CHARLES COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear CCPS parents, students, staff and community members,

Additional gun incidents in schools this week lead me to once again reach out to our Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) community to address this issue. Yesterday and again today, in two separate incidents at St. Charles High School, two young people made a choice to bring a gun to school, threatening the safety of everyone in the building. I happened to be visiting the school when today's incident occurred, and I commend staff and students for their swift actions that kept everyone safe.

I also made the decision that it was necessary to do a full sweep of the school facility and thus dismissed St. Charles students for the day. With the assistance of the Charles County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), the K-9 unit conducted a walkthrough. While I am thankful to report that no other guns were found at the school, I am outraged at the occurrences of these instances. Simply put, guns are easily accessible in our communities to our young people. Not just in Charles County but across Maryland and the nation.

Let's be clear about this issue. Guns do not originate in schools; they come into schools from homes and from the community. As I mentioned in a recent parent update sent two weeks ago (linked here), guns are accessible to young people in a variety of ways. We, as educators, have not stopped talking to students about making good decisions. In fact, we have ramped up our intentional work with young people regarding decision-making and our school safety program, "See Something, Say Something." But we cannot do this work alone. So, I have some direct asks for our families, elected officials, public safety partners and our community at large. Here is what I ask.

- If you are the parent/guardian of a young person, check their rooms, purchases, social media accounts and use, but above all, continue to talk and reinforce the importance of making good, safe decisions. Guns can be purchased, stolen or even built from mail ordered kits and 3D printers.

- We need parents to be more acutely educated by our public safety partners on all the ways children can access guns and what to do if they suspect their child has access to guns. CCSO has a wonderful Hope Trailer that educates parents about drugs. I think a similar idea can be generated and made accessible to families about guns.

- We need more opportunities for individuals to report safety concerns and want the return of the Crime Solvers program tip boxes in our schools.

- Collectively we need from elected officials and public safety partners more support for greater adult accountability in cases where guns are accessible to young people.

- And finally, we need more male mentors to partner with our schools. I applaud the work that has happened at schools like Westlake High School where a mentoring program pairing teens with male mentors has flourished and with our DADvisory program in our Title I schools. We need these replicated across all our middle and high schools.

The CCPS Strategic Plan (linked here) is clear about our commitment and efforts to engage and educate young people and families about high-risk behaviors and decisions that are unsafe for them, their peers and our staff. We also continue our commitment to offer early support to young people including access to mental health supports and services, and resources tailored to address bullying. CCPS is also expanding opportunities to explicitly teach safe decision-making and the use of the See Something, Say Something program.

I will continue to work with our staff, parents, students, community members, elected officials, and public safety partners to ensure all CCPS schools, facilities and buildings are safe for students to learn and grow, and for our teachers and staff to work. Next week, I will be part of a community meeting for St. Charles High School. I will update the CCPS community following it to provide updates about school, student and staff safety. I will also continue to ask for support and help from our community partners, including our public safety and elected officials, and share additional asks that are developed following the community meeting.

Thank you for your continued support of Charles County Public Schools — of our students, staff and safety.

Sincerely,



Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools