

From: [Ron K. Morris](#)
To: [GCES PTA](#)
Cc: [GCES VP1 VP](#); [GCES VP2 VP2](#); [Jennifer R. Peduzzi](#); [Superintendent](#); [Terri Marcus](#); [Tonya Tiffany, Vice President Issues](#); [Vicky Cutroneo](#); [Christina Delmont-Small](#)
Subject: Follow up to March 12 Concerns
Date: Friday, April 8, 2022 6:16:28 PM

Good Evening Ms. Inasi,

I am writing to share my findings regarding the concerns you expressed during the March 12, 2022 meeting. Thank you very much for your patience while I investigated your concerns. During our meeting you shared the following concerns regarding principal, Ms. Debbie Holmes:

- Staff Culture and Empowerment
- Bullying Prevention and Policy
- School Communication with Parents and Accountability regarding the 3rd grade class change
- PTA Collaboration with Administration
- HCPSS Policy and Compliance

Below you will find my findings regarding the bulleted concerns.

Staff Culture and Empowerment

Staff and parents have multiple ways to communicate concerns regarding administrators. Staff members may voice their concerns by contacting their Howard County Education Association (HCEA) representative, contacting the Area 2 Community Superintendent or Performance Director, filing a Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Employee Form, or voicing concerns via the HCEA Job Satisfaction Survey. HCEA is the union that represents over 6,000 certificated employees and paraprofessionals which includes school-based staff. They play a very active role in supporting school-based staff with a multitude of issues - including when there are concerns with administrators. It is not uncommon for employees to reach out to their HCEA representative for support when they are in need of assistance. As part of my investigation, I spoke with a representative from HCEA regarding Gorman Crossing. The representative shared there were no known complaints expressed by staff. Sometimes staff do not feel comfortable with voicing their concerns regarding their administrators and prefer to remain anonymous. HCEA annually administers a job satisfaction survey for employees to complete. Staff members share their feedback anonymously and are asked to give input regarding work conditions including information specifically about the "atmosphere of trust and open communication" in their school building and whether they have "experienced harassing behavior from their administrators". In the area

of having an atmosphere of trust and open communication, 96.4% of staff agreed or strongly agreed on the [2021-2022 HCEA Job Satisfaction Survey](#). This compares extremely favorably to the school system average of 48.1%. Gorman scored high in this area for several years. In the area of experiencing harassing behavior from administrators, 0% of staff reported that they have experienced harassing behaviors. Staff members have the option of submitting comments via the HCEA Job Satisfaction Survey as well. The comments are not posted on the HCEA website. The HCEA representative reviewed all comments submitted by GCES staff and no staff members expressed any concerns regarding administration. As mentioned earlier, staff members may contact the Area 2 Community Superintendent or Performance Director with concerns. Our office has not received any staff complaints regarding Ms. Holmes.

Like staff, parents have multiple opportunities to share concerns regarding administrators. Parents have options including but not limited to submitting a [Formal Concern Form](#), calling/emailing the Area 2 Office, or submitting a concern anonymously via the HCPSS Ombudsman. It is not uncommon for parents to file formal concerns or email/call the Area Office to voice concerns about school-based matters which includes concerns regarding the building principal. A review has been conducted of the complaints received from parents regarding Ms. Holmes over the past two years. There were a minimal number of concerns expressed by parents during this span of time. In addition, there have been no reported concerns regarding Ms. Holmes from the Ombudsman.

As a result, I have found no evidence to support that a culture of fear and intimidation exists at Gorman Crossing and that parents and staff fear voicing concerns as reported. However, if you have knowledge of individuals who are afraid to speak up, please encourage them to contact the Area 2 Office or the HCPSS Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can be reached at 410-313-6850 or at ombudsman@hcpss.org.

School Communication with Parents and Accountability regarding the 3rd grade class change

As a result of a third grade teacher returning from leave, a decision was made to make changes with students' homeroom classes. This change resulted in class sizes being reduced from approximately 30 students in a class to approximately 23 students per class. Additionally, as a result of this change students would be able to receive more appropriately challenged instructionally. Ms. Holmes met with the students who were impacted by the change in homeroom classes to inform them of the change and sent letters home. The decision to reduce class size due to having a teacher return from leave is a reasonable decision for an administrator to make. The change allowed teachers to better meet the needs of individual students and significantly reduced teacher workload as well.

