



November 13, 2008

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The U.S. Department of Education requires all states to collect information on the race and ethnicity of public school students and staff. Last year, the federal government announced the establishment of new guidelines regarding the collection of such data. In the past, forms for reporting race and ethnicity allowed individuals to be identified in only one racial category. The new form enables individuals to be identified in ethnic and racial classifications and in more than one racial category. The change allows individuals to more accurately reflect their racial and ethnic background by not limiting responses and as a result, new data will more accurately reflect the nation's diversity.

Beginning in January 2009, the Howard County Public School System will ask families of all current students to complete a form to update information regarding their children's ethnicity and race. Information for new students will be collected during the registration process. In January 2009, schools will send home a form for each enrolled student. The data that is collected will be used in the same manner in which such information is currently used. For example, the federal government uses racial and ethnic data in reporting and analyzing test results, such as the Maryland School Assessment and the High School Assessments.

We have enclosed a question and answer publication that provides additional information about these changes. You will receive additional details with the new form in January. We have also established a page on our website where information and updates will be posted.

Sincerely,

Sydney L. Cousin  
Superintendent of Schools

Encl.