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April 14, 2018

Calvert County Board of Education Executive Staff and School Board Members
1305 Dares Beach Road
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Dear Calvert County BoE Executive Staff and School Board Members:

We are writing in disgust and complaint of leadership and disciplinary concerns we have regarding our twelve-year-old, seventh-grade daughter, Sarah Blevins, and her experiences at Southern Middle School. For some time, we have had serious misgivings about certain classroom situations and about the administration, including a clear demonstrated lack of integrity, responsibility and respect for students, teachers and their right to learn and teach. Principal Mandy Blackmon and seventh grade Vice Principal Travis Mister have been our two primary points of contact. This is a very unpleasant situation, and one we hoped to avoid, in part because we fear Sarah will be made to feel even more unsupported, and in fear of reprisal from a couple of her peers, a teacher, and the administration. Her father, John, and I do not anticipate that our writing this letter will be well received by them, and we sincerely hope that our daughter will not be impacted.

At the beginning of the year, Sarah informed us she was to be in a PE class with about six females, and at least twenty males. Given what we already knew to be a school environment where shocking misbehavior is often normal and discipline is often poorly and inconsistently enforced, we had serious misgivings about such an imbalanced classroom and the potential for sexual harassment and other improprieties, particularly surrounding second quarter sexual education. I emailed an inquiry (Exhibit A) and had to repeatedly inquire, including via phone, to make sure the situation was resolved. When I finally spoke with Ms. Blackmon, her tone was consistently scornful, dismissive and argumentative. Although I was as conciliatory as possible under the circumstances, I had the distinct impression she was trying to make me out to be unreasonable and foolish, and two subsequent conversations with her have been no different. Among the rationalizations and dismissals from her on this occasion:

- No teacher can keep their eyes on all students all of the time. We concur, but how Ms. Blackmon could use this to *justify* an environment where girls were outnumbered by three or more to one and where there was a greater likelihood of impropriety and abuse alarmed us.
- If I think boys are prone to inappropriate sexual behavior and harassment, her experience is that girls can be as bad or worse (regardless, Sarah and many other students, both male and female, are not prone to that sort of behavior and do not deserve to be subject to it from others).

- “There are a lot more males than females.” Aside from being statistically improbable, a quick inquiry of Sarah and reference to the 2016-2017 yearbook proved this was a lie.

The conversation ended with no acknowledgement that classroom apportionment needs to be better addressed; rather, I was brusquely informed that Sarah could switch her schedule, and that was it. We talked with Sarah and she reluctantly agreed that she wished to move. Since that time Mr. Elliott has commented to Sarah’s new fifth period PE class (which is mostly female) that his second period class is one of the wildest he ever had. How such classroom distribution was permitted to occur, and that it then was in fact defended by the principal of the school, is unconscionable. While the situation was alleviated as it might affect Sarah, after that conversation we were left with the distinct impression that Ms. Blackmon is not trustworthy and resents those who create complications for her, no matter how valid.

We also were worried to learn that there was no certified Spanish teacher for Sarah’s sixth period class, let alone a teacher who knew Spanish. Mr. Thatcher operated as a floater to help in different areas around the school, and he was assigned to fill in until a teacher could be found. While Sarah reported that he did his best, he did not himself know the material to teach. Then a certified, Spanish speaking teacher, Ms. Herrera, taught for a week before leaving, and Mr. Thatcher returned. Eventually another certified teacher, Mrs. Cramer, from Puerto Rico, was found to teach during the second quarter. She remained until the end of the second quarter, when she returned to Puerto Rico to help take care of her family. At the beginning of the third quarter another new, this time uncertified “teacher” is there, Ms. Adams. Fortunately, she does know Spanish.

Aside from an absence of qualified, Spanish speaking teachers, the learning environment in the Spanish class has been anything but conducive to learning, for the entire year. The classroom is located directly adjacent to the administrative offices, but there is so much misbehavior that Sarah frequently finds it impossible to concentrate, and many of her classmates have the same problems. The primary, although not only, instigator of these issues is a student named

. He has been given a pass on much of his misbehavior by the administration, and since her arrival, by Ms. Adams as well. Ms. Blackmon, Mr. Mister and Ms. Adams have all repeatedly dismissed his behavior and tried to blame Sarah, and other students, for having a problem with it.

As Sarah described his behavior to us, which includes, but is not limited to, blasting loud music, playing on his phone/computer, running around and in and out of the classroom, blocking doors, physically charging and attacking teachers and administrators, throwing items including desks and chairs, yelling, cursing and hurling inappropriate, perverted and pejorative insults and threats, we told her to begin making notes on his behavior and giving them to us. (Exhibit B) Most notes she made were in the margins of her school work, but also sometimes on separate sheets of paper. Mr. Thatcher expressed frustration from the beginning, but Mr. continued to be allowed in the classroom by the administration, and Mr. Thatcher did not possess nor was he provided the tools to ensure discipline.

We were hopeful when Mrs. Cramer came to teach; however, she had even less luck trying to influence respectful behavior out of Mr. _____ than Mr. Thatcher or Ms. Herrera before her. She often would call to the front office for assistance as he would scream. Given the Spanish classroom's proximity to the office, the administration often was within earshot of these outbursts, but would do nothing, and even when they were forced by calls to intervene, would often return him promptly to class to immediately resume his misbehavior. At one point Mrs. Cramer even distributed pairs of foam ear plugs for each of the students to wear while she tried to address Mr. _____'s misbehavior, because she wasn't receiving sufficient help from the office next door.

In early November 2017 I emailed Mr. Mister. (Exhibit C) We spoke on November 2nd, and he informed me of certain things including:

- The School Board has been paying attention to the situation with Mr. _____ and trying to assist. Mr. Mister did not elaborate, nor did I inquire.
- The Spanish class and Mr. _____ had no more behavioral issues than any other and he would know, ostensibly due to his office's proximity.
- Expressed understandable frustration at the BoE's inability to find certified, Spanish speaking teachers.
- The problem is being addressed.
- Sarah should be concentrating on her work instead of documenting what is going on around her.
- That the kids in the class were hardly behind other Spanish I classes, to which I argued that Sarah is not able to learn, process and retain, and Sarah has repeatedly insisted she is very far behind.
- Sarah should try to get help in NEST to compensate for what she is unable to do in class. Nest is intended to supplement regular classroom instruction, not supplant.

On or about November 17, 2017, Sarah was approached during lunchtime by another Spanish student about a meeting some of them had organized to attempt to address accusations of bullying which Mr. _____ had just levied against them, and which were being investigated. The group of students met in a classroom and decided to go to Mr. Mister's office and discuss their concerns. Although Sarah neither organized nor led the delegation to the office, she was the person who ended up speaking on behalf of the group. As she presented their concerns regarding Mr. _____'s misbehavior, and argued that none of them had ever bullied him, Mr. Mister repeatedly obfuscated and deflected their concerns and issues in different ways, including through the following means:

- "I'm not going to lose my job because I wasn't following the Code of Conduct" - informing them that he could lose his job if he didn't follow policy, and so therefore always adheres to policy, making Sarah feel as if she may not have the right to question his authority because of risk it might pose to his employment, and that he is infallible and she and her classmates' perceptions and expectations flawed.

- Informing the students that not all of them come from ideal families and asking them how they would like their family business known to others. Neither Sarah nor we have ever inquired about what, if any, of the problems resulting in Mr. _____'s behavior may be, and Sarah does not know anyone else who has. Moreover, the implied threat that Mr. Mister knows things about students' families which could be a source of pain and shame if known to others was a revolting, but effective, tactic to employ.
- When student Kathryn McDonald, who is very petite, stated that she did not feel safe around Ryan, whom she had once witnessed threaten to slice a peer's throat on her bus, and who also would start at her to make her flinch and scare her, he exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me?"
- Mr. Mister refused to acknowledge that Ryan had done anything wrong – "we're going to take matters like this seriously," in regard to Ryan's later disproven claims that he was being bullied by Sarah and others. Sarah has never seen any of the kids Ryan accused of bullying him actually bully him; rather, they were telling/asking him to be quiet, behave and leave them alone.
- "What can you guys do to help the situation?" - which both belied his earlier assertions that there were not serious behavioral issues and deflected responsibility onto kids who hadn't done anything wrong and were *asking* for his help and support.
- There are no more problems than in any other class.

John and I were shocked and disgusted by the dishonest, manipulative and abusive conversational techniques employed by Mr. Mister against the students in that meeting. Sarah reported that she and others were left feeling confused, exhausted and unsure of their own perceptions after the meeting and we explained to her how Mr. Mister's actions were a deliberate form of mental abuse. While he is hardly sophisticated in his abuse, inexperienced middle schoolers are easy and susceptible targets. The difference between how Mr. _____'s accusations were addressed, with a full investigation, compared to his regular misbehavior and abuse of his peers and teachers, was striking and upsetting. In addition to herself, Sarah is aware of around eight other kids who were called out of class for varying lengths of time after Mr. _____'s accusations, and to her knowledge all accusations were not only unfounded, but disproven. There still being no improvement with Mr. _____'s impact on the class, and realizing the problem was much worse than we thought, I contacted Ms. Blackmon to request a meeting and for Sarah to attend. (Exhibit D)

The meeting started off courteously, albeit awkwardly, as John and I knew we did not trust either Ms. Blackmon or Mr. Mister and were furious at how Sarah had been treated. Throughout the meeting both Mr. Mister and Ms. Blackmon (but more subtly than Mr. Mister), continued to repeatedly try to discourage Sarah from documenting misbehavior, although we continued to state our adamancy that concentration on studies is impossible in the middle of such classroom upheaval, and that it is not wrong for Sarah to care about how not only she, but her teacher AND her peers are being impacted. Even at the end of the meeting Sarah's dad and Mister Mister engaged in a rapid-fire exchange with Mr. Mister insisting over and over Sarah should stop and

John saying “No....No....No” while directing angry and pointed looks at him. It appeared to rankle both Ms. Blackmon and Mr. Mister that Sarah would not be dissuaded. All three of us were indignant she was being told that she essentially was doing something wrong, when they were not ensuring she had an environment in which she could even think straight. We continued to explain that with such distracting behavior she *could not* focus on her work much of the time anyway, and that she has every right to care about how he impacts her and her classmates; such as the student, Kathryn McDonald, who told Mr. Mister she did not feel safe around Ryan, and who was embarrassed and rebuked for only reporting it when she accompanied her fellow students to his office. Mr. Mister was clear to state to Sarah, John and me that nobody had ever been inclined to believe Sarah is a bully, and also stated that he would want the same for his daughter as we want for ours; however, such claims are hardly comforting or helpful, and under the circumstances defy credulity.

At one point I broached the meeting Sarah and her classmates had with Mr. Mister and he swiftly and flatly denied having on separate occasions told both Sarah and me that behavior in the Spanish class was no worse than in any other. “I’m not saying you’re lying, but I never said that.” I calmly insisted that he had, and he continued to lie. When I mentioned his statement about always following policy he admitted, defended and tried to downplay it. When I mentioned how Kathryn McDonald had been made to feel badly for not having reported earlier that she was intimidated by Mr. _____, he plaintively asked Sarah “didn’t I ask Kathryn to stay after and talk about her concerns?” When I broached the topic of his asking the students if they would like their family problems known to others it was apparently too incendiary and immediately and frantically dismissed.

Although he informed Sarah that he had already finally confiscated Mr. _____’s phone, Mr. _____ even still has his school-issued computer and uses it to play music and videos during class, without consequence. Mr. Mister also expressed irritation at Mrs. Cramer for distributing earplugs, but seemed unconcerned that she had bought them for the students out of desperation because the administration was ignoring the whole situation and placing such an untenable burden on her. How could he have known about the earplugs, and still have the nerve to tell Sarah and me that what was going on in Spanish was no worse than any other class, before denying it in front of Ms. Blackmon and our family? Mr. Mister was very defensive throughout the meeting and occasionally downright apoplectic.

After at least an hour, with Sarah, John and me feeling as if we weren’t getting very far and Mr. Mister asking a few times what our “end game” was, we had arrived at some agreements. Ms. Blackmon suggested that

- Sarah place a *glue stick* on her desk, so that administrators, when walking by the room, would see that their intervention was needed. This is absurd, and while it provided some respite, it did not fix the problems and lasted for only around two weeks before no one paid attention through the window. Mr. _____’s misbehavior worsened every time he knew he was not being directly observed by an administrator, as well as sometimes when he knew he was being watched.

