

Maryland State Board of Education
August 27, 2013

Public School Students Should Be First Priority of State Board of Education

1. **Montgomery County Public School students are still paying fees to attend public school classes. This is the third time I have come before you on these illegal fees. In 2010, the State Board of Education did a survey of Maryland public schools to determine if other Counties were charging students to attend public school classes. What did you do with your survey results? You know this illegal practice continues, yet you remain silent.**
2. **Seven students were admitted to Montgomery County Public Schools one and only public charter school without being part of the public lottery process. You were given this information as part of your evaluation of the Charter. Have you contacted the seven families from the wait list that were denied admission to this school to alert them of their right to appeal the denial of admission? Have you done anything to protect the right of these seven public school students to a fair and open public lottery process?**
3. **How many teachers in public schools in Maryland are in classrooms with restrictions on their ability to touch or interact with their students? Please do a county by county survey and make the results public. Parents need to know if they are required to send their child to a public school if the classroom teacher is restricted from tying a shoelace, touching a child to show how to hold a pencil, or picking a child up who has fallen down. Parents have the right to know if their child's teacher is restricted from taking these basic actions. Do we need regulations? Legislation?**

What needs to be done to make sure that no teachers are in classrooms with children with these unconscionable restrictions on their movements. If a teacher has such restrictions, then promote them to administration and get them out of the public school classrooms! NOW!

Clearly, the State Board knew there was a serious problem when you signed off on your September 2012 Opinion 12-34, *Picca v. Montgomery County Board of Education*, but did you take any action? Here's what you said in that 2012 Opinion:

September 25, 2012, Opinion from the Maryland State Board of Education in the *Picca v. Montgomery County Board of Education* matter :

"...Recent child sex abuse cases have shone a bright light in that dark corner. We think that this case can shine a light on the abusive conduct, albeit infrequent, of school staff toward children. We ask local boards to review and put in place a policy addressing teacher and staff conduct with students, and make it a part of the message in staff training and meetings. We ask local boards to inquire about the safeguards that are in place to assure that the type of persistent conduct that occurred in this case does not occur in their schools..."

Did MCPS take any action after that Opinion was released?

It appears that neither the State Board of Education, nor Montgomery County Public Schools took any action after the September 2012 Opinion because it took **HOMELAND SECURITY to remove this teacher from a MCPS classroom in February of 2013.**

According to court documents, school leaders placed restrictions on Joynes in November 2011, after two complaints. Joynes was told not to touch children, be alone with them, sit in the cafeteria during lunch or stay on the playground during recess. His classroom door was to remain open, and he was to use staff restrooms, not those for students, documents say.

The Washington Post, August 21, 2013 – Article attached.

4. We need a Statewide ban on cell towers at elementary schools. Parents and guardians need to focus on their children's education and should not have to spend these important educational years battling private interests who want to turn playgrounds into Hazardous Materials compounds. It's time to protect playgrounds for public school students!

Thank you for the opportunity to give public comment.

**Janis Zink Sartucci
Parents' Coalition of Montgomery County, Maryland**



Maryland State Board of Education

200 W. BALTIMORE STREET / BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201-2595 / (410) 767-0467

September 28, 2010

Dr. David Cox
Superintendent
Allegheny County Public Schools
P.O. Box 1724
Cumberland, MD 21502

Dear Dr. Cox:

The Maryland State Board of Education is focusing some attention on the issue of course-related fees. As you may know, the State of California was recently sued for violating its constitutional responsibility to provide a free public education to all students. The complaint alleges that many California school systems violate the free schools guarantee by requiring students to pay fees and purchase assigned materials for their courses.

Maryland has a free public education responsibility. Because this is a difficult economic time for school systems and families, school fees may become an issue of concern. Therefore, in order to fulfill our responsibility, we are requesting that you send us:

- (1) The school system policy on charging course-related fees¹;
- (2) A list of the course-related fees that are imposed by each school; and
- (3) Whether fees can be waived and a description of the waiver process.

