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County Council Budget Hearing – April 24, 2024

FY 2025 Education Budget: Funding for school-based mental health services

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

The Foundation supports the proposed FY 2025 education budget that protects funding for enhanced school-based mental health supports. We thank the County Council for your commitment to supporting mental health in our community. Howard County has made great progress in recent years to implement mental health supports into our schools so our students can thrive inside and outside of the classroom. Together, we have worked to bring enhanced mental health services, which includes 1:1 counseling by licensed professionals during the school day, to every public school in our community. While this is an incredible collective achievement, work remains to ensure this program is fully and effectively implemented across the community. Over 1500 students are currently receiving these 1:1 counseling services, and we know that more students are on waiting lists.

We urge the Council and the Board of Education to protect funding for mental health providers in the HCPSS budget to reduce barriers to care and ensure that all students who need help can get it. With behavioral health needs on the rise for youth in our community, now is not the time to roll back mental health supports. Everyone in our community should be able to access the mental health services they need – without time or financial barriers or any kind of stigma to prevent them from receiving the support they deserve.

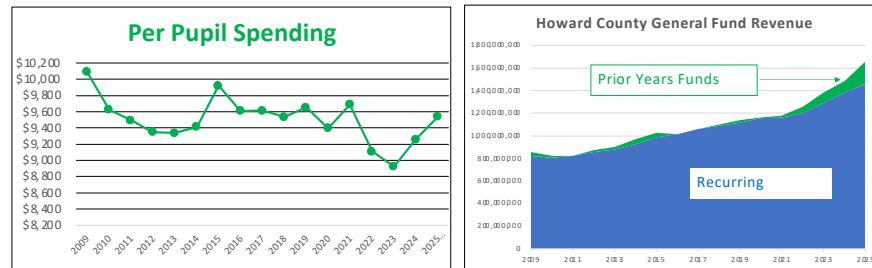
Thank you for your consideration.

Fully Funding HCPSS Board of Education FY25 Budget

Request is Necessary and Affordable

Comments to Howard County Council Public Hearing

Anthony DeBella, April 24, 2024



Good evening, I'm Anthony DeBella, parent of DRES and MHMS music students, and I would like to offer data demonstrating that fully funding the Board of Education's FY25 Budget request of \$769.2M is necessary and affordable. While the collaboration between HCPSS and our County Executive has yielded a partial solution that would restore cuts to some signature programs that help distinguish HCPSS from would-be peers, allocating the outstanding \$3.2M requested will contribute toward avoiding the increases in class sizes under consideration that if implemented would degrade the depth and breadth of the curriculum and undermine the confidence in HCPSS to deliver an excellent education that is justified by the property tax base which has been generating steadily growing revenue.

Fully Funding HCPSS is Necessary and Affordable

1. Inflation has eroded the value of HCPSS funding
2. Howard County funding of HCPSS as a percentage of revenue has dropped
3. Planning for Realistic HCPSS Budgets Based on Recurring General Fund Revenue

Anthony DeBella

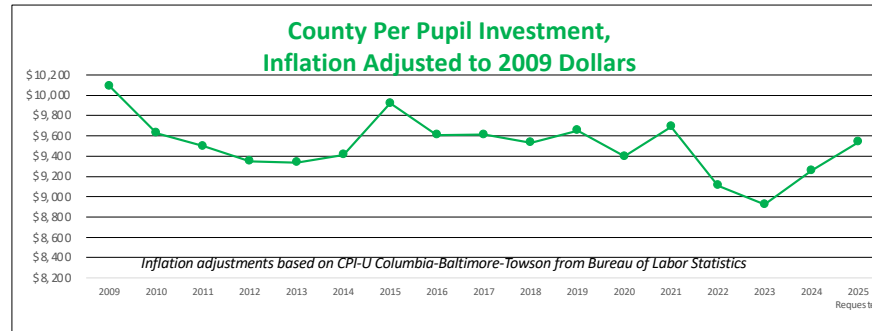
FundHoCoSchools@gmail.com

2

Stepping away from year over year differences to look at long term trends provides informative context on HCPSS funding. Funding data are inflation adjusted for constant dollars, and scaled by total HCPSS enrollment.

1- Historic inflation has eroded the value of historic HCPSS funding

\$2 in 2009 = \$3 in 2025



Fully Funding HCPSS is necessary and affordable

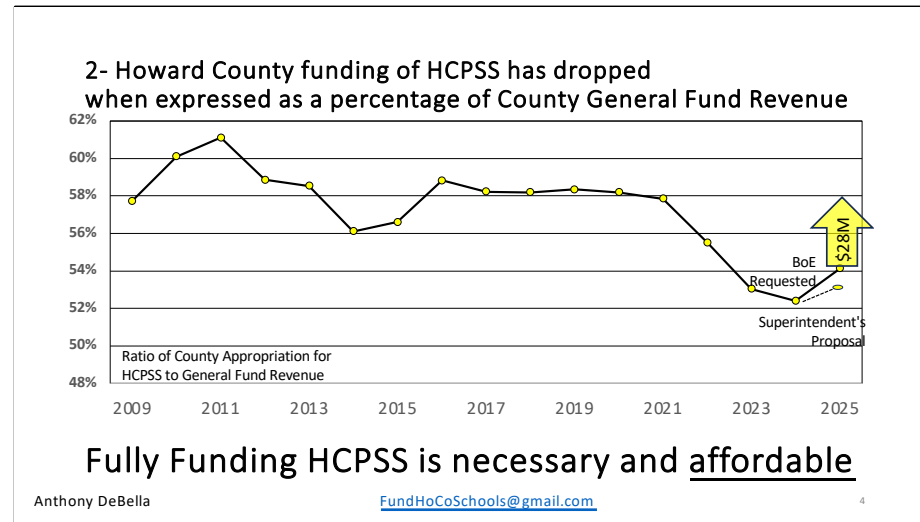
Anthony DeBella

FundHoCoSchools@gmail.com

3

Full funding is necessary to even approach a same service operating posture for HCPSS, and in keeping with SAAC guidance to limit new expenditures to legal mandates such as Blueprint for Maryland's future.