- Sarah switch her first and sixth period classes. Why should Sarah upend her schedule? Does this mean they still weren't taking these issues (or her) seriously and knew this would be the easiest way of getting rid of a pesky student and her family? Sarah declined, and although we would rather see her in a class where this isn't happening, we completely agreed.
- Sarah would try to meet with Ms. Blackmon during lunch on a necessary/weekly basis to report to her about how things were going in the class, which, given how she had already been treated for raising her concerns and documenting problems, was not something she was looking forward to, and with which we weren't completely comfortable, but to which we agreed. That has not happened, and neither Sarah nor Ms. Blackmon have sought out each other at any point since the meeting, although they do see each other around the school.
- Ms. Blackmon would look and see what Sarah might do to improve her grade. We were clear we're less interested in what grade Sarah receives than what she can learn and earn, but nonetheless were upset for Sarah that she was doing well in other classes, and yet very poorly in Spanish. But, the bottom line is, she has learned very little, and does not wish to take Spanish next year, in part because she does not believe she will be prepared (we agree), and also in the event Mr. ends up in her class again. Although Ms. Blackmon agreed to this on November 28, no progress was made until after I inquired again on January 11.
- Sarah explained that the Spanish classroom was full of disruptive people during NEST, making it impossible to receive help or study. We were assured the classroom would be made quiet and focused on Spanish help only. That did not happen. But, again, students should not have to regularly rely on NEST for instruction that they are consistently deprived of receiving in their normal class time.
- She would be permitted to go to another room to work on quizzes and tests. This is the only thing over which Sarah has had complete autonomy and not incidentally is the only thing which has actually happened. Why should Sarah, or any other student, have to regularly leave the room to try to have a chance on a quiz or test for which they haven't the resources to prepare, simply because behavioral standards are low and discipline unenforced?
- Asking about our "end game" was insulting, given what Sarah had already endured and the efforts she had already undertaken, including the strength of character she demonstrated. We all knew the problem did not lie with her, or us. It is the Administration's role to correct these issues, and no more responsibility should be transferred.

Although both Ms. Blackmon and Mr. Mister claimed in our meeting on November 28th that Mr. had already nearly exhausted the days he was allowed in ISS, which would mean, according to Ms. Blackmon, that he would be back in the classroom even more, regardless of behavior, he has spent many more days throughout the last few months in ISS. They also spoke in very general terms of the Code of Conduct and maintained they were acting in accordance

with it. At the end of the meeting I calmly asked where I might find the policies that dictate such behavior continue without alternative, and Mr. Mister immediately panicked, even acting, briefly, as if we had no right to such information. Ms. Blackmon located a Code of Conduct, with which we were already familiar and referred us to CoMar online for more information. Why would Mr. Mister panic and act as if we didn't deserve such information (as if we wouldn't have found it some other way), about which I had inquired simply to save some research and make sure we were fully informed? Whom better to ask? It would seem they should have been eager to show, and explain to us, the policy with which they have continuously claimed they were operating in accordance.

A couple of days after our November 28th meeting, Sarah heard Mr. _____ telling other kids that people were causing problems for him, but his parent/s had been informed that it wasn't a big deal and not to worry. We would like to know more about that. We would also like to know why on another occasion, after this meeting with only Mr. Mister and Ms. Blackmon, Mr. _____ informed Sarah and her peers that Sarah's parents are strict and unreasonable, as we have never met him and do not know Mr. _____ or his family, nor would we presume. How would he have known anything about us, and were either Ms. Blackmon or Mr. Mister at all responsible for causing him to think that? After all of the contradictions in particularly Mr. Mister's communication and action, and based on the fact we know he was a primary point of communication with Mr. _____ and his family, these are direct additional examples of how a culture of abuse and chaos has been fostered, where people are pitted against each other and no one knows whom to trust. We felt uncomfortable with some of the information Mr. Mister volunteered to us in the meeting, as we felt he was coming close to crossing a line in what he divulged about Mr. _____ and his father. Did Mr. Mister cross a line when speaking with Mr. _____'s family and inaccurately describe Sarah's father and me to them, deflecting responsibility from the _____ and himself by painting us as excitable and unreasonable, when neither Ms. Blackmon nor we were present? If so, why? Continuing to dismiss these things creates more difficulty and work in the long run than if discipline and consequences had been reasonably enforced all along, and in the meantime, a lot of damage is done. Why would someone work so hard to avoid telling the truth and addressing things as they are?

Upon Mrs. Cramer's departure at the end of the second quarter, she thanked Sarah for documenting what was going on in the classroom and told her to keep it up. Sarah was upset to see her growing more dispirited and her requests for help dismissed.

Within a few days after January 11th, while speaking with Ms. Blackmon about what was finally going to be done to help Sarah's Spanish grade, I informed her that the glue stick wasn't working. Sounding frustrated and making clear she found me unreasonable, Ms. Blackmon responded that it wasn't possible to monitor things that closely. When classroom structure and discipline are rooted in the hope that anyone next door in the administrative offices will be looking through a window for a *glue stick*, and are therefore dependent on an already frustrated, stymied and subjugated *twelve-year-old child* to tell them when to do their jobs, they have absconded their responsibilities, and do not inspire confidence.

At the beginning of the third quarter Ms. Adams arrived to teach. She does know Spanish, but has not yet completed her teaching degree. Sarah says she has some hearing loss, but that she has been aware of almost all of Ryan's misbehavior. Aside from being inexperienced and uncertified, Sarah is having a hard time with her teaching style, and still isn't learning much, in part because Ms. Adams berates them for not being able to hear and concentrate over Mr. [redacted] and refuses to repeat and replay lessons, including audio clips on the smartboard which are drowned out by Mr. [redacted]'s yelling, electronics, and other outbursts. Moreover, Ms. Adams appears to have taken sides against many students, including Sarah, over their frustration with Mr. [redacted]'s misbehavior, even going so far as to say to Mr. [redacted], in front of the class, on April 3rd, that "the class needs to do a better job ignoring you," and often refusing to try to silence him. We all are livid that Sarah received a comment from Mrs. Adams on her third quarter report card that says "Has difficulty with material." (Exhibit E) While true, Ms. Adams should know it is not Sarah's fault, and the consistency of her grades in other classes clearly reflects this. It is our fear that Ms. Adams has been told that Sarah and other kids are irascible troublemakers. However Ms. Adams may have come to such a conclusion, it is wrong.

From the Nov. 28th meeting, when Mr. Mister lied to Sarah and me about not having said the Spanish class has no more misbehavior than others, he has made a point of avoiding her. When he sees her in the hallway, he literally and immediately scrambles as far as he can from her, falling into doorways, and once in his hurry, even backward into the boy's bathroom. I had a similar experience when I was at the school one evening and he was keeping an eye on things near the front doors. He saw me, and although a simple nod or other acknowledgement from each of us would have been appropriate as I approached, he suddenly seemed to see something of great importance outside in the dark, past the front windows of the school, and stared intently. On my way to my van I saw quite a few parked cars, but no people or movement anywhere, and it was very quiet. How is Sarah supposed to feel supported when her seventh-grade principal avoids her like the plague and will not even acknowledge her, when she has not done anything wrong? We feel incredibly fortunate that she, so far, is not hurt or intimidated and sees this for how ridiculous it really is.

Sarah's Spanish grades have consistently been lower than her grades in her other classes. This can be attributed to the inconsistent/nonexistent teaching, but also an inability to learn during such frequent outbursts as Mr. [redacted] exhibits every day he is in class. When I followed up with Ms. Blackmon on January 11 (Exhibit F) to learn why we still had heard nothing about what Sarah might do to improve her grade, it had also become necessary to inquire about how she was going to be graded for a considerable chunk of work that she had turned in as it was due, but in all of the teacher turmoil the grades never entered in to HAC. Ms. Blackmon offered over the phone to remove the missing grades from the gradable average entirely, which I accepted on Sarah's behalf. I learned afterward that Sarah had been scrambling to redo the work and had managed to get almost all of it done and resubmitted, so the offer ended up being of no benefit, and she still wasn't learning much Spanish. The grades which had already been recorded were not as high as Sarah hoped to achieve, anyway, because learning was often impossible. As CCPS grading procedure requires grades to be entered within two weeks, this solution was no more than to which Sarah was already entitled, taught her nothing and was of no actual benefit.

Throughout this process we have been shocked by the inappropriateness of role distribution at Southern Middle School, as demonstrated and fostered from the top. Administrators should act like administrators, and accept responsibility for their roles by communicating with integrity and purpose. These roles include but are not limited to - adult, administrator, teacher, and disciplinarian. Administrators should not abdicate their responsibilities to teachers and students, and within that the kids' roles should be those of children, friends and students. They should never be made to feel responsible for that which the administration will not or cannot control. Confusing these roles and conveying responsibility for them to others has made for an unsupportive and mistrustful environment, and has had a chilling effect on those who attempt to address the dysfunction. Moreover, we have come to realize it is deliberate.

On December 7th, 2017 Sarah and her band class had a winter concert at Calvert High school. Although so many people, including our family, were very sad to hear that Mr. Humphreys, who is an incredible and inspiring band teacher, had chosen to move on from Southern, Mrs. Fraley has filled his shoes admirably and Sarah has thoroughly enjoyed learning from her. Mr. Humphreys was able to attend the concert that night, and Mrs. Fraley announced his presence to the audience. Most of the audience cheered, but one of the seventh graders who was in the audience and later to perform yelled "F-ck you!" to Mr. Humphreys. Although Mrs. Fraley had already spent at least a month regularly emphasizing proper concert etiquette and procedure, around ten of the kids sitting near this young man were also misbehaving, including yelling and moving around. Meanwhile, Mrs. Fraley was on the stage conducting and unable to hear her students who were down in the audience, not to mention that she was wearing an orthopedic boot and so could not have quickly moved to respond if she had known what was happening. So, even though Ms. Blackmon was sitting only a few rows directly behind the offenders, and near the aisle, she did nothing and remained in her seat. Just as Ms. Blackmon stated at the beginning of the year, no teacher can watch all of their students all of the time. A day or two after the concert Sarah saw Mrs. Fraley lose her composure and start crying during a lunchtime band rehearsal. Sarah's friend told her that she had just seen Mrs. Blackmon berating Mrs. Fraley in the hallway over behavior at the concert and comments she had received from angry parents. Ms. Blackmon was ideally situated, and more obligated than anyone, to call these misbehaving students to account, yet she did nothing, except to pass blame when she received unpleasant feedback.

On March 28, Sarah's friend, Hannah Wilt, was accosted in gym class. Another of Sarah's friends, Skylar Johnson, informed Sarah at the start of Spanish class that Hannah had been beaten up, and Sarah was worried and passed Skylar a note to ask if Hannah was okay. Ms. Adams confiscated the note, and then started typing on her computer. Shortly afterward, Ms. Goldstein pulled Sarah and Skylar from class and admonished them for "gossiping" and "spreading rumors." Then, Ms. Adams spoke to the class about "gossiping." Sarah was genuinely worried for her friend, whom she knew would not have, and in fact did not, provoke the attack. This note passing was a minor matter, and neither Sarah nor Skylar are disciplinary problems. Why didn't Ms. Adams confront Sarah and Skylar directly and reasonably, instead of messaging an administrator to chastise them for supposed quiet and inobtrusive rumormongering? She manages to disregard and sometimes even justify Mr. 's, and other

students' far worse behaviors for extended periods of time, to the point of hatefulness. What could have caused her to feel compelled to handle things this way? Why the double standard? Is this another indicator that she has been informed that Sarah is a troublemaker who needs to be put in her place, and again, by whom and why? As we already informed the administration of our intention to contact all of you if these situations were not rectified, was this seen as an opportunity to claim that Sarah has behavioral issues as well?

On Friday, April 13, Mr. _____ had been yelling for around fifteen minutes when Sarah saw Mr. Mister looking through the window. She waved and mouthed to him that he needed to do something, she knows Mr. Mister saw her, and yet Mr. Mister walked back into his office. (Exhibit B) We have no choice but to be suspicious under the circumstances. These are more disgusting instances of school leadership being more concerned with covering their backs, with image over reality, and trying to create an atmosphere where students are afraid to speak up and to support each other, where students' concern for their friends, and ensuring discipline, consideration and transparency appear to be unimportant. Instead of intimidating kids, through various means, into keeping their mouths shut, what is being done to ensure major disciplinary problems are being addressed thoughtfully, firmly, promptly, compassionately and *honestly*?

We are appalled, dismayed, disgusted and have so many questions. Among them:

- Just as things start at the top at Southern Middle School, these problems also are reflective of the state of leadership of the whole Calvert County Public School system. For each of you to whom this letter is addressed, how surprised are you by the atmosphere described herein?
- Do you realize that the examples listed above are only a vignette of the problems at Southern, and pale in comparison to the multitude of behavioral issues at the school? Do you wonder if Southern Middle is overwhelmed by other problems similar to these?
- Is what has happened at Southern Middle a reflection, if even only in part, of the atmosphere and support some or all of you have fostered for Southern's administrators and staff, teachers and students?
- How often do any of you visit Southern, and when there, do you address things as you see them? We have heard from multiple teachers of at least two of you who had experiences with students at Southern being disrespectful directly to you, and you just left, and have never returned. Did you do anything about it when a ball was thrown at you or a student swore at you, at all?
- We moved to Calvert County seven years ago because we heard it was a good place to raise a family (it is) and because of the schools. While our kids had many positive experiences at Saint Leonard Elementary and we are very impressed with Calvert High, we could never in good conscience recommend Southern Middle School to prospective or current Calvert residents, nor will several other people whom we know. While not an option our family might consider, in part because we are able to help Sarah augment her education, do you want families to move away to ensure their kids can receive decent public educations in respectful and

safe environments? Our youngest son will be there in three years. Why should he (or we) be comfortable with that?

