LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Superintendent's Office

May 3, 2024

The Honorable Jason S. Miyares
Attorney General of Virginia
202 North Ninth Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Attorney General Miyares,

First, let me thank you for your continued efforts to address the opioid crisis in the Commonwealth. As I am sure you would agree, it is imperative that our collective efforts to address the opioid crisis are grounded in accuracy and transparency, which is why it is important that I set the record straight regarding recent reports by WJLA and information you shared on social media regarding Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS). These messages have inaccurately stated that "late last year, LCPS delayed notification to parents for weeks of 11 Park View High School students who overdosed." You specifically were quoted as saying, "The idea that 11 kids can be poisoned by fentanyl while at school and not notifying parents defies common sense… ." Last fall, Park View had four in-school suspected overdoses as reported by the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. While any number above zero is of serious concern, this misreporting deflects from the important conversation we need to be having about opioid overdoses happening not only in schools but in every community in our county, across the Commonwealth, and across this nation.

It is hard to pinpoint where the count of 11 school-related overdoses came from, but it is wrong. The only place the number 11 shows up in our records is in an email (attached) from the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office Communications Director at the end of January, where he states, "of the juveniles noted below, 11 of the 22 from 2023, and both of those in 2024 (until today) were in the Park View community, *though most occurred off-campus*." (emphasis added). As I have said publicly many times before, when these situations occur in the community, we are not always made aware, and *the majority of juvenile overdoses in Loudoun County over the last year have not been school-related*. That is why we asked our General Assembly to consider expanding Senate Bill 498, so that we all might have clarity around how and when the at-large community would be notified when an overdose happens. Without expanded, community-wide reporting, our parents and community would not necessarily know about non-school related overdoses, and if we agree that it's important for them to know when this is happening in our schools, surely we agree they should know when it's happening under their own roofs and in other nearby public spaces. For example, just across the Maryland border in Frederick County, I have seen firsthand that their law enforcement agencies, in partnership with public health and local foundations supporting those with substance use issues have collaborated to ensure their community understands what is happening (https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/as-fentanyl-spreads-states-step-up-responses). I think it is important to stand together and recognize that addiction and drug use is impacting our entire community, no matter one's age, race, or income level, and therefore we need to approach any solution with this awareness and thoughtfulness.

Unfortunately, the focus instead seems to be on scapegoating our division, despite our longstanding efforts to address substance use in our schools and educate our community. For several months WJLA has been misrepresenting the facts surrounding Loudoun County Public School's reporting of suspected overdoses in our schools, suggesting that we have been hiding the truth about substance use in our schools. To the contrary, LCPS has consistently been open about this challenge and has been working with families and our community to tackle the issue head on. For example, before the Governor issued his Executive Order, the principal of Park View High School had already sent the following message to his community:

> I want to address the community about the important topic of Fentanyl. The use of this powerful, synthetic opioid is affecting young people across the nation. **Sadly, our students are no exception**. And I need your help to address this crisis.
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> **My heart is breaking for the students in LCPS, and other young people in the community, who have suffered from taking this drug.** It is often added to other drugs that look like legitimate prescription opioids (e.g., Xanax, Adderall, Percocet or oxycodone), or mixed into powders or nasal sprays (US Drug Enforcement Administration).
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> **We are seeing students ingesting drugs prior to school and suffering the effects while in school.** We are hearing reports of young people outside of school experiencing medical emergencies. And our staff and first responders are working together in critical situations to meet the crisis. (emphases added)

The letter also included the many, many resources LCPS has made available to our families to help them understand and address this issue. Unfortunately, because we did not include the specific number of overdoses, we have been accused of hiding the truth–even though we were still working at that time to clarify with the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office how and when schools understand whether or not a student has overdosed–an issue that we have not spent enough time addressing at the state level. For example, school divisions often do not have a way to get information about whether a suspected overdose is eventually confirmed from either law enforcement or medical professionals, which is the recommendation in VDOE guidance.

When the Governor issued his Executive Order No. 28, he stated (once again quoting WJLA) that LCPS had willfully not notified parents about a pattern of student overdoses for 20 days–a number which, again, is simply not true. Moreover, while the Governor now expects schools to notify parents when every overdose occurs–something with which we have complied, I am not aware of any time prior to this in my nearly 30 years of educational experience where school divisions in the Commonwealth have reported on each event. Out of real concerns for student privacy, most divisions, like LCPS, made parents aware of the concern more broadly and created education and awareness campaigns around the issue. And this is exactly what LCPS has been doing proactively for some time now. As you are no doubt aware, LCPS launched a division-wide educational campaign around fentanyl awareness in partnership with the Sheriff's Office and other agencies in the Spring of 2023, hosting six community sessions all across Loudoun County. And, we have continued and expanded that campaign this year. To date this school year, we have had six events, including one at Park View High School, to educate our community on the dangers of opioids (with another planned on May 8) and have launched a webpage dedicated to this issue. The work we are doing within our schools to address these issues is also deliberate and ongoing, and I am exceptionally proud of the team of educators and support staff on the front lines of this crisis every day–as all Virginians should be.

For others to continuously report and repeat over the last six months that LCPS delayed notification, as well as report and repeat an appreciably inflated number of school-connected overdoses at Park View is, again, factually incorrect and misleading—how is this solving the very real challenges we are facing in our schools every day? Let's focus on that instead.

Finally, I want to ask about the recent communication from your Office directed to the principal of Park View High School regarding a proposed educational presentation in collaboration with the Virginia National Guard's Counter-Drug Task Force. While we value and appreciate the intentions behind this request, traditionally such communications and arrangements are more appropriately addressed at the division- and Superintendent-level to ensure consistency and coordination. As stated above, we remain proactive and have been offering significant educational opportunities on this issue. We have a team dedicated to addressing this issue in our schools and have continued to collaborate with providers, non-profits, our health care community and law enforcement agencies, and we think this program, were it to occur, would be better leveraged as a collaborative, community-wide event rather than one focused only on one high school. We believe that by working together and enhancing our strategies through unified approaches, we can positively impact the wellbeing of our students and community. To further this, I recommend a meeting to discuss our ongoing and future collaborations, ensuring that all engagements are strategically aligned, communicated through the proper channels, and aimed at the correct audience to better ensure maximum community impact.

Our goal is mutual—to safeguard and educate our community about the dangers of drug misuse in the most effective and unified manner. Correcting misinformation and enhancing our communication strategies will undoubtedly strengthen those efforts.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. I look forward to your response and to setting a time for our teams to meet and discuss ways to enhance our cooperation for the benefit of the communities we both serve.

Respectfully,



Dr. Aaron Spence
Superintendent
Loudoun County Public Schools