



## MARYLAND HOUSE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS

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June 9, 2022

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Mohammed Choudhury  
State Superintendent of Schools  
State Department of Education  
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

Maryland State Board of Education  
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

Dear Superintendent Choudhury and Board Members,

You are by now in receipt of the report by the Maryland Inspector General for Education (IG) regarding the grade-changing scandal in Baltimore City Public Schools. We are appalled by the level of careless deceit demonstrated by the Baltimore City School system and are heartbroken for the thousands of students betrayed by those who were responsible for their education. This is a sickening and tragic abuse of power by those responsible for the education of Baltimore City's children.

The IG's report shows that this scandal was not limited to a few schools with a few bad actors. The investigation covered approximately 130 Baltimore City Schools including grades 6-12. The investigation uncovered that, from 2016 through 2020, more than 12,500 failing grades were changed passing. The IG's report also confirmed the allegations that not only had City Schools promoted students by changing failing grades but also that teachers had been pressured to do so by school administrations because of pressure from "North Avenue" – where Baltimore City Public Schools is headquartered.

The corrupt bureaucracy of the Baltimore City Public School system cannot be trusted to self-govern or to suddenly see the light and change the error of its ways. The anemic response it gave to the IG's report makes this abundantly clear. The best they could do is say that no laws were broken. While that remains to be seen, it does not absolve them from the moral injustice of graduating students who do not have the education they need to survive in today's world. They have betrayed the trust of thousands of City students and families.

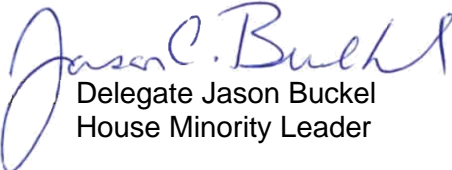
We concur with the IG's recommendation that the Maryland State Department of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools move forward with an independent performance audit of the grading policies and procedures in Baltimore City Public Schools. But Baltimore City Schools should have no say in the depth or breadth of this investigation. The fact that the school system will only agree to a prospective audit is incredibly telling. Allowing them to set the parameters for such an audit is like allowing the fox to take inventory of the henhouse.

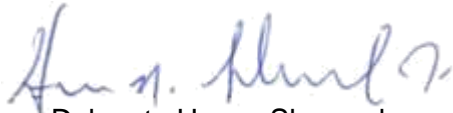
The Superintendent of the Baltimore City School System, Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises, has served as Superintendent since 2016. The IG's investigation covers the period from 2016 to 2020. While the scope of the IG's investigation does not include a timeline for when the grade changing began, we know a significant amount occurred during the time Dr. Santelises was at the helm. Even with these grade changes, graduation rates have dropped under Dr. Santelises' tenure, while she collects a 6-figure salary as one of the highest-paid school CEOs in the nation. Dr. Santelise must resign.

Baltimore City Public Schools have been plagued with scandal and have been failing students for decades. This grading scheme is only one episode in a series of problems. Ghost students, students not receiving adequate medical care, drops in student performance, instances of PTSD among City school teachers; an ever-growing and disturbing list of failure and outright danger exist in the Baltimore City Public School system. This is one of the most well-funded school systems in the state and the nation. According to 2020 Census Data, Baltimore City Schools has the fifth-highest per-pupil spending in the entire nation. Maryland's taxpayers have a vested interest in Baltimore City's schools, not only from a financial perspective but from a moral one. There must be accountability on the local level for this abject failure.

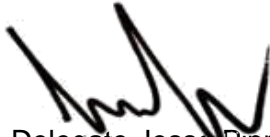
There is no excuse for this level of failure and there seems to be no movement for real change in the Baltimore City schools. Therefore, we call on the State Superintendent of schools to fully take over the Baltimore City School System. The students and teachers in this corrupt system cannot wait another day.

Sincerely yours,

  
Delegate Jason Buckel  
House Minority Leader

  
Delegate Haven Shoemaker  
House Minority Whip

  
Delegate April Rose  
Assistant Minority Leader

  
Delegate Jesse Pippy  
District 4