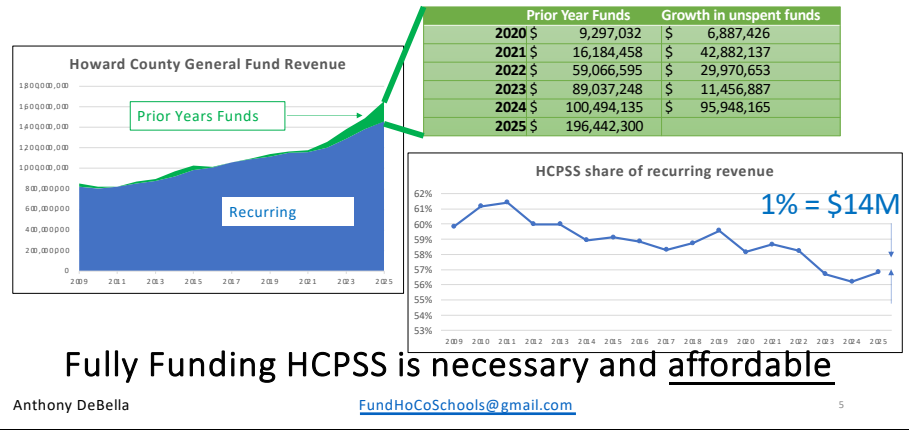
Roughly speaking \$2 in 2009 will require \$3 in 2025. When viewed through this lens, inflation adjusted per-pupil HCPSS allocations from Howard County have never recovered from the effects of the 2008 recession. Full funding would bring per pupil investment to a level 5% below 2009.



Howard County has supported higher levels of funding for HCPSS when measured as a ratio of general revenue funds available, which multiple County Executives have cited as a metric, most recently on Page 6 of the FY24 budget book. ((which in my opinion is a more relevant indicator of capacity and priorities.))

This drop in the relative amount of spending is due to both the effects of decreased per pupil spending and of increased in the county general fund revenue.

3- Planning for Realistic HCPSS Budgets Based on Recurring Funding



County General Fund revenue has been augmented in the past few years by “prior years’ funds” which cannot be relied upon to fund HCPSS’ recurring Maintenance of Effort (which does NOT account for inflation). Focusing only on the recurring funds in the blue portion of the left graph and recasting the HCPSS spending as the percentage of recurring revenue yields the plot on the lower right, still shows a decreasing trend in the share of revenue allocated to HCPSS.

Based on the recent pattern of unspent money becoming available shown in the upper right table, I urge the county council to move \$3M in the proposed FY25 Operating budget to HCPSS. This \$3M would require an across the board cut to general fund revenue for non-HCPSS general fund revenue of 0.5%, and represent a symbolic commitment to HCPSS to fully restore the Programmatic School Based reductions in the superintendent’s proposed budget.

Restoring that whole \$24M slate of reductions would still not have caused HCPSS funding to grow above the historically available percentage of recurring revenue, nor would it have exceeded per pupil funding on an inflation-adjusted basis. Budgets that provide for same-service education based on the measures documented here can hardly be described as “aspirational.” Use of that terminology has been a disservice to public discourse on HCPSS funding.

The green table of unspent money shows the total amount of prior years funds in each FY’s budget and the amount by which that amount has grown in each year. In the past 5 fiscal years, unspent funds have ranged between \$6M and \$95M.

Fully Funding HCPSS is Necessary and Affordable

1. Inflation has eroded the value of HCPSS funding
 - Inflation adjusted per-pupil spending has not recovered from 2009 recession
2. Howard County funding of HCPSS as a percentage of revenue has dropped
 - HCPSS' share of revenue in FY22 - FY 24 was lowest in FY09 – FY24 timeframe
3. Planning for Realistic HCPSS Budgets Based on Recurring General Fund Revenue
 - Maintaining funding for same service levels and adding only mandated services to Maintenance of Effort is affordable
 - Collaboration between HCPSS and County Executive and County Council can restore curriculum cuts within affordability limits
 - The concept of an “aspirational HCPSS budget” is not borne out by data

About the Data and Basis for FY 25 estimates:

