



NAACP
Fairfax County

April 9, 2022

For Immediate Release

To: The Fairfax County NAACP Members, Friends, Allies

Within the next few days, our School Board will announce their selection for the new Superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools. We believe the community should know about the two finalists, their respective school districts' composition and performance data, and our concerns about the selection process.

In the summer of 2021, FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand announced that he would finish his term with FCPS at the end of the school year, setting in motion the long and difficult task of finding a new superintendent. From that moment, Fairfax County NAACP asked to be involved in the process and asked that other advocates for vulnerable student populations be included as well. In keeping with the spirit of the [public statements](#) by our school board regarding the high value of community engagement, we asked to be part of the panel that would listen to the final candidates. Instead, we were invited to only participate in community stakeholder meetings to share characteristics we wanted in our new superintendent. Many groups representing Fairfax County's most vulnerable populations were part of these meetings, and we discovered very similar objectives. We all expressed a need for our new superintendent to be one with extensive leadership experience in large, complex, and extremely diverse systems, and to have faced and attempted to solve problems similar to those we face: **teacher shortages, achievement gaps, opportunity gaps, large English language learner populations with low graduation rates, large numbers of students from economic disadvantage, vast geographic diversity, wide economic disparity, and more.**

SELECTION PROCESS/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

On March 28th and 29th, a selected community panel met with the two final candidates. The Fairfax County NAACP lobbied without pause to be part of this body until the day before the panels took place. We were unsuccessful in our attempt to be included. The panel was made up of: individual members of selected School Board Advisory Committees; a few chosen FCPS elementary, middle, and high school principals; five members from the Fairfax County Council of PTAs (FCCPTA) to represent the five FCPS geographic regions; a representative from Northern Virginia Community College; a representative of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations (whose mission is to protect Homeowners Association interests); and the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce. When the composition of this panel became known, we again reached out to the School Board to ask for a spot as we were concerned there were no panelists there to represent the interests of our most vulnerable students: students with

Fairfax County NAACP #7066

P.O. Box 394, Fairfax, VA 22038 | president@fairfaxnaacp.org

disabilities, students of color, and English Language Learners. Also, there were very few people of color in the panel. We were again denied.

Almost immediately following this two-day panel, word got out about the two final candidates. Though the panelists were bound by NDAs, the difference in pertinent experience between the two finalists was so shocking that people felt a responsibility to advocate that our School Board select the candidate with the best chance of success here in Fairfax County. We were inundated with messages from whistleblowers sharing names and data points as well as overall impressions.

As grave concerns from the community reached us, we felt it our responsibility as the oldest civil rights advocacy organization in Fairfax County to connect with our School Board members to ask them not to forget the magnitude of challenge our new superintendent will face. Paramount was that many people on the panel were shocked that a superintendent with only a \$400 Million budget (vs. \$2.7 Billion FCPS budget) and 2,100 employees (versus 25,000 FCPS employees) and surprising achievement gaps despite relatively high wealth and low poverty could have ended up in our final two candidates.

At that point, the Fairfax County NAACP was concerned that perhaps our School Board had not seen performance data for both candidates, so we found it on publicly available state and district websites and shared it with them to make sure that our School Board is making the most informed decision possible. And while we have heard back from a few, we are disappointed that their reaction was not about the surprising data or comparative characteristics of the divisions, but rather to express dismay that whistleblowers reached out to us and that we acted on their behalf. As we know, whistleblowing happens when people lack trust in the body or the process, and is often applauded as an act of courageous defiance, putting outcomes above protocols. Whistleblowing in a situation like this, where community input has been ignored, is an act of integrity.

With so much at stake, we have determined to share this information with the public, as follows.

DIVISION DEMOGRAPHIC AND STUDENT PROGRAM DATA

Candidate #1 is Dr. Cheryl Logan, currently Superintendent of Omaha Public Schools in Nebraska. Dr. Logan joined OPS in the summer of 2018. Prior to this, she served as Chief Academic Officer (CAO) for The [School District of Philadelphia](#), the 8th largest school system in the country, where she was directly responsible for the academic achievement of 135K highly diverse students. Before this she worked in Prince George's County and Howard County, Maryland as a principal and teacher.

Candidate #2 is Dr. Michelle Reid, currently Superintendent of Northshore School District in Washington State. Dr. Reid joined Northshore in 2016. Prior to this, she served as Superintendent of [South Kitsap School District](#) which serves 10K students of minimal diversity but with 30% qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. Before South Kitsap, Dr. Reid was the

deputy superintendent, district athletic director, and high school principal in the Port Angeles School District in Washington state.

Fairfax County Public Schools serves approximately 180K students and is the country's 11th largest school district. The chart below compares the characteristics of both candidates' districts with Fairfax County Public Schools.

Demographic and Program Comparison

Demographics and Programs	Omaha Public Schools (OPS)	Northshore School District (NSD)	FCPS
Student Population	~ 50,000	~ 20,000	~180,000
White %	24%	50%	38%
Hispanic %	37%	13%	27%
Asian %	7%	25%	20%
Black %	25%	2%	10%
Free and Reduced Meals (FRM) %	77%	12%	26%
Special Education %	18%	13%	14%
English Language Learners (ELL) %	38% (18,777)	9% (2,000)	26% (46,000)

A quick look shows us that, in raw numbers, FCPS is nearly ten times the size of Northshore and just under four times the size of Omaha, yet we have ten times the percentage of Black students as NSD, and half the percentage of Black students as OPS. In nearly every metric, FCPS is more akin to OPS than to Northshore in size and diversity.

While recruiting a new superintendent from only school districts as large, diverse, and complex as FCPS would be a challenge given the small pool of similar districts, **we are very concerned about the likelihood of success for a new superintendent who has no professional experience *in any capacity* with a school district of the size and diversity of FCPS.**

PERFORMANCE DATA

While size and diversity tells one story, we then focused on achievement data by demographic and program group for both NSD and OPS. According to [publicly available data](#), in Northshore only 43.9% of Black students and 42.3% of Hispanic students are passing their English Language Arts (ELA) state standard exams compared to 78% of Asian and 65% of White students. The results are even more bleak **in Math where only 25% of Black Students and 22% of Hispanic students are passing**, compared with 74% of Asian students and **49% of White students**. The downward trend continues with [Special Education Students pass rates](#) of only 34% in ELA and 21% in Math. [For ELL students, pass rates](#) are **15% in ELA and 13% in**

Math. These metrics are surprising given the small population of approximately 2,000 ELL students in NSD, compared to the nearly 47,000 ELL students that FCPS educates.

Similarly disturbing is the data showing that despite only 34 Black students in the 2021 Senior class for the whole district, only 88% [graduated on time](#). At first glance, 88% looks like a respectable graduation rate until you realize how few students (30) we are talking about. In a district such as NSD with low numbers of racially diverse people, the data should be presented in raw numbers along with percentages to fully understand the implication. For example, in 2017 there looks to be a [huge bump](#) in ELA achievement, however it represents 85% of 20 students (17 students), compared to 57% of 23 students (13 students) in 2016, an increased achievement for only 4 students districtwide. Across all demographics, achievement at Northshore School District has stayed flat after a bump in 2017, and more recently we found [concerns about the provision of Special Education services during COVID closures](#). **Based on the publicly available data, we see no evidence of closing achievement gaps in Northshore despite the very small populations involved.**

We also looked at Omaha Public Schools demographic performance data as found in the [NSCAS 2021 Special Report](#). Without a doubt Omaha has a challenging educational situation for all students, with every demographic performing below standards. It is difficult to draw recent conclusions about OPS because the COVID pandemic eliminated statewide testing in 2019-2020, which was the first full year of Dr. Logan's tenure. Therefore, we must rely on results for the 2020-2021 school year, which includes the catastrophic academic, social/emotional, and health impacts of learning during COVID, especially on vulnerable school populations and economically disadvantaged communities. OPS began the 2020 school year remotely, like most of the country, however Dr. Logan successfully offered an in school option for Special Education students as early as October, 2020. To make this a success, Omaha Public Schools used rigorous community testing and community caseload data to close schools on a case-by-case basis while keeping students safe. Considering the high free and reduced meals and special education numbers, we are encouraged by the care that was taken to provide the most vulnerable students with in-person learning.

