

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

February 26, 2019

The Honorable Bernard C. "Jack" Young
President, Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: City Council Resolution 18-0107R

Dear Council President Young:

On October 15, 2018 the Baltimore City Council introduced the above-captioned bill (Resolution) concerning a hearing on arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; and to discuss what steps the City can take to reduce the risk of these incidents occurring to protect the children and residents of Baltimore City. Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) shares the concerns expressed in the Resolution, and we are pleased to respond on this issue.

Since 2013, City Schools has experienced six cases of arson, all involving school playgrounds during periods when schools were closed. The dates and schools involved were as follows:

- o School 87 Windsor Hills, Playground, June 2016
- o School 29 Matthew Henson, Playground, September 2016
- o School 7 Cecil, Playground, April 2017
- o School 134 Walter P. Carter, Playground, June 2017
- o School 16 Johnston Square, Playground, July 2018
- o School 122 Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Playground, July 2013

Fortunately, there were no injuries involved in any of these incidents.

Beyond these incidents, the only reported school fires were incidental occurrences involving trashcans, bathrooms and occasionally dumpsters. Most were considered to be acts of vandalism rather than arson, and there were no reports of injuries. Students involved in these incidents received consequences aligned with the Code of Student Conduct.

Out of concern for the safety of students and staff, fire drills are held in all schools without fully automatic sprinkler systems eight times in the course of the school year; schools with fully automatic sprinkler systems are required to hold drills five times per school year. Principals are responsible for arranging a faculty/staff meeting within one month of the beginning of the school year to review the school's safety plan and update staff on procedures.

In summary, City Schools takes its responsibility for fire safety with the utmost seriousness. We will be pleased to provide additional testimony on this important topic upon request.

Sincerely,



Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer