



Statement to

Members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

From Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Jack D. Dale

February 11, 2011

The resolution made on February 8, 2011, by Supervisor Cathy Hudgins, Hunter Mill District, entitled “FCPS Zero Tolerance Policy,” demonstrated a serious misunderstanding of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) policies.

First, the title of the resolution itself perpetuates the falsehood that FCPS has a zero tolerance policy. We have never claimed this nor do we believe in the notion of zero tolerance for our students. We operate on the principle that students are given ample opportunity to correct their behaviors before serious consequences are applied.

Let me assure you and all the families who send their nearly 175,000 students to our schools every day—our first priority is safety and security for all our students. Consequences, including suspensions and expulsions, are critical in maintaining a safe and secure learning environment for every student.

Second, for Supervisor Hudgins’ resolution to link two tragic student deaths to their disciplinary processes for the purpose of furthering a falsehood is unconscionable and a blow to those who have already suffered great pain and loss.

I believe our efforts would be far more productive if we focused on the incidence of depression among our county youth and how our agencies can work together to tackle this problem. Our joint County-School Youth Survey results from 2009 showed that 14 percent of students had considered attempting suicide and 3.6 percent reported that they actually had attempted suicide. Further, the survey revealed that students who reported abusing substances within the last 30 days were more likely to experience depression, consider suicide, and attempt suicide. While the survey showed that the incidence of depression is trending downward, I believe that these responses indicate a serious issue still exists in our community.

FCPS and many county agencies already have established positive working relationships on behalf of our youth, as presented at the joint County-School Smart Savings Committee meeting. In that presentation, we learned that social workers and psychologists from both the schools and county collaborate and talk frequently about support for all types of family situations and are now working on a Systems of Care model for families and children in distress. In addition, a Promise Neighborhood initiative is under way with Fairfax County Human Services and FCPS as lead partners in addressing communities at risk. These are just a few examples of our many collaborations and I am confident that as we continue to work together, we can make significant progress toward eliminating teen depression and suicide.

Third, I strongly recommend that all members of the Board of Supervisors learn more about FCPS' practices and policies before making public statements that are misinformed and damaging to our students, families, and community. The School Board and I stand ready to provide the facts and data as you consider and debate issues of importance to our community.