Please send the requested information to Anthony South, Executive Director to the State Board, at south@msbe.state.md.us by November 30, 2010.

On behalf of the State Board, I thank you for gathering this information for us and for all your excellent work in public education in Maryland.

Sincerely,

James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr.
President
Maryland State Board of Education

c: Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick

**Maryland State Department of Education
Office of School Innovations**

Dear Charter School Colleague - LEA Liaisons,

The Charter School Program is required to complete an Annual Performance Report by the end of next month for the United States Department of Education. To successfully complete this report, we will need to obtain some required information from each of you by **Friday, May 30, 2013**. This is a requirement that MSDE must meet in order to comply with federal mandates annually. We are collecting this information through the use of a short questionnaire below. Please assist us with this process by completing this form and returning it to my office before or on the date listed above. You may return this survey by e-mail at hortiz@msde.state.md.us or fax it to our office at (410) 333-8010. The Office of School Innovations appreciates your assistance and support.

Sincerely,
Hilda Ortiz

1. LEA and Charter School Agreements:

0 Number of Charter Schools in your school district that met 100% of the measurable goals and objectives contained in their agreement with your LEA this school year (12-13).

1 Number of charter schools that did not.

What categories of goals were not met?

Achievement
Governance
X Management
X Fiscal
Other: _____

46.2% Of the schools that did not meet all their goals -what percent of their goals did they meet?

2. Accountability - Annual Financial audits:

0 Number of Charter Schools in your school district that had "unqualified" audits (no findings): As Community Montessori Charter School is in its first year of operation, a financial audit has not been conducted as of the date of this report. However, financial concerns have arisen during the course of the year; therefore, the attached memorandum was sent to the school.

Number Charter Schools in your school district that had material findings in their audit. Major findings: See attachment

Number of technical assistance instances that were provided to help correct material (weaknesses) findings in the audit: To address issues raised in the Attachment, technical assistance was provided more than 50 times.

3. Accountability - Performance Standards: (yes /no responses)

- Yes** **Are you familiar with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NASCA) standards?**
- Yes** **Does your school district use the National Association of Charter School Authorizers standards to evaluate charter school performance?**
- Yes** **Does the charter school contract format used by your LEA include performance standards that are used to evaluate charter schools?**
- Yes** **Have you used Maryland's Model Performance Contract in any way?
Please Explain: It was the basis for a contractual framework.**
- Yes** **Do you evaluate charter school performance annually?**

School District: Montgomery County Public Schools

LEA Charter School Liaison: Ms. Lori-Christina Webb Date: May 29, 2013


Thank you for your assistance and dedication to all public schools in Maryland!


MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Office of School Support and Improvement
Rockville, Maryland

February 26, 2013

MEMORANDUM

To: Ms. Kathleen Guinan, Chief Executive Officer, Crossway Community, Inc.
Ms. Ann Byrne, acting coordinator, Community Montessori Charter School

Through: Larry A. Bowers, Chief Operating Officer 

From: Donna S. Hollingshead, Community Superintendent 

Subject: Community Montessori Charter School Meeting Summary, February 22, 2013

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of the agenda items we discussed during the meeting held among the four of us, as well as Mr. James O'Hara, Board member, Crossway Community, Inc. on February 22, 2013. The meeting agenda included the following topics with a summary of the discussion points and action/follow-up items noted under each topic header.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)-Community Montessori Charter School (CMCS) Finances:

Mr. Bowers focused on three critical financial components for this meeting:

