-quality school programs that meets the needs of every student in Baltimore.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer