

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Brandon M. Scott**  
Mayor, City of Baltimore

**Jhonneta A. Richardson**  
Chair, Baltimore City Board  
of School Commissioners

**Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises**  
Chief Executive Officer

October 5, 2022

Dr. Mohammed Choudhury  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Maryland Department of Education  
Office of the State Superintendent  
Maryland State Education Building  
200 W. Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Re: Incidents at The Academy for College and Career Exploration

Dear Dr. Choudhury,

I am in receipt of the September 29, 2022 letter sent to you by Dr. Zainab Chaudry, Director, Council on American-Islamic Relations (“CAIR”), who is copied on this letter. City Schools shares CAIR’s commitment to promoting equity and ensuring that no student should ever attend our schools and not feel safe, respected, and valued.

I am writing to share with you the significant steps that Baltimore City Public Schools (“City Schools”) has already taken to thoroughly investigate and address the concerns raised in CAIR’s letter.

On September 16, 2022, a student informed her teacher, who in turn informed administrators at The Academy for College and Career Exploration (“ACCE”), that she experienced bullying and harassment when her hair and hijab were pulled by one or more other students. The ACCE administration immediately launched an investigation pursuant to [Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners \(“Board”\) Policy JICK](#) (Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation of Students), [Board Policy JBA](#) (Nondiscrimination – Students), as well as the accompanying administrative regulations. Baltimore School Police also were notified, responded to the school, and followed up with the family. As a result of the investigation, City Schools imposed disciplinary consequences consistent with [Board Policy JKA](#) (Behavioral Interventions and Student Discipline) and the Student Code of Conduct. In addition, the temporary staff member will no longer be employed by City Schools.

ACCE administrators also investigated a second incident that occurred on September 20, 2022, which is also referenced in the letter from CAIR. As a result of the investigation, City Schools imposed disciplinary consequences consistent with Board Policy JKA (Behavioral Interventions and Student Discipline) and the Student Code of Conduct.

Throughout the investigation of these incidents, school administrators followed the protocols set out in [Board Policy JICK](#) (Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation of Students), [Board Policy JBA](#) (Nondiscrimination – Students), [Board Policy JKA](#) (Behavioral Interventions and Student

Discipline), and their associated administrative regulations. In addition, ACCE staff members and other City Schools staff communicated with the students and their family members, including written notification letters of the results of the investigations (translated into the family's preferred languages for communication), as well as a home visit to the family of the student victim in the September 16 incident. The families of the student victims in the September 16th and September 20th incidents have been provided supports and safety plans, and they have been notified of their appeal rights if they are dissatisfied with the outcomes of the investigations. City Schools' ombudsperson has also engaged and offered support.

There is some additional information in CAIR's letter that has not been previously reported to City Schools, which will be investigating and addressed promptly.

Finally, City Schools has been treating these incidents with the utmost seriousness since they were first reported, and are using a variety of approaches to address the serious concerns raised in the letter from CAIR. Since the first incident, ACCE Principal Nick D'Ambrosio has facilitated schoolwide student and faculty community meetings to discuss religious/cultural attire and the serious consequences that will result from interfering with an individual's cultural/religious attire. A restorative circle was also held with the accused students from the September 16 incident. Several faculty members are also designing lesson plans for students in the middle and high school to learn about each other's identities and cultural values. And the School Equity Action Team (SEAT) will continue to meet with their Equity Specialist to co-create an equity action plan that addresses racial inequity in their school and elevates cultural awareness and inclusivity programming. As of October 3, 2022, all of the student victims are back in school safely.

City Schools also would welcome a collaborative engagement with CAIR around the issues raised in its letter. Please contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sonja B. Santelises

Cc: Dr. Zainab Chaudry, Director, CAIR Office in Maryland  
Alison Perkins-Cohen  
Tracey Durant  
Joshua Civin  
John Davis  
Tina Hike-Hubbard