- The importance of the timely submission of a well-planned CMCS budget to MCPS.
 - It was acknowledged that this is a new process for CMCS and can be challenging. Ongoing technical assistance by Ms. Nicola Diamond, executive assistant, Office of the Chief Operating Officer, was provided to work directly with CMCS staff this year to determine their program requirements and collaboratively draft a budget to meet the critical deadlines within the MCPS budget process. Mr. Bowers explained the rationale for the requirement of more proactive and detailed attention to the budget planning process, including the need for funds in the appropriate categories as this impacts how the Montgomery County Council approves funding (by category), as well as how MCPS provides data to the state. In addition, specificity is required around what services, if any, CMCS will be buying back from MCPS (e.g., transportation services). This is critical as the CMCS program grows (CMCS receives 98% of the per pupil cost).
 - MCPS is a very large organization and starts the budget process in July and completes the Superintendent's Recommended Budget by mid-November for the next school year. MCPS continues to be committed to work collaboratively with CMCS in the discussions related to optimizing resources to meet CMCS student needs throughout the budget process. Note that there are some "givens" within the budget (e.g., the school leader position) that are requirements. For future budget cycles, it is imperative that CMCS staff proactively attends to the development of detailed budget plans based on specific program and student needs.

MCPS will continue to provide technical support. Ms. Byrne expressed her great appreciation for all the assistance.

- **Submission of quarterly and monthly financial reports and other reports requested**
 - CMCS has not been meeting the MCPS financial reporting requirements including the following noted during the meeting:
 - Quarterly financial statements and monthly financial projections
 - Monthly position management/reconciliation reports
 - CMCS coordinator timesheet information (payroll currently supported by the Employee Retiree Service Center (ERSC))
 - CMCS coordinator long-term leave request documentation
 - Additional nonfinancial reports that have not been submitted in a timely or accurate fashion including the following were noted in the meeting:
 - Student enrollment reports
 - Classroom sectioning on the Online Administrative Student Information System (OASIS)
 - "Schools at a Glance" data
 - Mr. Bowers underscored that MCPS will continue to be supportive of the staff in meeting these MCPS financial reporting and other reporting requirements to include additional training, clarification of requirements, and direct support from the appropriate MCPS staff. The CMCS application was first denied due to concern around the potential for comingling of funds. It is imperative that the funds are not mixed and this requires full attention of CMCS staff especially given the complicated prekindergarten programs. For all the three-year-old children, non-income eligible four-year-old students, and wrap-around services that MCPS is not paying for, CMCS must ensure that expenditures and dollars are clearly delineated. It is imperative to separate the students who are not in the CMCS program from those who are enrolled.
- **Invoice for CMCS Fiscal Year 2013**

(Reference: letter with attached invoice from Mr. Bowers to Ms. Guinan, dated January 8, 2013, regarding funds owed to MCPS with payment due date of January 31, 2013.)

 - Mr. Bowers asked for the status of the CMCS response to this invoice. Ms. Byrne responded that their fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 and that they have a plan and have done a fair amount of fundraising to date and fully intend to pay off what is owed to MCPS and this is part of the agreement. Ms. Guinan said that the sliding scale (wrap-around program) for the students does not offset the costs. She also stated that they do not have the ability to pre-pay as some of grants will not be received until April 2013 and payment is more of a timing issue, not ability to pay.
- **Coordinator Position Status:**

The long-term leave status of Dr. Jacqueline Cossentino, acting coordinator, CMCS, was discussed.

- After numerous requests, MCPS has yet to receive the documentation from her that supports her long-term leave or an extension of her leave. As of the end of February 2013, the undocumented long-term leave ends. However, It was apparent from the second undocumented leave request with date of return December 2013, as well as from the discussion in this meeting, that Dr. Cossentino will not be returning. Ms. Byrne has been acting in her absence, and I appreciate her knowledge of the CMCS programs and infrastructure, strong commitment to serving the CMCS community, and her positive spirit in working with MCPS staff.
 - Ms. Bryne said that they have advertised in two professional journals for a replacement (NAMTA and AMI) to begin to develop a pool. Note that the requirement must be met to work with the MCPS Office of Human Resources and Development (OHRD) and me, as well as closely adhering to the established MCPS regulations, guidelines and processes for recruitment and hiring, and the agreements with the three MCPS employee associations. We agreed that it was important to begin this process immediately as this is the hiring season for administrators. In addition, the new coordinator will need to lead the hiring of the teaching and support staff. As an action item, I will contact Mr. Jeffrey (Jeff) M. Martinez, director, Department of Recruitment and Staffing, OHRD, to determine who will be working with CMCS in the recruitment/hiring processes given that Mrs. Helen A. Nixon, OHRD liaison to CMCS, will be replaced (due to a job promotion).
 - Information was shared with the group from Mrs. Janette Gilman, Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) president, regarding the request from a parent for the formation of a PTA Chapter at CMCS. Copies were distributed of the home page of the Maryland PTA Website and contact person, Teresa Willis at officeadministrator@mdpta.org. I informed Mrs. Gillman that the current coordinator was on long-term leave and most likely she would not hear from the school until a permanent replacement was in the position next school year. Ms. Guinan noted that this parent who put in this request is withdrawing her child at the end of the year.
- **Student Rosters (CMCS Students Crossway Resident Program Students)**
Ms. Byrne stated that they have been very careful about segregation and that she showed me the classes during her last visit on February 8, 2013.
- The question arose regarding the discrepancy in the number of classrooms and students. During this visit, I observed inside the classrooms of: Ms. Fraley with Ms. Pasco (paraeducator)—approximately 16 students; and Ms. Mollah with Ms. Washington (paraeducator), and Ms. Mulligan (staff development teacher) —approximately 25 students.
 - A third classroom was viewed through the entrance only. This was staffed by Ms. Hober and was down the hall separate from two CMCS groups with approximately 20 non-charter school students. Ms. Bryne mentioned during the meeting that there is a 3rd CMCS classroom that Ms. Mulligan runs. I did not observe this 3rd CMCS class. Note that this classroom is not sectioned as such in OASIS (MCPS student scheduling web application). Currently, there are only two sections reported in OASIS: Ms. Fraley with 38 students and

Ms. Mollah with 31 students. While it was stated that the 70-student count does not include the non-charter students, as a critical follow-up, the sectioning of the students must be accurate in OASIS.

- As a follow-up to this item, please correct the classroom assignments to reflect the existing state and provide a class list for Mrs. Hober's class.

➤ **Lottery Process**

MCPS will be providing more support and oversight into the CMCS lottery process given the issues with last year's process and increasing size of the lottery.

- Ms. Jeanie Franklin, director, Division of Consortia Choice and Application Program Services, has extensive experience with the application and selection processes for MCPS magnet and consortia programs and will serve as your liaison for the lottery process. As discussed, she and her staff will review your plans for the CMCS lottery this year and observe the actual lottery take place. I will follow-up to arrange a meeting.

- Note that in cross referencing the current (February 12, 2013) rosters in OASIS with the June 18, 2013, CMCS lottery acceptances, it was noted that seven currently enrolled students were not on the lottery acceptance roster or wait list; and there were wait listed students who did not enroll. Ms. Byrne said that more acceptances were extended based on space available. I will ask Ms. Franklin to pay particular attention to this portion of your process to support CMCS in complying with stated lottery requirements. Ms. Byrne shared that based on a CMCS parent survey, CMCS expects that 99 percent of the students plan to return next year.

➤ **Charter Performance Evaluation**

Copies of the performance evaluation form that was developed and submitted by CMCS and approved for implementation (as part of the charter approval) were distributed to the group.

- It was agreed that it was reasonable for the Charter Performance Evaluation to be completed by the end of April/beginning of May 2013 and that the Steering Committee will participate in the draft based on their work with CMCS this year. As a follow-up to this item, I will ask Ms. Lori-Christina Webb, executive director, Office of the Deputy Superintendent of Teaching, Learning, and Programs, to reconvene the Steering Committee in the near future to begin the process to meet this deadline.