Because of the COVID induced deficit in OPS data, we looked at Dr. Logan's tenure as CAO in Philadelphia, where she made [significant gains in student performance](#) in a school system that shares many characteristics with FCPS, including increased high school graduation rates; the expansion of Career and Technical Education programs; and a substantial growth in reading achievement among students at every level from 3rd through 7th grade.

In summary, there is [no evidence of any shift in performance over the last 6 years](#) that Dr. Reid has been superintendent of Northshore School District, whose size, diversity, and budget are orders of magnitude smaller than FCPS. Omaha Public Schools has tremendous challenges including overall poor performance of their students, and lower performance for vulnerable populations. As we do not have enough data to judge Omaha's trends, we can only judge the division demographic and program enrollment data, and Dr. Logan's experience in a comparably sized and complex environment including as CAO of Philadelphia.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

During the community panel, participants were asked to log their impression of the candidates, some of which struck community members as inconsistent with what FCPS needs, and we want to bring these to your attention. Members of the panel shared their observations with us.

Dr. Logan spoke to the needs of expanding Fairfax County's world-class course offerings to nontraditional populations, including introducing many avenues to take part in Fairfax County's college-level programs and broader advanced academic programs. At OPS, Dr. Logan inherited a system with AP/IB offered at only two high schools, and quickly implemented these offerings at all high schools. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of public accountability to community organizations and families, providing specific examples of her meetings with the community, labor unions, and boards and the vital role these relationships have in policy setting. **She even stated that her standing policy is that any student-requested meeting is granted within 48 hours.** Dr. Logan speaks fluent Spanish and taught Spanish for many years in Prince George's County. In [this interview](#), she speaks about coming into a high need, high diversity school system, and having built a reputation of being "tough on the issues but not on the people," stopping at nothing to thoroughly address system-wide problems while maintaining an emphasis on building trust among stakeholders. Panelists were impressed with her poise, confidence, and detailed professional response to each question without notes.

Dr. Reid's ideas were less specific and more "broadly visionary," largely centered upon proposals Fairfax County had already implemented in the last two decades. It was clear that she admired the work that had been done here already, and stated more than once that she benchmarks FCPS. We are concerned that while this flattery is a compliment to all that have worked hard for FCPS, it does not demonstrate a forward looking approach. One deeply concerning example that was shared with us was that her district was not screening every child for gifted education programming (Hi Cap), and that it took an outside consultant to bring to her attention that the district had a fundamentally racist process. Once it started screening every child (universal screening has been used in Fairfax County for years), Dr. Reid is quoted as being "ridiculously proud" that access to Hi Cap increased by 600%. However, the lack of detail provided left participants wondering how many individual students benefited, especially in light of the referenced flat performance data. She speaks about this program in this [print interview](#) conducted after having won the AASA National Superintendent of the Year award in 2021.

CALL TO ACTION

As the clock is ticking towards a final decision on the future of FCPS, the community continues to sound the alarm, and we felt it imperative to communicate these concerns to you, the citizens of Fairfax County. At a time of unprecedented challenge locally and across the

country, we want to do everything we can to assure that our division gets the leader best equipped to hit the ground running. Further, in this particular case, our School Board has the historic opportunity to choose the first Black superintendent and the second woman superintendent in Fairfax County Public School's 150-year history. We are sure that with their vocal stance on equity and representation, and with the extreme difference in comparable work experience among candidates, the School Board will make the right choice. Please [contact your School Board representatives](#) and urge them to hear your voice while making history.

cc:

Chair Stella Pekarsky
Vice-Chair Rachna Sizemore Heizer
Board Member Megan McLaughlin
Board Member Elaine Tholen
Board Member Melanie K. Meren
Board Member Tamara Derenak Kaufax
Board Member Ricardy Anderson
Board Member Karen Corbett Sanders
Board Member Karl Frisch
Board Member Karen Keys Gamarra
Board Member Abrar Omeish
Board Member Laura Jane Cohen