

November 11, 2021 School Board Meeting
Written Public Comments
Ricardo Roberts

I learned a great deal as a candidate for the School Board and, through this process, I now have a much better understanding of the various constraints and rules under which the ACPS School Board currently operates. I truly think it would be valuable if the Board could educate more community members on this topic. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing members for their service and extend my sincere congratulations to the members-elect.

I do hope that, even for those of you who are nearing the end of your term, you are prepared to continue the hard work of this Board in making sure that our schools are safe learning environments for all students. While many see the return of the SROs to the secondary schools as a solution, I think that many others recognize that the SROs are not a cure-all.

The SROs presences, ideally, can deter acts of violence and provide a quick response when one is needed, but the SROs cannot prevent all acts of violence. There has been an uptick in fights at the middle schools and high schools this year, but the feeling I am hearing in the community is one of exasperation because the Board failed to recognize the fact that fights were happening prior to the pandemic and prior to the removal SROs.

Bluntly, the Board did not demand the superintendent to be more decisive as we were a few weeks ago when the SROs came back.

We need to recognize that the fights have not ceased. The SROs might be providing some specific students, families, and staff with a sense of security, but for others, nothing has changed. Some students continue to fight, some students continue to bring weapons that go undetected and unreported, and some students are fearful of even entering the building because they don't want to get caught up in the melee. As we know, many injuries occur as uninvolved students try to run away from the fray. We need to keep working to put additional measures—like metal detectors—in place. Metal detectors, as I've said before, will provide an objective screening tool and reduce the likelihood that students will be, or perceive themselves to be, targeted by the SROs.

We need to acknowledge the fact that the superintendent allows certain administrators to weaponize SROs to threaten students or parents who they deem to be annoying.

We need to face the hard facts that some students are being targeted by other students and that the anti-bullying efforts touted by some in our school system are not as universally effective as some counselors and administrators claim. So we need to re-examine the ways we investigate reports of bullying so that we can more consistently arrive at the truth of what's happening and make sure that those students being targeted are not further isolated by our inaction or our failure to believe them.

Finally, we need to find a way to truly provide the support that our students—and—staff so deeply need. We need to make sure that students who make a poor decision are offered the chance to correct

their path. But we also need to differentiate between typical adolescent error and a serious, criminal act, and we simply cannot make excuses for the latter.

When a student was found with a loaded gun on ACHS school grounds earlier this fall, our superintendent commented that the young man has the weapon to protect himself because he was being bullied. I was stunned by those comments, and from what I hear in the community, I am not alone. I've waiting for the superintendent to address this again or clarify his statements and I've heard nothing. While is undoubtedly true that the school system failed this young man in a myriad of ways, when the superintendent framed this young man's actions in this way, it reflects negatively on all of ACPS.

With that said, it saddens me that I must demand that you, the Board, take action to remove the superintendent. Although Dr. Hutchings is a very nice man with long ties to this community, his comments made our brown and Black children sound like hoodlums who have not other manner in which to protect themselves or resolve their conflicts other than to resort to violence. I have lost all confidence in his ability to effectively lead our school system out of this crisis.

Sincerely,
Ricardo Roberts