➤ **Next Steps/Group Discussion**

- Ms. Guinan mentioned that grant funds from November would be coming in the end of March and this would help to cover the funds due to MCPS. In addition, plans are underway for other fundraisers including a "Kitchen Opening for Mother's Day" as well as expectations for Summer Program Revenues and a large event in the fall to celebrate Maria Montessori's Birthday.
- Concerns remain regarding resource overload for free childcare for three and four year olds and families then pulling students out for kindergarten. CMCS uses a sliding scale (similar to

Ms. Kathleen Guinan
Ms. Ann Byrne

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February 26, 2013

Arlington). Ms. Bryne will provide the cost of the CMCS full fee. The issue highlighted around attrition before kindergarten will require further thought and discussion.

- Follow-ups and actions items were summarized.

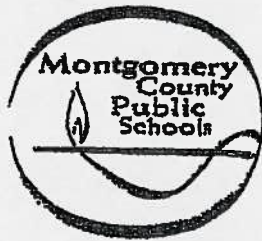
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Copy to:

Dr. Schiavino-Narvaez

Dr. Statham

✓Ms. Webb



430 Hungerford Drive • Rockville, Maryland • 20850-747
Telephone 279-3381

August 22, 1995

Mr. Daniel Picca
9502 Treyford Terrace
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879

Dear Mr. Picca:

This letter of reprimand results from an investigation by the Office of Personnel Services for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) into alleged inappropriate behavior on your part toward male students at Rachel Carson Elementary School. I am aware that on October 8, 1993, you met with your principal, Mrs. Laura Silkwood, concerning allegations that you had been observed, on more than one occasion, with a male student sitting on your lap after school dismissal. Mrs. Silkwood sent you a memorandum the same day detailing her concern about this allegation. In this memorandum, she addressed your comments regarding not wanting to push a child away who sits on your lap. She invited you to meet with her to discuss strategies for handling this type of situation, but she made it clear that it was inappropriate for you to have a fifth grade male or female student sit on your lap or be alone with you after school. She mentioned that behaviors of this type could be construed as sexual harassment.

I understand that since you received Mrs. Silkwood's directive, there is evidence that you have engaged in activities of the sort you were directed to cease. You have acknowledged to Mrs. Silkwood that during the first part of the 1994-95 school year, you permitted and even encouraged certain students to stay after school and that physical exercises were often a part of this non-sanctioned activity. Male students have alleged that you encouraged them to remove their shirts as well as to sit on your lap at these sessions. Once aware of this information, Mrs. Silkwood met with you on November 10, 1994, to discuss this activity. In a November 14, 1994, follow-up memorandum to you, Mrs. Silkwood specifically stated that, "I want to reiterate that your Friday afternoon boys' group is not a school-sponsored activity, and that it must end. There should be no students meeting with you in your classroom on any afternoons after school."

On February 22, 1995, Mrs. Silkwood was notified by the mother of a former student of yours that she had contacted the Montgomery County Police Department regarding allegations her son had confided to her regarding his interactions with you while he was a student at Rachel Carson Elementary School. I have reviewed the information collected by members of the Montgomery County Police Youth Division as well as

Mr. Daniel Picca

-2-

August 22, 1995

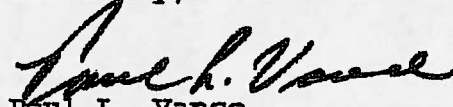
by individuals in the Office of Personnel Services. It is clear to me that you conducted non-sanctioned after-school activities in your classroom with a specifically selected group of male students. While I have been made aware that you deny allegations of inappropriate behavior on your part, the nature of some of these activities and your selection of students was unacceptable, unprofessional, and suspect. Your disobedience in failing to follow your principal's directive is clear.

I am directing you to contact Dr. Glenn Miller, a psychiatrist utilized by MCPS, within one week of receipt of this letter in order to schedule a psychological evaluation. Dr. Miller can be reached at 229-0987. I will determine if any further action is necessary following my review of Dr. Miller's report.

The need to reassign you for the 1995-96 school year has been accomplished with your transfer to Luxmanor Elementary School. In this new assignment, you will be directed by your principal, Mrs. Beverly Hopkins, to conduct all of your interactions with students in a responsible and professional manner. Non-sanctioned after-school activities will not be permitted.

