



Baltimore will grow and prosper if we develop each child first.

May 25, 2018

Dear Partners and Friends of Child First Authority:

I write this letter to offer context and information regarding comments that were made about Child First Authority on March 17th at the *More Resources for At-Risk Students Workgroup* of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (“The Kirwan Commission”). During the open comment period when evaluation strategies and effectiveness of community schools was being discussed, an audience member shared that Child First Authority had systematically denied families access to programming because of the families’ inability to pay and removed children from programming due to behavior. Both statements are erroneous, and I wanted to make sure you had the following information for clarity.

The Baltimore Child First Authority (dba Child First Authority or Child First) was established in 1996 as a response to a city-wide call for safe, productive learning environments for children in the out of school time (OST) hours. Child First Authority’s (CFA) mission is to develop youth by strengthening and reforming schools. Child First is the community school partner and afterschool provider at eight schools and is the afterschool provider at three additional schools. Underpinning all our work is a focus on parent and family engagement and organizing.

As a grantee of the Family of League of Baltimore City, CFA is prohibited from charging an enrollment or participation fee for any of its programs or services. We are committed to providing high-quality out of school time and community school programming at no cost to all children and families. Child First’s ability to provide programming to students at no cost requires a great deal of fundraising. Although Child First has been successful in garnering grants, contracts, and gifts to support its work, the cost of running the program continues to increase, and we are committed to exploring diverse sources of funding to make sure our services are available for the families who need them for many years to come. To that end, in January of 2018, Child First launched a pilot effort to collect a small, **voluntary** contribution from families to help offset some of these costs. If they were able and so inclined, families made their contributions to the program between January and March 2018.

Parents and family members were informed that this contribution was in no way an enrollment fee. **No children were removed from the program if their parent or family did not contribute.** Despite the severe weather during the winter months, the average daily attendance was 88% for the first quarter of the year, which suggests that families were not deterred from attending because of the program contribution.

Just as we are dedicated to continuing to sustain our work, we are committed to delivering a high-quality, engaging program that motivates children to attend and participate. We are proud of our consistently high attendance across school sites, and of the low rates of children suspended



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from our program. Child First staff and lead teachers worked together to create a behavior expectations system/rubric, and it outlines the expectations and consequences for inappropriate behavior. The system categorizes offenses and consequences into tiers based upon severity of the behavior. The system allows for multiple chances for students to make amends for their behavior and to continue participation in the program. Each parent receives a copy of the behavior expectations, signs, and returns an acknowledgement sheet. **For the current school year, only one child was removed from programming because of behavior.**

For more than two decades, Child First has expanded its programs to address important issues that affect children and youth in their schools, homes, and communities. In so doing, Child First's reputation for accountability and quality service has grown among its participants and funders. Child First stands on its reputation as an authentic community partner and take very seriously our commitment to serving all children and families in our 11 schools. Integral to that is our partnership with you.

I thank you for your continuing support and would be happy to answer any questions you may have. I may be reached at:

Danista E. Hunte, Executive Director
410-367-8520 – main line
3904 Hickory Avenue, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21211
dhunte@childfirstauthority.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danista E. Hunte". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danista E. Hunte
Executive Director