- Enrollment: Annual total enrollment based on published statistics on hcps.org, as of 30 September of each academic year. Based on 15 January 2024 presentation by HCPSS to Spending Affordability Commission, enrollment reported as "stable." Enrollment prior to 2014 courtesy of HCEA.
- Board of Education's FY25 Requested Operating Budget Lists Howard County funding of \$769.8M (Direct Appropriation) and 2025 enrollment estimate. Historical data based on Approved Operating Budgets.
- Total Howard County outlay includes Direct Appropriation to Board of Education and HCPSS attributable debt and Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB).
- Population based on census data on 1/1 of each year, made available by the Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis. Population after 2022 (last available data) assumed to remain stable.
- Percentage of population enrolled in HCPSS represents quotient of HCPSS Enrollment and Population.
- The adjustments for inflation over the period from 2009 to the present are derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U data for Columbia/Baltimore/Towson, and are available as a download from: <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CUUBS35ESA0>, 2025 assumes inflation steady at 2024 rate.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 Requested
HCPSS Enrollment																	58054
HCPSS County	48888	49903	50641	50993	51555	51681	52511	54870	55638	56779	57907	58868	57293	57325	57676	57633	
Appropriation (\$000s)	\$ 454,795	\$ 457,560	\$ 464,709	\$ 467,617	\$ 472,364	\$ 485,037	\$ 515,531	\$ 526,861	\$ 562,245	\$ 572,872	\$ 600,054	\$ 607,200	\$ 620,300	\$ 640,800	\$ 675,577	\$ 721,187	\$ 769,800
Total County Outlay (\$000s)																	
Including debt & OPEB	\$ 493,276	\$ 493,032	\$ 503,825	\$ 512,610	\$ 526,009	\$ 544,120	\$ 581,650	\$ 595,408	\$ 617,537	\$ 639,422	\$ 665,598	\$ 670,897	\$ 680,588	\$ 699,659	\$ 731,843	\$ 778,487	\$ 830,016
Total HCPSS Share of General Fund Revenue Includes Debt & OPEB																	
General Fund Budget (\$000s)	\$ 57.72%	\$ 60.11%	\$ 61.12%	\$ 58.87%	\$ 58.52%	\$ 56.10%	\$ 56.61%	\$ 58.82%	\$ 58.22%	\$ 58.20%	\$ 58.35%	\$ 58.20%	\$ 57.85%	\$ 55.51%	\$ 53.02%	\$ 52.40%	\$ 54.13%
Prior years funds (\$000s)	\$ 854,500	\$ 820,225	\$ 824,376	\$ 870,818	\$ 898,681	\$ 969,839	\$ 1,027,550	\$ 1,012,304	\$ 1,060,647	\$ 1,098,746	\$ 1,140,608	\$ 1,152,748	\$ 1,176,537	\$ 1,280,494	\$ 1,380,021	\$ 1,485,727	\$ 1,531,267
Percentage of Population Enrolled HCPSS	17.4%	17.3%	17.2%	17.0%	17.0%	16.8%	16.9%	17.4%	17.4%	17.6%	17.8%	17.7%	17.1%	17.1%	17.2%	17.2%	17.3%
CPI-U Index	213.632	219.263	223.807	229.706	233.422	238.971	238.551	241.259	246.675	252.350	254.433	259.121	261.917	286.243	303.749	311.665	319.768



**Howard County Council Budget Hearing
April 24, 2024**

Testimony in support of Howard County Library System

Tonya Aikens

President & CEO, Howard County Library System

Good evening, Council Chair Jung, Vice Chair Walsh, and members of the County Council. I am Tonya Aikens, President & CEO of Howard County Library System and a resident of Columbia. Thank you for your long-time support and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Howard County's residents of all ages who use and value our libraries.

Thank you also for your ongoing support of Battle of the Books this past Friday evening. Three hundred thirty-nine teams of fifth grade students, a record number, participated this year! Every HCPSS elementary school, as well as five private schools, sent teams. We are profoundly grateful to our sponsors, our team, the nearly 200 community members who volunteered, and our partners at Howard County Public School System and the Merriweather Arts and Culture Center who made it happen.

We heard through one of our volunteers that her participation in Battle of the Books as a fifth grader was a turning point in her life. It stimulated her reading interest, and she is now an AP student who plans to study Biomedical Engineering in college.

A parent wrote, "Our kids learned a good lesson about perseverance through this experience. I have also noted that since BOB started in November, my daughter has read a lot more, aside from the BOB's books, and her grades have all gone up, too. I think the creativity and self-discipline required by BOB definitely added to the growth of our team. Thank you again. Your work is appreciated by this Coach and Mom."

Those are just two of many stories we hear about the impact of events like Battle of the Books on our community members, students, and their parents.

While planning for Battle of the Books happens year-round, preparing children for experiences like these starts at birth. That's why one of our three new strategic priorities is that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Before our youngest residents are enrolled in preschool, Head Start or kindergarten, their public education begins in our libraries.

The County Executive's budget request reflects our priorities, which also include all teens and young adults feeling a sense of agency and belonging, and an inclusive, connected community where everyone feels they belong.

