

February 10, 2025

A NOTE FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

As we move into the third week of the third quarter, I encourage you to sit down with your child and review assignments and grades in Canvas. Help them review what has been turned in and graded. If you have questions about an assignment, this is a good time to help your child reach out to their teachers via the Canvas inbox. Middle School is a great time to help your child to start advocating for themselves. This is not to say that you can't also reach out to the teacher, but as we are working to help our children move towards more independence, this is a way to allow them to take more ownership of their learning and their grades.

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at the Second Annual Taste of Soul event on Thursday night. Please see below for more information. It will be a fun evening of joining together as we celebrate the talents of our students, learn about the resources that our community offers, and have dinner in community with each other. Thank you to our PTA for sponsoring some of the prizes and to the executive planning committee who have worked tirelessly to make sure the event is ready to go!

We also thank our PTA for providing a wonderful breakfast for staff during our Professional Development Day this past Friday.

Dr. Alexia K.S. Couch

IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND UPDATES

BLACK HISTORY EXPO 2025

See this [flyer](#) for more information.

TARDY PROCEDURE REMINDERS

Our process has changed for students who are tardy to school.

There are two ways for students to sign in when they arrive late.

- Student barcodes (based on student ID#, unique to each student) have been generated and will be at our tardy table. When a student is tardy, their barcode will be scanned; this timestamp will be captured directly into Synergy. It will generate a pass for class admittance.
- Students, with parental/guardian permission can use the StudentVUE app. This free app is a HCPSS app that will have a unique QR code the students will scan themselves (with staff assistance) and have a pass generated for class admittance.

[Student View Download App](#)

If the app is the method being used, please note that the cell phone is used as the student enters and must immediately be put away for the balance of the school day.

Parents can view time of arrival via HCPSS Connect by navigating to the Attendance tab>clicking on the day of concern in the calendar display>reviewing the timestamp under Attendance detail. As a reminder, if your student is going to be absent, please send an email to hcmsabsence@hcpss.org

Include the following information:

- Student First and Last Name
- Date
- Reason for absence (e.g., illness, bereavement, observance of a religious holiday, lack of transportation).

Current Attendance Procedures

Research is clear that showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic and social success, starting from pre-kindergarten and continuing through high school.

- Missing 10% (or about 18 days of a school year or 2 a month) can drastically affect a student's academic success at each grade level.
- By the 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that can indicate if a student is at risk for dropping out of high school.
- In the 9th grade, regular and high attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.

What is the Difference Between Excused and Unexcused Absences?

Lawful Absence - An excused absence for any portion of the day under the following conditions:

1. Illness of the student
2. Death in the immediate family
3. Court summons
4. Observance of a religious holiday
5. Hazardous weather conditions (as determined by the Superintendent)
6. State emergency (as determined by the Governor)
7. Suspension
8. Lack of authorized transportation (school system transportation)

Unlawful Absence - An unexcused absence for any reason other than those cited as lawful is presumed as unlawful and may constitute truancy.

1. Missed bus
2. Car trouble
3. Traffic
4. No parking

Parents/Guardians have five days from the date of the absence to email the reason for their absence. If the note is received after the five-day grace period, the student will be given an unexcused pass for the absence and will remain truant.

Discretionary Days

HCPSS students are granted 3 days a year to use at their discretion for scheduled interviews with prospective employers, visits to post-secondary institutions, family trips, civic engagement, and other special events.

- Such absences may not occur during exam or state-mandated testing periods unless authorized by the principal/designee.

- A written request for such absences to be lawful/excused should be submitted at least one week in advance to the principal/designee. Please download the PDF fillable [Discretionary Absence Form](#) and email it to hcmsabsence@hcpss.org The form is also available in [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), and [Spanish](#)

If you are requesting a day for a religious holiday not identified by the Howard County Public School System school calendar, please download the PDF fillable [Religious Obligation Form](#) and email it to hcmsabsence@hcpss.org

Please help us support a culture of showing up to school every day and on time!

UPCOMING DATES

02/11/2025 & 02/12/2025 Math MAP testing
 02/13/2025 - 02/21/2025 MAP testing make-ups
 02/13/2025 Taste of Soul, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
 02/17/2025 Schools and offices closed, Presidents' Day
 03/14/2025 Schools close 3 hours early, Professional Work/Wellness Day
 03/31/2025 Schools closed, Professional Work and Development Day
 04/14/2025 - 04/21/2025 Schools closed for Spring Break

CONTINUING ANNOUNCEMENTS

DONATION REQUEST FOR TISSUES

As the winter months are among us, we would appreciate and accept any donations of tissues! We thank you for your support in advance.

INTERNET RESOURCE

Project 10Million's [Direct to Parent/Guardian program](#) provides internet access to eligible families that have a student who meets the eligibility criteria. Approved families receive 200GB of mobile data per year for 5 years and a FREE mobile hotspot, plus the opportunity to purchase additional Wi-Fi devices at a low cost.