- Why are students with special needs and/or behavioral issues interspersed throughout standard classes where they cannot properly function, while simultaneously reducing their peers' abilities to function and feel safe? Why are the specialized programs and environments for these students being downsized and/or eliminated? How are the students, teachers, staff and administration supposed to cope and is this same thing happening at other schools in the County?
- With as much time as the Administration wastes throughout the year forcing the teachers and students to conduct and participate in weekly insipid Southern Strong activities and reviewing the Code of Conduct ad nauseum, why doesn't it do any good? Maybe telling the kids to behave with integrity, discipline and compassion doesn't work when it does not start at the top. How about not insulting teacher and student intelligence with this drivel, and spending some time actually enforcing the Code of Conduct and delivering on some consequences? Is it because the Administration requires teachers and students to comply with their whims (and/or yours) so that the administrators will appear to be keeping things running smoothly and ethically? For some certificate, award, designation, etc. which looks good and sounds impressive? Doesn't it seem like patronizing and pandering to the kids might actually prompt behavioral challenges? If it hasn't helped to repair the chaos endemic at the school by now, stop wasting teacher and student time, get rid of it, and enforce the contracts parents sign at the start of the year.
- When this is the sort of experience a conscientious student has, from whom can they expect help, and why should they keep trying? Why should anyone try?
- How does this bode for the students who may not be doing well and are even more in need of support? How does such a clear lack of structure and consequence enforcement help them?
- Are teachers, staff and administrators provided a safe and reasonable method to report concerns and complaints, without fear of reprisal and manipulation? How many, many times have you been asked for help, and what have you done? Have any of you been dismissive of requests for help and blamed the person asking?
- If any of you are curious what might be done to attract, support and retain top teaching talent (Southern has many outstanding teachers who do a lot of good) does this help to explain why attraction and retention, if even only at Southern, might be a problem? We know quite a few full time and substitute CCPS educators who teach at other schools who have expressly told us they do not want to or will not work at Southern. If you ask around and listen, how many do you know?
- Do you care? It's difficult to see how things can be this bad, without being the direct result of prolonged indifference.
- The Code of Conduct explicitly states that many of Mr. _____'s and other students' everyday misbehaviors are violations and merit severe and appropriate

consequences. Every student and parent should have signed a Statement of Understanding at the beginning of the year. Why isn't this contract (which should be unnecessary) being enforced, and why have we been told it cannot be, as set out in the Student Behavior Response guidelines?

- Can you imagine how hopeless and beaten down people become under such circumstances?
- How, and when, will this be fixed? Sarah, and all of Southern Middle School, need answers and solutions from all of you.

We had hoped to address this situation far sooner. Neither Sarah nor any other student should have to put up with anything like this. We have delayed acting, in part, because we learned Ms. Blackmon had a necessary extended absence. However, we are addressing it now and will be expecting prompt, honest and respectful communication and action. Moreover, we hope that Sarah will not endure even the slightest hint of retribution or retaliation for any actions we take on her behalf or encourage and support her to take in this, or any other matter where it might be inferred her valid concerns and complaints are the root cause. We welcome anyone who wishes to meet with her and who wants to hear about her frustrations and concerns, but only if at least her father or I are present, and her schedule will need to be considered so she doesn't have to make up missed work unless she is comfortable with it. Under no circumstances, and particularly after Mr. Mister's conscious and intentional mental abuse and subsequent pathological avoidance of her, will Sarah be placed in any position where something like that could happen again, without us there to protect her.

This dysfunctional mess has lasted into the fourth quarter of the year. Although it will have been a learning experience for Sarah, and we hope one day something on which she can reflect objectively and with some appreciation, no twelve-year-old should have to deal with this, let alone provide contemporaneous notes under such circumstances, simply to prove what is happening. To quote Sarah, and at her request, "these problems have made the whole year hell."

Eagerly awaiting your responses and action,

Katharine Blevins

John Blevins