Our operating budget requests:

- COLA and merit increases for our team. Providing competitive salaries is critical to retaining and recruiting staff who are essential to teaching early childhood education classes, working with teens, and meeting the needs and aspirations of our community. *Our instructors teach the most classes and have the highest class attendance of any public library in Maryland.*
- funding anticipated publishing increases in materials, as well as anticipated increases in the use of materials in all formats. Our ongoing goal is to maintain the caliber of our collection, meet customer demands for new content formats, and lessen wait times for materials, especially time-

bound requests related to student learning and school assignments. Our community borrowed 6.8 million items in our collection (in print, online, and special collections) last fiscal year, and that number is expected to increase to 7.4 million this year. *We have the second highest per capita borrowing in the state.*

- supporting our team through professional development opportunities as our team commits to delivering high quality classes and events for all community members. Our request reverses a funding decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Libraries remain one of the last places where people of all ages and backgrounds can come together for conversation, to learn from each other, and to form community. We will continue to operate as good stewards of the tax dollars entrusted to us and return the highest value to the community. On behalf of our community, I respectfully ask you to invest in all county residents – from birth to seniors - and fully fund the County Executive’s budget request. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens
President & CEO



**HOWARD COUNTY
LIBRARY SYSTEM**

BY THE NUMBERS

fiscal year 2023

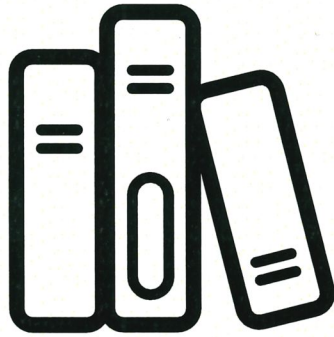
6,842,095

ITEMS BORROWED

Physical: 4,187,172

Online: 2,557,609

Special collections: 97,314



1,473,840

PHYSICAL VISITS

Website hits: 2,314,054

AskHCLS questions answered: 51,603

Research assistance interactions: 581,775

1,136,003

ITEMS IN COLLECTION

240,046

CARD HOLDERS

HCLS has the second highest per capita borrowing in the state. We teach the most classes and have the highest class attendance of any library in Maryland.

242,853

CUSTOMERS ATTENDED

9,478 CLASSES

taught by HCLS instructors and research specialists for children, teens, and adults

A+ PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Every HCPSS student has an A+ Student Account with the library system, built right into the student portal, hcpss.me.



57,676

HCPSS STUDENTS
borrowed or accessed

923

A+ Partnership classes
and events reached

153,206

books, e-books, and other
resources using A+ accounts

57,584

STUDENTS & FAMILIES

ON THE ROAD TO KINDERGARTEN

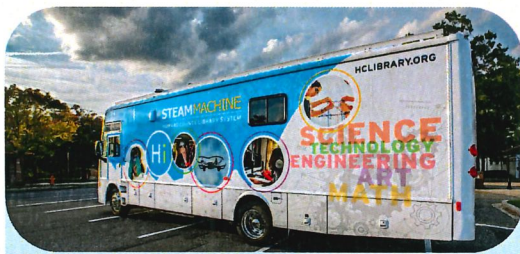
HCLS visits neighborhoods and schools to meet young children whose families face barriers coming to the library.

2,983

attendees at
103 visits to
neighborhoods and
day care centers

2,048

visitors at 52 visits
to HCPSS preschool,
pre-k, RECC &
summer food sites



7,576

**STUDENTS AT
46 SITES**

VISITED THE STEAM MACHINE

for hands-on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics classes aimed at middle and high school.



SUMMER READING

10,702

AGES BIRTH - 5

632%
INCREASE OVER FY22

6,121

ELEMENTARY

80%
INCREASE OVER FY22

6,898

TEENS

211%
INCREASE OVER FY22

7,642

ADULTS

1,000+%
INCREASE OVER FY22

INEQUITY WITHIN

The *Inequity Within* report demonstrates that even in a county where the majority of residents appear to be thriving, there are communities and subgroups that do not fully reap the benefits of residing here.

SELECTED FINDINGS

11.7x

Black students are 11.7 times more likely to experience homelessness than White students.



3x

Black adults are three times more likely to be denied a home loan.

5.4x

Hispanic residents are 5.4 times more likely to lack prenatal care.

And, Hispanic students are 5.4 times more likely than White students to skip school because they felt unsafe.

1.8x

Asian residents in the county are 1.8 times more likely to face poverty than White residents.

Asian residents fared worse than non-Hispanic White residents in housing, health, and economic outcomes.

PROJECT LITERACY



Open to adult native English speakers without high

school diplomas and English language learners in Howard County, Project Literacy staff and volunteers teach classes and provide one-on-one tutoring.

26,060

CONTACT HOURS, WITH

1,094

STUDENTS ENROLLED

IN JUNE 2023:

- 14 received their External High School Diploma
- 8 obtained U.S. Citizenship
- 25 people got better jobs, started higher education or training program

Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, Md 21043

Benjamin Schmitt
PRESIDENT

Teresa Dennison
VICE PRESIDENT

John Wallace
SECRETARY

Sarai Gray
TREASURER

RE: The FY25 HCPSS Operating Budget

Howard County Council Members:

We are a coalition of parents, educators, and advocates allied against the HCPSS Superintendent's FY2025 austerity budget, and we are demanding the following from the County Council:

1. Fully fund the Board of Education's requested budget of \$55.2 million.
2. Allocate any additional funding possible to HCPSS.

While we appreciate the County Executive's support for the restoration of specific programs and his ongoing commitment to allocate county resources to our school system, we cannot ignore the fact that the Board of Education failed to ask for a budget that could adequately meet the needs of the school system. Even with the County Executive's unprecedented allocation of funding, in addition to \$5 million in one-time funds, this budget falls short of what our students and staff deserve.

The proposed budget still calls for an increase in class size at the secondary level, along with the elimination of classes with less than 20 students like seminars. The budget also still includes staffing reductions, which means less support for students and educators, and an increased workload for remaining staff.

It also includes reductions in temporary services which disproportionately impacts students with disabilities and will only help contribute to increased behaviors. This will fall on the shoulders of our special educators who are already overburdened with unbearable workloads and will not create a supportive learning environment for students.

