

News Release: Student Safety Task Force Announces Findings and Recommendations Regarding PGCPs Practices

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For Immediate Release

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UPPER MARLBORO, MD – Today, the independent Student Safety Task Force (SSTF) released its recommendations regarding current policies, procedures and practices of Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) in a news conference at the Sasscer Administration Building. Dr. Charlene M. Dukes, President of Prince George's Community College; Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer, PGCPS; and Dr. Segun C. Eubanks, Chair, Prince George's County Public Schools Board of Education, spoke at today's news conference.

Chaired by Dr. Dukes, the Task Force report outlines five major recommendations for immediate consideration along with 61 specific considerations related to the four key areas of review, and 28 suggestions where the Task Force determined that administrative procedures can be updated, clarified, or enhanced.

Established earlier this year by PGCPS CEO Dr. Maxwell, the Task Force was charged with conducting a thorough and comprehensive review of the school system's existing policies, administrative procedures, protocols, practices, and curriculum. The efforts were part of an ongoing effort related to child safety and abuse reporting efforts. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from colleges and universities, and the non-profit, private, local government, and public safety sectors, supported by staff of the school district.

"When the Task Force was commissioned, Dr. Maxwell set no boundaries or limits on what and where we could examine and the recommendations we could ultimately put forward. He was clear in his expectations that the Task Force could and would have access to whom and what was necessary to complete the charge," said Dr. Dukes.

"We view these recommendations as the foundation for immediate and future success. I speak for the entire Task Force when I say that we stand ready to support Dr. Maxwell and the Board of Education as they work collaboratively and swiftly to implement any and all of the recommendations laid out in this report."

The Task Force examined four key areas: Culture and Climate; Reporting and Training; Screening of Employees, Volunteers, Vendors, and Contractors; and Curriculum and Counseling. The five major recommendations of the report are as follows:

1) Reporting Procedures. The CEO should report publicly each year on system-wide efforts related to student safety, including data, strategies, and outcomes on steps taken to address the major recommendations of this report.

2) Accountability. The CEO should ensure that each principal conducts safety assessments and uses the results to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to include screening and training of employees, volunteers, vendors, and contractors; evaluation of physical facilities; and curriculum/lesson content reviews.

3) Oversight. The CEO should establish an Office of Monitoring, Accountability, and Compliance with direct reporting to the CEO, to assume responsibility for assuring implementation of procedures associated with policies approved by the Board, and to assure fidelity in training, awareness of individual responsibility to report to whom by when, and compliance.

4) Universal Precautions. The school system should develop and implement a “universal precautions” approach to screening and training of employees, volunteers, vendors, and contractors, to include a searchable database for rapid identification of red flags.

5) Curriculum. The school system should update the K-12 curricular content focused on preventing child sexual abuse that is developmentally age-appropriate, engaging of parents and guardians, and meets evidence-based criteria for effectiveness in mitigating instances of child sexual abuse.

“We thank Dr. Dukes and the members Task Force who worked tirelessly to develop these recommendations. The Task Force was an integral part of ensuring that we are doing everything in our power to keep our children safe and that is my promise and commitment to students, parents, and the community,” said Dr. Maxwell.

“We are still carefully and thoroughly reviewing the findings of the report and will make additional changes to our practices as we move forward. However, based on what we have been able to review and analyze, I have already instructed my staff to immediately begin implementing many of the recommendations.”

In response to the report, Maxwell said he will establish a new Office of Monitoring, Accountability, and Compliance, charged with the responsibility for overseeing the fidelity of training, implementation of, and compliance to the new procedures, protocols, and curriculum suggested in the report. In addition, he is convening a workgroup of high-level school system administrators to review and implement all or most of the 61 considerations and 28 opportunities to update, clarify, and/or enhance administrative procedures within the four key categories.

Maxwell also concurred with the recommendations regarding yearly public reporting procedures; accountability for training; an update of the system’s curricular content on preventing and teaching about child sexual abuse, preK-12, in a developmentally age-appropriate manner; and the development and implementation of a “universal precautions” approach to screening and training to ensure that all individuals who come in contact with children in PGCPs schools on a regular basis must be trained and screened and approved before that contact is permitted. The approach will include a searchable database for rapid identification of red flags in consultation with outside experts in the field.

The Student Safety Task Force work included a survey of stakeholders; targeted interviews; a review of best practices; and an analysis of policies and procedures now in place, with an eye toward impactful changes.

As part of its work, the Task Force also distributed a survey to parents, staff, students, and the community to solicit their input, including asking for their perceptions, opinions, and beliefs about the four key areas; soliciting comments with regard to what the public thought to be strengths and weaknesses of current policies, procedures, and practices; and, finally, what recommendations they might provide. Four hundred and five individuals responded to the survey and gave the Task Force 2,835 responses to the questions asked.

The members of the Task Force conducted confidential interviews with a wide range of school personnel to assess student safety and how it might be improved. Over the last three months, the Task Force met a minimum of 30 times, with more than 500 hours dedicated to completing its work.

In response to the Task Force’s report and findings, Dr. Segun C. Eubanks, Chairman of the Prince George’s County Board of Education stated, “Understanding the gravity and importance of this issue, the Board is ready to do whatever is necessary to ensure that Prince George’s County schools have policies and procedures in place to protect our children. That is not only a

promise, but our responsibility.”

The members of the Task Force were:

- o **Dr. Joshua Sharfstein**, Associate Dean for Public Health Practice and Training and faculty in Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
- o **Gloria Brown**, Director of Social Services, Prince George’s County Government
- o **Renee Battle Brooks**, Assistant State’s Attorney
- o **Judy Bresler**, Attorney at Law, Carney, Kelehan, Bresler, Bennett & Scherr, LLP
- o **Dr. Kristina Kyles-Smith**, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Student, Family and School Support, Maryland State Department of Education
- o **Dr. Brenda Jones Harden**, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland College Park
- o **Michelle Booth Cole**, Executive Director, Safe Shores - District of Columbia Children's Advocacy Center; and
- o **Blanca Abrico**, Parent of a student at Robert R. Gray Elementary School

Visit <http://www1.pgcps.org/student-safety-report/> (<http://www1.pgcps.org/student-safety-report/>) to review the full report of the Student Safety Task Force.

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Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), one of the nation's 20th largest school districts, has 201 schools and centers, more than 133,000 students and nearly 20,000 employees. The school system serves a diverse student population from urban, suburban and rural communities located in the Washington, DC suburbs. PGCPS is nationally recognized for college and career-readiness programs that provide students with unique learning opportunities, including dual enrollment and language immersion.

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