While I fully support Ms. Holmes' decision to make the third grade class changes, we reflected upon how this information was communicated with parents. In reflection, Ms. Holmes agrees that moving forward should a similar situation occur, she would communicate with parents earlier regarding the need to make a class change. This would give parents advanced notice that a class change was coming and allow them the opportunity to ask questions or talk with their child prior to the move.

PTA Collaboration with Administration and HCPSS Policy and Compliance

During the March 12, 2022 meeting, you reported that Ms. Holmes told staff not to attend PTA events and Ms. Holmes worked with individuals outside of the PTA that created conflicts with the efforts of the PTA. Additionally, you raised a concern regarding Ms. Holmes collaborating with a parent outside of the PTA to obtain gift cards for staff in questionable amounts. With regard to the latter concern, a parent outside of the PTA did organize a group of room parents to support classroom teachers. The parents worked to obtain gift cards from individual families in the amount of less than \$25. Parents are permitted to give staff gift cards and staff are allowed to receive them if they do not exceed \$25 from an individual. While the giving and receiving of gift cards was not a violation of HCPSS Policy, there were challenges as a result of some of the efforts from the room parents. Therefore, Ms. Holmes ended the utilization of room parents. Regarding the former concern, I have found no evidence that Ms. Holmes directed staff not to attend PTA events or attempted to thwart the efforts of the PTA. Ms. Holmes does welcome parent involvement from all families including those who choose not to join the PTA. Further, if a parent expresses a desire to support staff in a manner that aligns with school system policy, it is welcomed and appreciated. This includes donations of food for staff.

Bullying Prevention and Policy

Ms. Peduzzi and I do not have record of bullying prevention concerns from our March 12 meeting. Following that meeting you forwarded a concern expressed by a parent regarding bullying. Ms. Holmes did meet with the parent to address the concern. Prior to that time, Ms. Holmes was not directly involved in supporting the parent. However, if you have other concerns regarding bullying, please do not hesitate to forward them to me.

I appreciate your wish to have a strong and healthy relationship with the school principal as well as to ensure that effective communication, transparency, and accountability exists. The PTA plays an invaluable role in supporting students, staff, and parents. I am confident that both you and Ms. Holmes want what is best for students and staff members. I am hopeful that the relationship can be strengthened

through continued collaboration.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions regarding my findings.

Sincerely,

Ron Morris
Performance Director, Area 2 Schools
(410) 313-6606
<http://www.hcpss.org/contact-us/community-superintendents/>

From: GCES PTA <gcespta@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 6, 2022 11:20 AM
To: Ron K. Morris <Ron_Morris@hcpss.org>
Cc: GCES VP1 VP <gcesvpone@gmail.com>; GCES VP2 VP2 <gcesvptwo@gmail.com>; Jennifer R. Peduzzi <Jennifer_Peduzzi@hcpss.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@hcpss.org>; Terri Marcus <vpoperations@ptachc.org>; Tonya Tiffany, Vice President Issues <vpissues@ptachc.org>; Vicky Cutroneo <Vicky_Cutroneo@hcpss.org>; Christina Delmont-Small <Christina_Delmont-Small@hcpss.org>
Subject: Re: [External] Fwd: Meeting follow up 3/14/2022

You don't often get email from gcespta@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Good Morning Mr. Morris,

Thank you for your email. I look forward to your reply later in the week. Unfortunately, as you noticed in my follow up email, lack of response and lack of communication from HCPSS Leadership has been a major obstacle standing in the way of properly addressing this and the numerous other concerns that have been raised.

Sincerely,

Sheliza Inasi

On Wed, Apr 6, 2022 at 10:30 AM Ron K. Morris <Ron_Morris@hcpss.org> wrote:

Good Morning Ms. Inasi,

You are correct that during our March 14 meeting it was communicated that you would

receive follow-up communication by the end of the week. You should have received an update by now and I take responsibility for not providing you with an update. Please know that your concerns are being investigated and you will receive a response by the close of business on Friday, April 8. I truly apologize for the delay and lack of communication and appreciate your patience.

Sincerely,

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From: GCES PTA <gcespta@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 5, 2022 3:15 PM
To: Jennifer R. Peduzzi <Jennifer_Peduzzi@hcpss.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@hcpss.org>
Cc: Vicky Cutroneo <Vicky_Cutroneo@hcpss.org>; GCES VP1 VP <gcesvpone@gmail.com>; GCES VP2 VP2 <gcesvptwo@gmail.com>; Tonya Tiffany, Vice President Issues <vpissues@ptachc.org>; Terri Marcus <vpoperations@ptachc.org>; Ron K. Morris <Ron_Morris@hcpss.org>
Subject: [External] Fwd: Meeting follow up 3/14/2022

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Good Afternoon Ms. Peduzzi,

When we last spoke via Google Meet on Monday, March 14th, you had stated that you would follow up with me before the end of the week. It has now been three weeks and I have not received an email or telephone response to our discussion and the included emails.