Cuts to custodial and grounds staff are also still part of the proposed budget, which means kids will be forced to learn in dirtier schools and staff will need to take more time out of their already busy schedules to help clean their own classrooms and buildings.

Finally, this budget misses the opportunity to get ahead of some of our Blueprint expenses, such as professional salaries and the career ladder. The Board of Education claims that the rise in expenses is largely due to Blueprint mandates, but only \$9 million of the proposed budget (16%) is related to the Blueprint. Meanwhile, without appropriate funding for staff salaries, we are slated to fall from #2 to #7 when it comes to starting salaries. Less competitive salaries mean the school system will likely have to hire more teachers on conditional certificates who may have never stepped foot in a classroom before.



So, what can the Council do to help?

Please allocate the full \$55.2 million that HCPSS is requesting, so the school system has more flexibility to restore programs and reallocate funds that can preserve our existing staffing and programs.

Please prevent us from falling further behind the other counties in the state, especially as it relates to the Blueprint, by providing any additional funding you can to help prevent layoffs and fully fund the school system's negotiated agreements.

And, finally, please work with HCPSS and the County Executive to cost out the annual fluctuations in healthcare over the next few years in order to reduce the impact that rising healthcare costs could have on programs and staffing each year. We know that health care costs for the school system are projected to rise by more than 13% compared to our neighboring counties. We need to do our part to stay ahead of that.

Thank you so much for your time and attention, and all that you do on behalf of the citizens of Howard County.

Signed,

Signatories	
Howard County Education Association (HCEA)	AFSCME Local 1899
HoCo Parents for Educators Admins	HoCo School Interest Admins (HCSI)
Indian Origin Network of Howard County (ION)	Autism Society of Maryland (AUSOM)
Community Allies of Rainbow Youth (CARY)	African American Community Roundtable (AACR)
HoCo Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC)	Howard Progressive Project (HPP)

Good evening to the members of the County Council...

My name is Benjamin Schmitt and I have the good fortune of presiding over 6,500 members of the Howard County Education Association. I'm here to speak with you tonight about the budgets that both the school system adopted, and the County Executive recently presented to you. As you know, our association is composed of both Support Professionals and Teachers. The budget affects all of them.

I'd like to take a moment to thank Dr. Ball for committing resources to the school system, and for acknowledging just how much HCPSS is what attracts many families to move to Howard County. Dr. Ball has also asked the Board of Education to be better stewards of county funds and to dig deeper to find additional savings. While I am grateful to him for the allocation, educators are extremely disappointed by the Board's request, and we want the Council to know this budget is a disaster. It will harm our ability to recruit new teachers and keep veterans during a nationwide teacher shortage.

Let's talk about what this budget really means for educators...

Class sizes used to be a priority for both the school system and County Government. Many years ago, both worked together, dedicating a portion of a tax increase to create a cap of 19 students in both 1st and 2nd grades, just as an example. Lately, nearly every proposed budget includes a class size increase, and those 1st & 2nd grade classes now have a cap of 25. Each increase makes it less possible to provide the individual attention every student desperately needs, increases teacher workload, strains already cramped classrooms, and worsens behavioral issues. Currently, the FY25 budget has a proposed increase of class size at the secondary level by one student. Don't be deceived, thinking that increasing class sizes by one average student will result in class sizes increasing by one. In reality, classes in secondary schools will balloon, and offerings with less than 20 kids will be eliminated, impacting many visual arts and music classes, electives, as well as advanced classes.

Second, the budget makes cuts to custodial, grounds, and print shop services that affect educators most, while leaving much of upper-level administration largely untouched. The loss of these positions will exacerbate deferred maintenance, ensure problems in our worksites are left unattended, and means educators will take more time away from instruction to help clean their own classrooms. Custodial staff are already asked to do more with less, and with position cuts in grounds, they will be asked to do more outside work during the day, taking them away from students and staff that need their help. Our print shop services over 9,000 staff and 56,000 students. Turnaround times will be increased, and staff will now be told to print more at school. How will that happen when we have administrators now telling educators that paper is in short supply, clicks on copiers are too high, and school-based paper and ink supplies have already been cut?

Third, the proposed FY25 budget includes cuts to our contracted, temporary employee positions that work one-on-one with our neediest and most vulnerable students, those with special needs. Increasing class sizes, while simultaneously eliminating these positions is a recipe for increased behavioral issues in classrooms and widening achievement gaps. Any day of the week, our special educators are simply falling under the crushing weight of their workloads, while being asked to do more by the Department of Special Education.

Benjamin Schmitt
PRESIDENT

Teresa Dennison
VICE PRESIDENT

John Wallace
SECRETARY

Sarai Gray
TREASURER



Lastly, despite claims by the Board that difficult budget decisions are being driven by the Blueprint, this budget makes no progress toward achieving the Blueprint's central tenet: raising pay for teachers to that of other professionals. We have been at the table with the Board's team since November, and they have not moved even one inch away from their initial proposal. Meanwhile, other counties have finished negotiations with their bargaining units, and we're already watching a slip from 3rd place to nearly 7th in starting salary for next year. Dr. Ball, all of you, and members of the Board agree that our educators should be paid professionally and competitively, to help retain the wonderful staff we have, while attracting others. These negotiations and this budget emphatically do not do that. In fact, while drawing out the process, we are being outpaced by neighboring school districts, and those in Western and Southern Maryland, whose leadership decried the Blueprint, saying the requirements couldn't be reached. HCEA is gravely concerned about an exodus of highly qualified staff that live in neighboring districts, because the school system isn't doing anything to keep them here, nor are they doing anything to attract others to live where they work.