I want to caution you that should there be a future proven recurrence of unacceptable behavior with male students, I will recommend to the Board of Education more serious disciplinary action, including suspension or dismissal, based on insubordination. A copy of this letter of reprimand will be placed in your personnel file. You may attach your own comments to this copy. Actions such as these are appealable through the grievance procedure.

Sincerely,


Paul L. Vance
Superintendent of Schools

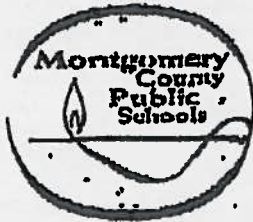
PLV:jmm

Copy to:

Mr. Bowers
Mrs. Gemberling
Dr. Fisher
Dr. Massie
Mrs. Hopkins
Dr. Miller
Mrs. Silkwood

Blind copy to:

Ms. Bresler
Ms. Burger
Mrs. Ippolito
Mr. Schaub
Mrs. Zauderer



850 Hungerford Drive - Rockville, Maryland - 20850-1747
Telephone/Fax 279-3381

February 9, 2000

Mr. Daniel J. Picca
9502 Treyford Terrace
Montgomery Village, Maryland 20886

Dear Mr. Picca:

The purpose of this letter is to strongly reprimand you for conduct I consider to be inappropriate, unprofessional, and highly suspect. As you know, for the second time in the last four years, a request was made for an investigation into allegations of inappropriate behavior on your part involving your conduct with certain male students. My recommendation is based on the results of that investigation. I have had an opportunity to read the investigation report including your statement, as well as statements from other individuals. It was disconcerting to find the investigation was hampered by the fact that several members of the school community refused, or were reluctant, to participate or have their children participate as they feared retaliation on your part.

While I have determined there is no evidence to indicate sexual contact on your part with students, I am nonetheless seriously concerned regarding your interactions with them. While you purport to have an interest in creating a "love of athletics and a strong, healthy body in my students," the perception in many minds is that you use activities such as the "Muscle Beach" event to satisfy baser interests. I cannot entirely discount this perception given that you have now been cited twice for suspect conduct.

You will not be returned to your assignment at Luxmanor Elementary School. Rather, the Office of School Performance and Accountability and the Department of Human Resources will work together to determine an appropriate assignment, given my conditions for reassignment. This assignment and your effective date of reporting will be arranged by those offices.

By this letter you are directed, and your principal will be notified that you are so directed, to abide by a set of very specific directives. All interactions on your part with students are to be strictly professional and related to the curriculum. You will not be permitted to seek or accept stipend activities nor voluntary "club" activities that permit you to work with students outside your classroom duties and responsibilities. You are not permitted, even on an informal basis, to engage students in activities related to body building, muscular development and the like nor any activities not related to instruction. Additionally, you will not be permitted to share with your students reading material or

Mr. Daniel J. Picoa

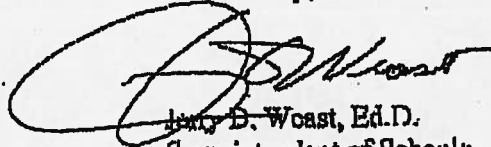
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February 9, 2000

other visual arts depicting wrestling or body building. You should know that swift and drastic action will follow any proven allegations of you as much as asking a student to raise or remove a shirt or flex his muscles for you regardless of the reason. Your methods of managing your classroom through a "token economy" system will cease. You are not permitted to provide students with "pizza, soda, and a dessert" nor any other enticements through the exchange of tokens. Most importantly, you are not permitted to allow students to be separated from their classmates to have lunch or engage in other non-curricular activities with you. This applies to small groups of students as well as individuals. Your actions will be monitored to ensure that female students in your class, as well as your male students, are treated with equal attention.