- New and existing T-Mobile (including Metro by T-Mobile and Assurance) as well as Non-T-Mobile customers are eligible to apply.
- Available to residents of the United States and Puerto Rico. Not currently available in the US Virgin Islands.
- One free T-Mobile hotspot device and 200GB/year data line per household, max one per student.
- Data service ends when allotment is reached until the yearly renewal date (additional data passes are available for purchase).
- May purchase up to five select, at-cost Wi-Fi-only tablets and laptops for use with the hotspot device.

Website linked here:

https://www.t-mobile.com/support/account/project-10million-direct-to-parent-guardian-eligibility?icid=MGPO_TMO_U_20TENMM_6BRGAVTKUD4AUN8W23252

UPDATE FAMILY FILE TODAY!

As field trips are quickly approaching, please make sure that you have submitted your Family

File. We are currently at 88% completion. All families must update their emergency contact information annually. While we recognize that many of you may not have any changes, you must transition through each screen and click submit at the end for this task to be completed. **The completion of the Family File is essential to your students' participation in field trips, dances, and other fun activities throughout the year.** Please visit [HCPSS Connect](#) today and click submit on the final screen! If you need assistance, please call the front office.

Family File Directions

[FAMILY FILE USER GUIDE \(ENGLISH\)](#)

[FAMILY FILE USER GUIDE \(SPANISH\)](#)

Thank you to all of the families who have completed their Family File!

HC DRUGFREE UPDATES

Free Life Skills Classes for HoCo Middle/High School Students

- Classes will be taught by HoCo college students with high school student assistants and adult supervision. Botvin's Evidence Based Curriculum promotes positive health and personal development for students in grades 6 to 9. (Slightly younger students will be considered especially if joining an older sibling, and students older than 9th grade may be invited to join our high school team to earn Community Service Hours while learning.) If parents/guardians have questions about the appropriateness for students, register the students and HC DrugFree's team will contact you. **Siblings and friends are encouraged to take these classes together.**
- Class dates: **February 24, March 3, 10, 17, 31, April 7, 28, and May 5 from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on Zoom.** Visit HC DrugFree's website for more information and register students at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Spring2025LifeSkills>
- **HoCo High School Student Leadership Opportunity to Earn Community Service Hours:** Join HC DrugFree's instructional team to assist college students teaching online Life Skills classes – all while serving as a role model and mentor to younger HoCo students. This leadership experience looks good on resumes and college applications. For more information and to register to volunteer, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AssistLS2025spring>

Free Parenting/Grandparenting Classes

- Free! On Zoom and open to parents, guardians and grandparents residing in HoCo or with school-age children/grandchildren residing in HoCo. This evidence-based, interactive prevention program provides families with the skills and knowledge to reduce the risk that their children will use drugs including alcohol or engage in other dangerous behaviors. The curriculum was written for families with children 9-14 years olds, but we believe it is appropriate for K-12 families. Class dates: **March 18, 21, 25, 28 and April 1 from Noon to 1:30 p.m. on Zoom.** Visit HC DrugFree's website for more information and register at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Spring2025GGC>

Free Newsletter

Stay up to date with HC DrugFree's free events offering Community Service Hours, resources, and a variety of substance use and behavioral health information! Sign up for HC DrugFree's free digital newsletter: <https://hcdrugfree.org/enews-signup/>.

HoCo Student Film Fest 2025

The 2025 theme of the HC DrugFree Public Service Announcement (PSA) Category is *Make the Call: Help Without Hesitation*. This theme serves as a PSA about Maryland's Good Samaritan Law. Middle and high school students who live in Howard County are eligible to create and submit videos, which are due by midnight on April 1. See the attached flyer for more information and guidelines or visit: <http://www.hcdrugfree.org/hoco-filmfest/>

HCPSS FREE STUDENT RTA BUS PASS PROGRAM

Thanks to a continued partnership between HCPSS, Howard County Government, and Regional Transportation Agency (RTA), all HCPSS middle and high school students have access to free RTA bus passes through summer 2025. Students have full access to the RTA system and are not limited to transportation to and from schools or to school-related activities. If your child is interested, they can visit our front office to request a free pass.

HCPSS POLICY 9400 - STUDENT BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) is committed to providing a safe, engaging, and supportive school environment that fosters the social and emotional safety, dignity, and well-being of all students. HCPSS acknowledges the need for employees

1. to use an array of research-based positive behavior interventions, strategies, and supports to address student behaviors and keep students safe.
2. to minimize the practice of exclusion from the classroom environment
3. to minimize the practice of physical restraint (which may only be used when necessary to protect a student or other person from imminent, serious, physical harm and only after other less intrusive, nonphysical interventions have failed or been determined inappropriate).

It is an expectation that HCPSS employees will be responsive to all incidents of exclusion or physical restraint and appropriately case manage impacted students to minimize unsafe behaviors and maximize instructional engagement.

Additional information can be found at [HCPSS Policy 9400 - Student Behavior Intervention](#). If you have any questions regarding this policy or its implementation, please contact a school administrator.

HCPSS POLICY 9460

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all students. Preventing bullying is an important part of this goal. [HCPSS Policy 9460](#) states that bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, and intimidation are prohibited in HCPSS. Our administration and staff have been trained and made aware of this policy as well as preventative and responsive measures.

We know how important your role is in not only supporting your children, but also reporting possible incidents as you become aware of them. The BCHI Reporting Form should be used to report all alleged incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, and intimidation that occur at school or have a connection back to the school setting that create a risk of harm to other students while they are at school or interfere with the educational environment. An [online version](#) is available and can easily and confidentially be used by students, staff, and family members. Hard copies of this form are available in the main office, staff workroom, school counseling office, media center, and health

services office. If you believe your child has been bullied, please complete and submit this form as soon as possible and/or assist your child in doing so.

Once the form is submitted, school administrators will ensure the parent/guardian of both the alleged target and alleged offender are aware of the report and will begin an investigation within two school days of receiving the report. Parents/guardians can expect a school administrator to reach out to them during the investigation. Once the investigation is completed, parents/guardians will be provided written notice of the outcome of the investigation within fifteen days of receiving the complaint, excluding extenuating circumstances.

CAR LOOP REMINDERS

Please remember that anyone dropping off students in the morning should use our designated drop-off location which is located at the back of our bus line in the large parking lot. We are asking parents to refrain from dropping off students in the small parking lot as it causes congestion. Our concern is the safety of our students, parents and staff. Thank you for using our [designated student drop-off location](#).

WILDE LAKE HIGH SCHOOL SPECTATOR RULES/GUIDELINES

Please view this [flyer](#) for more information.

ATTENDANCE REMINDERS

Need to report an absence? Please email your absence notes/questions to: HCMSAbsence@hcpss.org or send in a signed parent/guardian note. The email should include the student's name, the parent's name, the date(s) or period(s) (if absence is a partial day) of the absence, and the reason for the absence. The email must be received within 5 days of the absence. Requests for changes to attendance submitted after the 5 day deadline cannot be honored.

Please Note: Absences are unexcused until an email or note is received.

For Discretionary Absences (up to 3 per school year), please complete the linked form and email it to: HCMSAbsence@hcpss.org. This form must be completed one week prior to absence.

For Religious Observances, please complete the linked form and email to: HCMSAbsence@hcpss.org.

HCMS FOOD PANTRY

HCMS has partnered up with the [LindaBen Foundation](#) and Safeway to help feed our HCMS community. If your family is interested in receiving food boxes or you would like to make donations to our food pantry, please call the HCMS front office.

If you would like to make direct donations to the LindaBen Foundation, please view this [information](#).

COMMUNICATION TO FAMILIES

Families may find it useful to bookmark the following webpages where information will be continually updated and posted:

[HCMS website](#)
[HCPSS website](#)
[HCPSS 2024-2025 Calendar](#)
[2024-2025 School Year](#)

[HCPSS News Site](#)
[HCPSS Help Site](#)

CLOTHING TO CASH

HCMS participates in the Clothing to Cash fundraising program. Clothing to Cash is a textile recycling program that donates money to the school for every pound of donated items. Look for the white donation bin at the bottom of the Harper's Choice Middle School parking lot. Clothing to Cash will accept items in ALL conditions: new with tags, or torn, stained, worn-out knees, shoes with holes or only one shoe, backpacks, old sheets, towels, blankets, stuffed animals and more. What a great way to help the school and clean out your closets! All donations must be bagged and put in the collection bin. We appreciate your support!

Please remember to follow these [guidelines](#).

GROCERY STORE FUNDRAISING PROGRAMS

HCMS partners with the following grocery stores as a fundraiser for our school. Please consider linking your card and help raise money for our school!

Harris Teeter Together in Education

Harris Teeter's [Together In Education](#) program gives schools a chance to earn funds when you link your VIC card and shop Harris Teeter brands. When you shop Harris Teeter brands, a percentage of your purchase is donated to the school that your VIC card is linked to. There are NO LIMITS to how much a school can earn. Register your VIC card to our SCHOOL ID# 7984.

Weis Markets Weis4School

Through the [Weis4School program](#), you can earn cash for HCMS each time you shop at Weis. To register, simply scan the HCMS Barcode at checkout. Each time you shop at Weis, be sure to scan your Weis card to earn money for our school.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please visit the [Community News and Programs](#) page on the HCPSS website for announcements of upcoming events and programs sponsored by non-profit organizations.