After all this, what can you do?

Please close the gap between the Board's request and the provided funding levels. This will give HCPSS the greatest flexibility to restore programs and reallocate the funds they have to preserve staffing and other programs. Set aside the funds you do have, so that we don't fall even further behind other counties, the system can prevent layoffs, and fund the negotiated agreements, when we finally have them. Also, one of the highest costs in this budget are escalating health care costs. These costs are projected to rise by more than 13%, double that of surrounding districts. HCPSS, the Council, and Dr. Ball should use a multi-year strategy to average out annual cost fluctuations in healthcare, to reduce the impact of these costs on the budget each year.

During the budget season, we've heard a lot about doing the hard work now. Being careful and focused upfront, while being honest and open about what could happen with programs and staff. This has caused a tumultuous couple of months for staff and students. The mental health of staff has been left swinging on a pendulum between learning their jobs are at risk to then being told they are safe, and back again. The same has happened to students and families who were drawn into this battle, worried they would not see cherished programs and staff in their schools next year. It's been an ugly process with far too many victims and not enough maturity. Let's be the decision makers that staff and students look up to. What kind of school system do students and staff deserve? What are community members willing to pay for? And finally, what are the leaders willing to do to make this happen? We may not be able to do multi-year budgets. However, we can strategize for the years to come, so that we all have a school system that we are proud of, and where staff and students feel valued and prioritized.

Thank you.

Benjamin D. Schmitt
President
Howard County Education Association

My name is Dr. Corinne Happel. I'm a board-certified pediatrician and mother of 5 children, 3 going on 4 who are old enough to attend and are enrolled in a Howard County public elementary school. My family moved to Howard County in April of 2020 largely because of the public school system's reputation.

I stand united with fellow community members asking that you fully fund the FY 2025 HCPSS Requested Operating Budget.

I came to speak at this County Council's public hearing for the Operating Budget last year too. You remember: school bus service was being cut for approximately 3,500 children without any prior public hearing. As you probably also know, most children slated for school bus service cuts never got their school buses back. Advocacy efforts prompted a full review of HCPSS's Policy 5200, (the policy on Student Transportation). I am pleased that many good recommendations are being made to re-expand school bus service. Unfortunately, there is no funding for this in the current budget. The Committee Co-Chairs will be presenting the report at tomorrow's public Board of Education meeting. Yet even if recommendations are voted on and approved at the end of the school year, no implementation is being considered until the start of the 2025-26 school year due to lack of funds.

School bus service promotes child safety and equity.

Just this past November, in neighboring Prince Georges County, two children ages 5 and 10 years old were killed after being hit by a van as they walked to school despite adult supervision (<https://wjla.com/news/local/children-struck-vehicle-riverdale-park-elementary-school-prince-georges-county-elementary-school-crime-traffic-wounds-injuries-hospital-police-investigation-serious-tragic-morning-pgpd>). School buses are the safest way for children to get to school per the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In neighboring Carroll County, all elementary school students qualify for a school bus ride and families are heavily discouraged from privately driving their children to school (<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1639155493/carrollk12org/oly1e4zzrpx9vm7oqufj/PARENTSTUDENTHANDBOOK8-29-19002.pdf> see page 5).

Not only is the school system not funded to restore school bus service for the incoming school year, new cuts are on table.

This year, I learned that GT and orchestra teachers and programs were slated for cuts at my children's elementary school. I want to thank the County Executive for standing up and supporting restoration of school teachers and programs including GT teachers and orchestra teachers at all elementary schools, as well as other important programs. Yet there are so many more cuts that are written into the budget including cuts to teachers at the middle and high school levels (due to increased student to teacher ratios), cuts to support staff in special education, cuts to custodians, and the list continues. Giving the Howard County Public School System its full request will decrease the level of cuts this year.

Let's fund our future! Thank you for your consideration.

FY 25 Operating Budget Testimony-

Name: Jennifer (Ginger) Segala

In favor of additional funding for HCPSS

Good evening members of the County Council. My name is Ginger Segala.

I am Chair and the proud representative tonight for the coalition, Howard County Parents for School Music.

Howard County Parents for School Music is a community advocacy group that was formed in 1993 to promote the importance of quality musical education for our children in the Howard County Public School System. Today, we are over 2000 members strong and still advocating that mission.

Today I am here to testify on behalf of our members regarding the FY25 operating budget. We are requesting that the council vote to move \$3.2 million additional dollars into the Howard County Public School System budget.

At the County Executive's hearing we called on him to be a leader for our educational system and for our Howard County signature programs. We are grateful and thankful that Dr Ball encouraged the Superintendent and Board of Education to restore funding for targeted cuts to 3rd grade strings and other programs, but we have been engaged in this process for months and we KNOW that drastic cuts were made to *many* areas in school based staffing to match the request.

Students and teachers in our public schools have already endured increased class sizes over the last few years. In the FY25 budget proposal, the Board made severe cuts to school-based staffing in many areas which will raise class sizes and potentially prevent offerings of smaller specialized classes including classes that will affect music education. We have also seen the complete erasure of the curricular based fieldtrips such as music assessments which is a standard requirement for eligibility for the statewide level competition. Cutting even one penny from the public school's FY 25 request will have lasting detrimental effects.

The solution to the problem of a currently underfunded school system with increasing requirements looming from the Blueprint mandates will not be easy, and the decisions can't be made in one budget cycle. One thing is for sure ---- the Blue Print is not meant to eliminate. It's meant to be additive or transformative in the best interest of students and their teachers.

We want to remind everyone at the macro decision making levels for the budget process, that the decisions you make at this level are not just numbers in a ledger. They represent children and the experiences and opportunities to which they will be exposed.

Music is Essential. The music programs are about music, and they are also about team building, and mental health. They are about brain developing curriculum that promotes discipline, and universal language. They provide opportunity for cultural sharing and community building. The students connect with their directors over years, they connect with their peers across grade level and academic tracks, and they connect across cultural and socio-economic barriers. These programs are, quite frankly, the most universally engaging, appropriate, inclusive, and openly welcoming programs in the entire school system.

How do I know that? Because the students told me.

Since the program cuts were announced, students across the county have been participating in an opportunity offered by the Howard County Parents for School Music called Music Notes. These are notes written by our public school system music students -- across all grades-- about why the music programs are important to them. The words on the cards are heartfelt and they are unedited. They are varied in their reasons. Some students are just glad they get to play music. Other students say that they met all of their friends in their music classes and connected to the school through them. Many of the studentsmore than I would like to see...wrote about how these classes provided the mental health break that they needed just to make it through their stressful day.

Each of you have a gift bag with a selection of the thousands of Music Notes from the students in Howard County. I encourage you to take some time to read them before you make decisions on the overall budget. Think about each one of them individually. Think about little fingers learning to pluck the strings of the viola in 3rd grade. Think about how proud those elementary students are when they play hot cross buns as a team for the first time for their parents and grandparents. Think about how our students then go on to achieve music at the highest levels in the country and represent Howard County as the Gold Standard. And also, think about how thousands of community members connect at school music concerts and musicals every year. Howard County should be proud of the music programs that have been offered for decades in our county.

Music in all its curricular forms is an essential part of an evolved, accomplished, world-class public-school system. I don't need tell you more about that...because on those cards....our children do.

We implore you to protect these programs and more by voting to add the necessary dollars to fully fund the Board of Education's request for our public school system.

Thank you.



Honorable Members of the Howard County Council,

I am Jean Xu, Director of Development and External Affairs for CAPA. Our organization has been steadfast in supporting the Howard County Public School System and its legacy of educational excellence. CAPA has advocated extensively through the Board of Education and the Operating Budget Review Committee to enhance the efficiency of the school system and prioritize essential programs and services.

Today, I represent CAPA in requesting that the County fully fund our school system, which is vital for the well-being of our children and the long-term health of our community. Known for its educational excellence, HCPSS has become a beacon for families valuing exceptional educational opportunities for their children. However, the school budget has been severely strained in recent years due to several factors. This year, HCPSS faces a critical funding deficit, leading to cuts in essential programs and the removal of great teachers. This is a dire challenge we must address properly. While there are always opportunities to enhance operational and financial efficiency—and CAPA is committed to this effort—efficiency alone cannot overcome the funding gaps.

Howard County champions equity, especially in education, by striving to eliminate barriers to success for all students. Access to quality education is crucial for social mobility and justice, empowering children to excel academically and pursue fulfilling careers. Unfortunately, disadvantaged students are disproportionately affected by funding shortfalls. When programs are cut, families with means can supplement through commercial services, whereas those less fortunate lose the learning opportunities they deserve. Educational equity and social progress rely on adequate funding for public education.

While the dollar amount invested in HCPSS has been increased, CAPA is calling for attention of our County leaders to the fact that the inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending in 2024 is 5% lower than in 2015 and 2.5% lower than in 2021. During this time, essential costs such as teachers' salaries and benefits have increased significantly. Additionally, the proportion of the county's total operating budget allocated to HCPSS has decreased from nearly 40% to 36% in the past 10 years. We must reverse this declining trend, address the investment shortcomings of the past decade, and significantly boost school funding to effectively respond to new state mandates, rising labor costs, and the heightened demands of a new era marked by advancements in artificial intelligence.

As we look towards the future, it's essential to address the long-term financial challenges facing schools. School expenses are rising faster than inflation for various reasons, and HCPSS has been struggling with budget shortfalls every year. This has resulted in temporary solutions that are far from ideal. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the County Executive, County Council, and the Board of Education work together to create a clear multi-year financial and operational plan. This approach will



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Chinese American Parent Association of
Howard County in Maryland

enable consistent growth, long-term investments, and broader community support. With sustained funding commitment from the County, our schools can provide robust programs and retain top-quality staff.

While we recognize the constraints on the county's revenue, it is crucial to remember that Howard County ranks among the wealthiest in the nation. This wealth affords us the ability to strategically redirect our fiscal priorities more favorably toward education. On behalf of CAPA, I urge the Council to fully fund the HCPSS budget request and to develop a comprehensive long-term plan. Let's demonstrate to the next generation that they are our priority. Let's redouble our commitment to their success and well-being by investing in their education. Let's not just hope for a brighter future but actively build it together.

Thank you.

Good evening. My name is Jhonna Seifert.

I'm a current teacher, resident, and parent of Howard County.