Further, I have directed Mr. Stan Schaub, assistant director, Department of Human Resources, to contact the Montgomery County Education Association to ensure their representation when you are presented those directives. Mr. Schaub also will meet with you and your new principal prior to your first day of work to review those directives in your presence with him/her. Finally, you should be aware that proven allegations of violation of any of the directives listed above will be grounds for me to recommend more serious disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Respectfully,


Jerry D. Weast, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

JDW:bsa

Copy to:

Dr. Solcznow
Mr. Williams
Dr. Wilhoyte
Dr. Arons
Mr. Kopp
Mr. Schaub

Blind Copy to:

Ms. Bresler

Montgomery leaders to examine changes after abuse allegations

By Donna St. George, Published: August 21, 2013

School leaders in Montgomery County said Wednesday that they are looking into what more could have been done to prevent the alleged sexual abuse of 14 young girls by their music teacher at a Silver Spring elementary school.

A week after police charges against Lawrence W. Joynes became public — charges that described years of abuse while Joynes was with the Montgomery school system — Board of Education President Christopher S. Barclay (Silver Spring) said school leaders are working to ensure that change is made where needed.

“Whenever an incident like this occurs, we always ask ourselves: ‘Is there more we could have done to prevent this?’” Barclay said. “I know this is something that our staff is looking into and that appropriate action will be taken and changes will be made.”

Superintendent Joshua P. Starr said he is already working to add more training for principals and improve the way cases are tracked and reviewed.

Joynes, 54, a teacher in Montgomery schools since 1985, is accused of sexually abusing girls in kindergarten through second grade at New Hampshire Estates Elementary School during the past eight school years. He is also accused of second-degree rape in connection with the alleged abuse of a middle-schooler in the early 1990s.

The veteran teacher was first arrested in late February at his home in Baltimore County on child pornography charges. Police then found video recordings and other material allegedly showing a range of abusive acts with young girls in his classroom.

Three educators and two parents have told The Washington Post that they reported Joynes to school leaders for incidents they considered inappropriate. They did not say they saw the video recordings or alleged criminal acts.

According to court documents, school leaders placed restrictions on Joynes in November 2011 after two complaints. Joynes was told not to touch children, be alone with them, sit in the cafeteria during lunch or stay on the playground during recess. His classroom door was to remain open, and he was to use staff restrooms, not those for students, documents say. At least one case described in the court filings involves alleged abuse of a child after those school restrictions began.

At Wednesday’s school board meeting, several elected leaders weighed in on the need for vigilance and quick action.

“To our staff, our parents, and our students: If you have concerns about the conduct of one of our employees, please report it,” Barclay said. “Do not wait. Let a principal or an administrator know. And to our principals and administrators: If someone raises concerns about the conduct of our employees, please look into it as quickly as possible. Do not wait.”

Board of Education member Michael A. Durso (Eastern County), a retired school principal, said his rule of thumb on the job was, “If something doesn’t seem right, it probably is not.”

“We also don’t want to be alarmists, but we don’t want to be at the point where situations are not dealt with appropriately and promptly,” Durso said.

Board Vice President Phil Kauffman (At Large) said he was hopeful about making changes.

“We’re confident we will fix what needs to be fixed,” he said.

The board discussion Wednesday came six days after Starr promised administrators and supervisors that he would provide additional training to school leaders on how to handle suspected abuse and said new procedures were being designed “to track these cases centrally,” according to a recording of Starr’s Aug. 15 remarks.

The improvements, he said, would help educators do a better job of investigating allegations. Still, Starr said, "in the end, we as leaders in the district must accept responsibility for relentlessly and unapologetically protecting children at all times."

He added that all allegations require attention.

"I want to be really clear and direct about something: If a parent, a staff member or a student ever raises a concern about the conduct of one of our employees, we must take swift and appropriate steps to investigate as quickly as possible," he said, according to the recording, which school system officials provided to The Post.

Starr urged staff members to contact key school district leaders if there is any doubt about what to do in a case of suspected abuse, "because it's always a gut call, right?" He added: "Don't wait, and don't delay."

Lynh Bui contributed to this report.

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