



January 11, 2014

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Employees:

We made the wrong call.

As I wrote in a recent column that appeared in *The Capital* and *Maryland Gazette* newspapers, making weather-related decisions about the opening of schools are never easy and often invoke plenty of criticism. It is our duty and obligation, however, to make decisions that are in the best interests of our nearly 79,000 students and 10,000 employees.

Friday's decision to open schools on time came after we worked through the same process we do in any similar situation. We examined weather reports, consulted with county and state agencies and other jurisdictions, and arrived at the decision we felt was best at about 4:45 a.m. – the time we need to make that decision in order to start the complicated bus system we have in place to transport nearly 60,000 of our students.

Nonetheless, the ultimate call is our school system's and our school system's alone. It is made by a group of human beings who truly are working hard and doing their level best to make correct decisions. We as a system are not perfect, and we should not be afraid to admit when we err. In this case, we clearly could have done better.

With that said, I want to reiterate a longstanding school system philosophy that has been conveyed to parents for years: When it comes to the safety of travel to and from school, it is parents who should make the final decisions they feel are in the best interests of their children. There is no question, however, that parents place their trust in the decisions we make as a school system.

In a county as diverse in terms of climate as Anne Arundel, any decision is bound to bring about questions regarding location-specific circumstances in which conditions may be far different than in other parts of the county. No decision will be 100 percent correct for 100 percent of homes and 100 percent of students and employees. Thus, it is parents and employees who must make that final call. Schools and departments will work with those adversely impacted to arrive at reasonable accommodations in those circumstances.

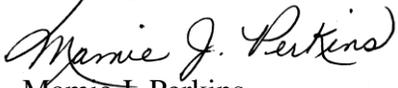
Students whose parents chose not to send them to school Friday received an excused absence, and will be allowed to make up any missed work. The same will apply to students who arrived to school late. Supervisors have been instructed to be flexible with employees who could not get to their work locations.

Finally, I want you to know that we have had many, many discussions since Friday morning about this issue. We have more discussions planned in the days to come about the system we have in place to transport students to and from school each day. While the breadth of our programs is a great asset academically, it does create some transportation challenges. I want to closely examine the system we have in place and, where possible, make changes to increase the flexibility when it comes to making weather-related calls.

I can't promise you where those discussions will lead, but I can promise you they will be frank and honest discussions that closely examine our procedures and the process we use to make weather-related calls.

There is no question that if we had it to do over again, we would arrive at a different outcome. I certainly regret the way things played out Friday morning, and I pledge to you that we will work harder than ever to try to ensure such an unfortunate situation doesn't arise again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mamie J. Perkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Mamie J. Perkins

Interim Superintendent of Schools

MJP/bm