



## MEDIA RELEASE – For immediate release

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# HCLS President & CEO Valerie J. Gross Departs for the West Coast, Concluding 16 Award-Winning Years

ELLCOTT CITY, MD – After 16 years leading Howard County Library System (HCLS) in Maryland, President & CEO Valerie J. Gross will be departing in August. She is returning to her roots in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“I kept waiting for the right time, but it never came. The fun just never stops! It’s such an honor to be part of the ever-remarkable HCLS team,” said Gross. So instead, at the 15-year mark—and after their son moved to Los Angeles—she and her husband began discussing their move back West.

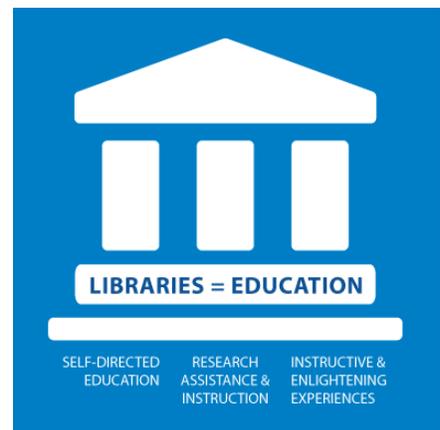
Gross’ crowning contribution, the development of “Libraries = Education,” repositioned HCLS as a key educational institution—on equal footing with the region’s schools, colleges, and universities. She worked with the HCLS Board, staff, funders, elected officials, and the community to implement the approach that is ushering in a new era for libraries everywhere. Gross has delivered 100+ keynotes, workshops, seminars, and webinars on the strategy, drawing the participation and input of thousands of library professionals from all 50 states and 108 countries around the world.

For living this game-changing vision, HCLS was recognized in 2013 as Library of the Year by Gale and *Library Journal*. They hailed the Libraries = Education equation “a 21st-century model worthy of study and consideration by every library in America, if not the world.”

Gross also led HCLS to being designated a national "Five-Star" library system by *Library Journal*, to receiving the Urban Libraries Council’s “Top Innovator” award for HiTech, HCLS’ STEM Education initiative for teens, and international recognition by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals in the 2015, 2016, and 2017 Hermes Creative Awards for cover photos of HCLS quarterly magazine, HCLS Now! communications campaign, and HiJinx, HCLS’ new monthly podcast.

Internally, Gross established a culture that focuses on “everyone a leader,” “winning teamwork,” and “the power of us.” She explained, “We’re smarter when we innovate together. The philosophy unleashes staff talents and creativity, resulting in meaningful work.”

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Applying these same concepts externally, Gross forged lasting community partnerships, including *A+ Partners in Education*, a groundbreaking comprehensive partnership with the school system and community college; *Choose Civility*, a community-wide initiative that invites everyone who lives and works in a community to value diversity and choose respect, inclusiveness, and compassion when interacting with others; *Well & Wise*, a health education partnership with the hospital; and the *Enchanted Garden*, an outdoor teaching venue that centers on science, health, and environmental education.

During Gross' tenure, HCLS' statistics soared. Items borrowed doubled (3.6 million to 7.9 million—the highest borrowing per capita in Maryland, and among the highest in the nation), as did physical visits (934,000 to 2.2 million) and research assistance interactions (760,000 to 2 million). Attendance at classes and events quadrupled (73,000 to 308,000).

Correspondingly, HCLS' Operating Budget doubled to \$22.5M, with its team of educators and support staff increasing by 35.5 FTEs, to 239.5 employees. Gross also led the development of the *HCLS Facilities Assessment & Master Plan*, securing \$100M in capital funding to add and expand branches, including the Miller Branch & Historical Center, Savage Branch & STEM Education Center, and Elkridge Branch & DIY Education Center.

Grateful for her many contributions, HCLS Board Chair Tom Munns said, "Valerie Gross has taken Howard County Library System to new levels. We thank her for honing and articulating our cause, engaging our staff, involving our community, and inspiring the delivery of our world-class curriculum—all of which benefits *everyone* in Howard County. We wish her every success in her future endeavors."

The HCLS Board of Trustees is working with the HCLS Leadership Team and a national recruiter to launch a search for a new leader. Information will be forthcoming at [hclibrary.org](http://hclibrary.org).

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