



February 2, 2011

Dear ACPS Middle School Staff and Families,

It is with great anticipation that I begin my appointment as the Director of Middle Schools for Alexandria City Public Schools. My primary responsibility is to be the advocate for our students, parents, teachers, principals and community. For my family and me it is a highlight in our lives to return to my hometown and have the opportunity to work with our team of professionals. It is my goal that this wonderful opportunity will establish our community's pride in our middle schools' service to our young people and families.

The first question addresses our core mission: how effectively are we serving the needs of our middle school children? We know we have begun positive changes, yet so much more has to be achieved. We must provide school conditions for our middle students to discover, engage and thrive. ACPS' middle schools have many celebrations due to the hard work of our school leaders, teachers, and students. Our Francis C. Hammond and George Washington campuses have been restructured as five individual middle schools to provide our students with personalized and customized instruction.

Our academic program has expanded at Jefferson-Houston to a K-8 model. Also, we've been able to expand inclusive practices for English Language Learners and special education students. We've supported a significant increase in middle school students' participation in Algebra this past year. Also, there has been an increase in writing scores at the middle school level across the division. The introduction of the Middle Years Programme and AVID will provide our students with more rigor and opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.

The middle school years are complex, critical and challenging for our young people, making the middle school experience especially vulnerable to multiple risks. Our middle schools are rich in diverse student populations which encompass even more complex issues. In addition to the traditional social pressures faced by our young people and the growing pains associated with those teenage years, we face a crisis in providing for our non-English speaking student population in ACPS. Furthermore, we must provide more enrichment opportunities for our gifted students, inclusive practices for English language learners and special education students, and continue to challenge all students to reach their maximum educational potential.

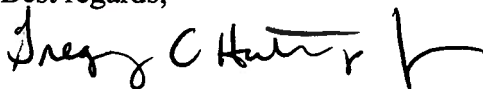
Over the next few months I will be speaking with and communicating regularly with our middle school professionals. It is my goal that we set an even sharper trajectory for academic achievement by building relationships with our middle school students and recognizing that each of them will need a personalized educational experience to be ready for the challenges of high school and beyond. In addition to more effectively supporting their classroom experience, we will focus on their social and emotional needs; increase

both student and parent health and nutrition awareness; provide clarity on the growth contributions of community and service efforts; and provide every student a holistic education. Holistic education not only helps students find their individual identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to a clear set of values...it's an approach that genuinely believes in helping students navigate their journey towards finding their unique potential.

ACPS has developed a reputation of being an educational district making important strides in achieving academic excellence; however, we have to candidly acknowledge we are still faced with many challenges at our middle schools. Only when our middle schools are recognized for meeting and exceeding the needs of our children in their preparation for life can we rest. It is imperative that we focus on personalization and rigor for our students to compete in our global society. Some in the community have said to me that we should aspire to make our middle schools 'the best in the country' and it's certainly a commendable goal. It is my personal and professional goal that every ACPS middle school student is prepared to enter high school with the tools, knowledge and desire to succeed in whatever path chosen for life!

I have launched a 'listening tour' where I will spend the entire month of January and February meeting with students, teachers, parents, principals and community leaders to discuss the state of our middle schools; solicit their ideas, insights and experiences; and then work collaboratively to create an actionable and measurable strategy to fulfill our promise to our young people. Your candid comments are encouraged, your forgiveness in any stumbles we make is sought, and your support is necessary to meet the needs of our students. Their lives, their needs and their futures are today's realities. Each of us is linked to the individual and collective success of our students. Your commitment to public education is essential for the success of ACPS and we need your support to achieve our goals. Please feel free to contact me via email at Gregory.Hutchings@acps.k12.va.us.

Best regards,



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