November 9, 2021

Dear Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. School 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 enable 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.

Dr. Bernard Harris has been a very small school for some time. The size of the school population impacts our ability to provide your student(s) with strong academic programming because schools are funded on a per student basis. When schools are of a healthy size (a sustainable elementary program is about 400 – 500 students), per student funding allows school leaders working with families and community partners to prioritize rich and varied programming in schools. When schools are under-sized, the focus is on ensuring enough staffing to offer the basic limited programming and managing sometimes large class sizes as a result.

Dr. Bernard Harris is located in close proximity to two other elementary programs in healthier facilities that support learning. Johnston Square is an intensive social emotional learning site and a community school with the Y of Central Maryland serving as its lead agency, and Harford Heights Elementary School, another nearby school serving the same grade bands, is located in a new 21st century building that has space to safely accommodate additional students.

Tonight, based on the results of this year’s review, I am recommending that the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners consider closing the Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School and splitting the zone between Johnston Square and Harford Heights at the end of the school year. 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 the Bernard Harris, Sr. zone who live south of Preston Street would be rezoned to Johnston Square, and students who live north of Preston Street would be rezoned to Harford Heights. I am also recommending that the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners consider returning the Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. building to the city of Baltimore in summer 2022.

As a member of the Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. community, your feedback on this recommendation is critical. A meeting will take place at your school beginning at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, November 29 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](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 this recommendation at its meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022.** If the Board votes to approve closure of the Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. school program, 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,

[Signature]

Dr. Sonja Broookins Santelises
Chief Executive Office