

Screening Committee and Board of Education

Fayette County Public Schools

Lexington, KY.

Re: Dr. Gregory Ross

Dear Committee Members,

Our Nation is facing a crisis. The riots that erupted on January 6, 2021 at the Capitol brought into sharp focus the fragility of our Democracy. An event that ordinarily would not have garnered any publicity; validation of the Electoral Votes by Congress declaring the next President of the United States, usually a mere formality, will now go down in history as a day when the seat of democracy for the country and the world was violated. President elect Biden has his work cut out for him to unify this divided country and bring back the vision of peace and justice for ALL.

In comparison, the selection of the next Superintendent for the Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) to lead the administrators, educators and the students representing the future generation of this country *may appear* less important. It is my opinion however, that we stand at a crossroads and the direction we take will influence the future of our country. Our children are the future.

As a parent of six children, I value public schools greatly. Five of the six achieved academic success in their stride and then there was Megan, our youngest, who has Down syndrome. Megan had to strive so much harder to achieve similar success. Megan opened doors to our understanding of Special Education and resources for those with different learning abilities. Megan thrived on the belief that when expectations are raised, achievement is limitless. We were blessed with principals, Special Education administrators and teachers who believed in her. Megan was a FCPS student, a Governor's scholar and is now an employee of the FCPS. We are proud parents.

I have continued to be actively involved in public education and employment of persons with developmental disabilities and those with learning difficulties at the state level, as a member of HB 144, and a member of the "Governor's Council for Employment First" initiative. Until the Pandemic shut down "normalcy," I was a member of the Excellent Student Opportunity Subcommittee of the Equity Council in FCPS. We advocated on closing the achievement gap for all "at risk learners." Because of these experiences, I feel qualified to write this letter of recommendation in support of Dr. Gregory Ross' application for the position of Superintendent and am honored and humbled to do so.

I have known Dr. Ross since 2017 when he hired Megan as a substitute paraeducator at Mill Creek. However, Dr. Ross met Megan in 2016, when she volunteered to teach a Health and Wellness Program initiated by the University of Kentucky. The program stressed the importance of Nutrition, Exercise as well as Social interaction and Spiritual health to 2nd through 5th grade students of all abilities. Megan reminded me that she had talked with Dr. Ross, said she attended Mill Creek when she first moved to KY in 1994 and that she would love to work in the school someday. I have come to learn the core values and characteristics of Dr. Ross that I believe are exceptional. He is a grassroots organizer *who leads by example*; always focusing on "Not where we were but where we are going." He assumed the position of principal at a time when Millcreek was experiencing academic difficulty. Under his guidance, the school has transitioned to an Academy of Excellence from being a failing school. To him, every student matters

because we are as strong as our weakest link. So, for Dr. Ross, change and improvement begin with an inclusion of all students and an understanding of the barriers to learning for each of them. Dr. Ross recognized that the student who does not complete his homework is not necessarily lazy, but, sometimes, unable to complete assignments on time because there is no electricity in the home. He embodies the concept of “seek first to understand and then to be understood.” Dr. Ross worked with a student who was wheelchair bound, providing encouragement and physical therapy until the student was able to walk independently. Dr. Ross starts his day with a communal prayer with the teaching staff. He meets and greets all the students and ends the meeting with a reminder of the seven habits of highly effective people that the students should aspire to. A preschool teacher once said this of Dr. Ross. “ I have never had a principal (in my 30 years of teaching) walk into the classroom, see I was overwhelmed in trying to calm a student, just roll up his sleeves and work alongside me.” Clearly, Dr. Ross supports his teachers and he values all his support persons. It was not surprising to see him socializing with the janitorial staff so he could listen and understand their concerns. A volunteer who transported food bags donated by the parishioners of Southern Hills United Methodist Church to different Elementary schools shared this story. The church contacted Mill Creek Family Resource Center over Christmas (2019) and offered to donate extra bags of food, which the school gladly accepted. When the volunteer drove up with about 70-80 bags of food, to her amazement, Dr. Ross, the front office staff as well as the person from Family Resource center greeted her. Dr. Ross was very gracious, very appreciative of the gift and he and the staff carried all the bags in. To the volunteer who usually had to carry all the bags in herself without any help while the Family Resource Center staff simply sat at the desk, the experience was novel. Her comment to me was, “Dr. Ross seems so genuine and real.”

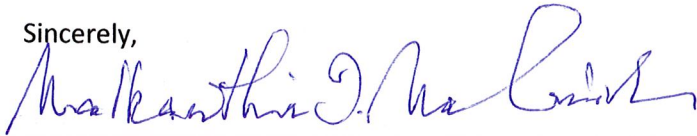
On the front door of Mill Creek is a sign that reads “We Choose to Include.” Dr. Ross practices this creed of inclusion every day. He initiated Unified sports at Mill Creek in conjunction with Special Olympics Kentucky, taking time from his busy schedule to coach Basketball to children with varying abilities and he encouraged the creation of unified cheerleading as well. Again, Dr. Ross was leading by example because the teachers who volunteered and the students who participated learned the value of acceptance.

The leadership Dr. Ross demonstrates as the Principal at Mill Creek presages the way he will lead as the Superintendent of FCPS. I knew Dr. Manny Caulk and met with him a few times. His premature death is a devastating loss. Dr. Caulk was a man of incredible vision, who believed and worked toward taking down barriers to learning for everyone. I once asked him if FCPS hired graduates with disabilities in any positions in the system. He could not answer but immediately recognized that the considerable resources expended in special education programs ought to lead to graduates finding work or going on to secondary education. I believe Dr. Ross not only fully shares the vision of Dr. Caulk but is also committed to continuing his legacy and taking our school system further. Dr. Ross is a visionary for inclusion, aware of the human condition of implicit bias and one of his strengths, like Dr. Caulk's, is to engage others in partnership to effect improvements in education.

Dr. Ross has an impressive resume and has impeccable qualifications for the position of Superintendent of FCPS. I focused on the Community Service record of Dr. Ross. It speaks volumes about the kind of human being he is. The services he is involved in or provides, all are a reflection of the value he places on each individual to achieve his/her highest potential. I believe my interactions with Dr. Ross and my observations are to describe his humanness and leadership capabilities.

Again, it is my privilege and honor to endorse the application of Dr. Ross for the position of Superintendent of the FCPS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Malkanthie I. McCormick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Malkanthie I. McCormick

Professor of Medicine

Division of Infectious Diseases

University of KY

Lexington KY

January 19, 2021