

**An Open Letter to Howard County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Renee Foose  
and the Howard County Board of Education from a former Chairman of the Board of Education**

February 16, 2016

Dear Dr. Foose and Members of the Howard County Board of Education,

I write this open letter in response to recent actions by the Board and HCPSS, the disturbing approach to governing that the Board and Superintendent have adopted, and the completely unprecedented alienation between you and the citizens of Howard County and elected officials at the highest level of state office. The time for silence is over. The time for hoping that you will come to your senses and see how bad things have become is also over. Each of you (Dr. Foose and the Members of the Board), must take immediate and dramatic action or see the school system that you claim to hold dear enter into a period of significant decline, lack of parental involvement and rapid departures of your best teachers, administrators and other staff.

Just over the past weeks, during an increasingly turbulent winter, the Board and Superintendent have come under unprecedented criticism by a bipartisan group of elected officials, up to and including the two highest elected officials in Maryland and nearly the entire Howard County delegation to the State House. Governor Larry Hogan, in an official public meeting, stated that "There's a palpable loss of trust between many parents and the county school system, and in particular with the superintendent." Peter Franchot, the Comptroller of Maryland, all but accused the school system of covering up a health crisis and putting the wellbeing of staff and children at risk to avoid embarrassment. Howard County State Representatives of both parties have also weighed in. Delegate Frank Turner said: "If we filled our rooms full of administrators and staff, shut our doors and not allowed public testimony do you realize the kind of criticism we would face ...I don't expect it to happen in our county." Delegate Warren Miller said that "It's not normal activity for a board or public school system to do some of the things that they've been accused of, I hope that there is a change of a spirit, both at the school board and public school system, to be more open. Until there is, I think we all have to be vigilant about looking out for our constituents."

It would be bad enough if this was simply an issue between you and other elected or public officials. However, it is not. There is an unacceptable level of animosity between you the people you serve, the citizens of Howard County. Beginning with a forum on December 8<sup>th</sup> hosted by the Howard County State Delegation, there have been multiple meetings, sometimes attended by hundreds of people, where well-meaning and involved citizens have expressed anger and frustration about the actions of the Board and Superintendent. In every case, you have been dismissive of those concerns, showing nothing but contempt for us, the citizens of Howard County. Perhaps this contempt (and an unspoken acknowledgement of this state of affairs) is what led to the embarrassing process in which the contract of Dr. Foose was renewed, without any public input or even the ability of dissenting voices within to the Board to be heard before a vote.

This is not how things work in Howard County and it is antithetical to our shared values, the honorable history of the school system, and to our continued success. Action on your part is needed now:

Dr. Foose, please acknowledge the reality that you are not the right leader for our school system. Please do what is best for the school system and children that you claim to serve. I call on you to withdraw your candidacy for Superintendent of Schools before your new contract takes effect. This will likely mean an acting Superintendent for a year, but it will give the Board (including newly elected members) the opportunity to choose a leader who can better serve our county.

Members of the BOE, whether you will ever admit to fault or not, please acknowledge the obvious lack of trust between you and the people you serve. I don't know if you can fix that as individuals, but as a system you must. I call upon you to take immediate actions to dramatically increase transparency for school system and BOE operations. Some actions you should take include:

- Publically support proposed legislation that would require the state public access ombudsman to investigate the integrity of county school officials' denials of public information requests from July 1, 2012 — when Dr. Foose became superintendent — through December 31, 2015.
- Reinvigorate transparency mechanisms within the HCPSS that you have allowed to atrophy: the independent audit office, the school system ombudsman and the public budget committee.
- Immediately put in place independent audits and public reports for the following:
  - The process for renewing the Superintendent's contract – including criteria you used, opportunities for public input, and potential irregularities during the meeting itself.
  - Potential health and financial concerns regarding the conditions and maintenance of HCPSS buildings
  - The provision of special education services and how our actual practices follow the intent of school system policies and how they compare to actions of other counties in Maryland.

It is also worth noting that every member of the Board will be up for reelection either this year or in 2018. Each of you should objectively look at the current situation and ask yourself if you really are the right person to lead this system. It may be the best thing you can do for the county is to step aside and allow for new leadership.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Joshua Kaufman, former Member and Chair, Howard County BOE, Elkridge, MD