I am frustrated and disappointed at HCPSS Executive Leadership's lack of response. I have been in contact with Ms. Cutroneo and Ms. Delmont-Small regarding concerns at our school. PTACHC and the BOE have been extremely responsive and supportive. Given the lack of communication, transparency and accountability provided by GCES Administration and HCPSS Executive Leadership, I am now including Dr. Martirano because I believe that he should be aware.

On or before December 3rd, we initially reached out to HCPSS leadership to identify one of the many concerns that are present at our school and to determine how to resolve the situation. Since that time I have had interactions with GCES Administration and meetings with the HCPSS Executive Team where I routinely need to reiterate my issues and

explain my desire for resolution. It has now been four months and the issue remains unaddressed. It appears as though I am being run in circles so that you do not have to address the issues presented.

I want to take the opportunity to remind you that these are not isolated incidents. Over the years many parents have had similar complaints. Ms. Holmes has been at our school for a very long time and there is great concern about her awareness of and compliance with HCPSS Policy. Parents are afraid to speak up or do not know what is going on in our school. Dysfunction relating to communication, transparency and accountability has become normalized. Lastly, there is a culture of fear among staff. What actions are going to be taken to alleviate community concerns and bring resolution to the issues that have continually resurfaced about the **lack of communication, transparency and accountability?**

I am looking for Dr. Martirano and the BOE to help. At this point, due to the lack of response, I prefer to continue further discussions with Dr. Martirano, Ms. Cutroneo and Ms. Delmont-Small. The end of the school year is approaching and I would like to have some resolution.

Sincerely,

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Join the PTA. Together we can make a difference.



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From: **GCES PTA** <gcespta@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, Mar 17, 2022 at 11:39 AM

Subject: Re: Meeting follow up 3/14/2022

To: <Jennifer_Peduzzi@hcpss.org>, Ron K. Morris <Ron_Morris@hcpss.org>, Tonya Tiffany, Vice President Issues <vpissues@ptachc.org>

Cc: Vicky Cutroneo <vicky_cutroneo@hcpss.org>

Good Morning Ms. Peduzzi and Mr. Morris,

The email that I just sent you from my personal email is another example how how our Leadership lacking in three major areas:

1. Communication
2. Transparency
3. Accountability

This is not the first time that I have heard a parent express their concerns regarding our Administration's response to a bullying complaint. I hope that the situation can be resolved as soon as possible so that the student involved feels safe and comfortable going to school.

I would appreciate your follow up as to how this type of situation is handled, so that I can provide an informed response to any other parents that confide in me or or any of our Executive Board Members. I understand that some of it is confidential, but a general idea of how incidents should be handled and how it is resolved would be helpful.

Thank you,

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On Tue, Mar 15, 2022 at 4:25 PM GCES PTA <gcespta@gmail.com> wrote:

Good Afternoon,

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet. As the PTA president, my goal has been to advocate on behalf of our students and families, and try to create positive change. As we discussed, there have been a number of concerns raised at our school. The three major themes we discussed concerned:

1. Communication
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Per our discussion, I appreciate your follow up on:

- School Communication with Parents and Accountability regarding the 3rd grade class change.
- Staff Culture and Empowerment
- HCPSS Policy Compliance
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As you requested, I have attached a copy of the [Canvas solicitation](#) that was sent to one of our PTA Board members. Please note that first grade families inquired as to why the PTA was asking for so much so often and why they were the only ones being asked to contribute to an event for all GCES staff. Many parents reported that they thought that all the requests originating from the Room Parent were PTA related. The intent is good, but the execution did not follow the guidelines.

I will try to find the email that Mr. Morris requested about Staff attending PTA events. For ease of reference, I have attached four additional emails

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As we discussed, I am happy to provide PTAC-HC with our notes regarding items that may help in future training. I am very pleased by the support that PTAC-HC has provided. They have followed up and answered every question asked of them this year. I look forward to hearing back from Ms. Peduzzi and Mr. Morris so that we determine the next steps and move forward together.

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Subject: Re: [External] Fwd: Meeting follow up 3/14/2022
Date: Wednesday, April 6, 2022 11:21:02 AM

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