I've lived in Howard County for 40 years, since I was two. I started Student teaching for HCPSS in 2003 and began working as a teacher for HCPSS in 2004.

It is not new information that Education is the foundation of a successful community.

We know Education is the backbone of OUR thriving community.

We already know who develops our world class doctors, lawyers, mechanics, accountants, and so on ...

Our schools do!

Therefore, we must fully fund the BOE HCPSS budget and look for other ways to increase funding.

We need to keep ALL programs and ALL teachers.

There will be a direct educational impact on students if we cut programs.

Several elementary schools are left with only 1 Gifted and Talented teacher and no 3rd grade strings program.

A single Gifted and Talented teacher will not be able to service an entire school and meet the needs of all students, with a population of more than 500 students.

Who will this directly impact? Our students.

Did you know that teachers do more than instruct material?

Teachers are there for students when they need someone to talk to, they are there to help teach social skills, and prepare them for life and help them become a kind and caring citizen.

Research states that in order to best meet the needs of our students, they must be taught on their instructional level. When students are taught at their instructional level, they are able to retain and learn new knowledge.

To quote Carol Ann Tomlinson's book (from 2017), titled: How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms, on page 21, "...advanced learners can become mentally lazy ... We have evidence (Altintas & Ozdemir, 2015; Clark, 1992; Ornstein & Thompson, 1984) that a brain loses capacity and "tone" without vigorous use in much the same way that a little-used muscle does. If a student produces "success" without effort, potential brainpower can be lost."

This speaks volumes.

We must foster curiosity and strengthen engagement for all of our learners.

How do we do that? We need more money!

There are not enough teachers or staff members to properly run our schools in HCPSS and provide the education that our children deserve.

We need more money, because we need more people to run our schools. So we can have smaller class sizes, then we are able to properly build relationships, provide grades and feedback in a timely manner, plan and create hands-on diverse and engaging

lessons, teach with an instructional match, conference and call families, showcase work, plan field trips, - the list goes on.

We need to fully fund the BOE HCPSS budget and provide MORE!

Teachers will be able to do their jobs if we have the staff needed, if we have adequate clean buildings, enough materials, then students will then learn and become kind helpful community members.

Yes, schools are expensive, but aren't our students worth it?

It's a simple cause and effect.

We must set priorities in this county and Education must be one. Without properly funding education, our future citizens are at risk.

Please fully fund the Board of Education Howard County Public School's budget and look for other funding, because our children deserve it.

They ARE worth it!

Dear County Executive Ball, Council Chair Jung, Members of the Howard County Council,

My name is Linfeng Chen, and I am a resident from North Laurel and a school board member of the Howard County Public School System. I am here today to testify about the county budget related to education.

I begin by expressing my huge thanks to many people who have contributed to the current progress of the FY 2025 school operating budget in one way or another.

First, thank you to everyone who has made the effort to have their voices heard, emailing the school board and County Government, and testifying for what is important to you. Since the superintendent-proposed FY 25 school operating budget was released on Jan 18, we have had four public hearings and five work sessions. All public hearings were filled up early and quickly. I have been deeply impressed by how much we as a county value education. Thank you, many students, teachers, parents, and community leaders for sharing your opinions. You made a difference!

Second, I want to recognize the tremendous effort of acting superintendent Barnes and his team in building this FY 2025 HCPSS Budget. We knew this would be a very difficult budget to balance, but Mr. Barnes took this on day one of his acting role. I appreciate his team's transparency, patience, and professionalism in building the scenarios and assisting the school board in deliberations. The budget tools are useful, and their proposals are thoughtful! They made the best of the fiscal situation given.

Third, I want to thank you, County Executive Dr. Ball and your team, for your support and investment in our Howard County Public School System with a record \$1.14 billion. This funding increase of \$52 million above the required Maintenance of Effort funding allows the school system to restore the Elementary School Gifted and Talented program, 3rd grade strings, Environmental Education Program, the Summer BSAP, and the MESA Program. Our budget reflects our values. One of our shared values is to keep high quality public education for all students. Thank you!

County Council members, now it is your turn! I need your help to deliver this budget to our community in a way demonstrating this shared value. As one of many residents who pick Howard County as home because of public education, I urge you to fund HCPSS at the level that we requested so our system can be excellent and equitable. High quality public education that meets the diverse needs of all of our students is the biggest form of equity for all of our residents. The money spent on our students is an investment for our future. Our students, including your children or children's children, can create wonders when we give them every learning opportunity we could. Thank you!

4/24/2024 County Council Education Budget Testimony

Good Evening Council Members

I am Meg Ricks, a resident of district one Elkridge.

I am here tonight to ask for the council's support for the Howard County Public School System budget. I'm grateful for the County Executive's responsiveness to the testimony shared by myself and many other engaged community members at his budget hearing last month. I implored him to continue Howard County's commitment to education and not being a "just the minimums" jurisdiction in our public school funding. I am very grateful that the council has been presented a budget that exceeds required maintenance of effort funding and which comes much closer to the Board of Education's request than many thought that it would. My ask tonight, to you the Council, is to find funding to close the gap between the Board's request and the County Executive's budget.

While the Board will have the final say on the particular expenditures, I am greatly concerned about the proposed class size increases in middle and high schools and I hope you are as well. These increases are driving much of the surplus of teachers and even the possible loss of some of them from our county. Conditionally certificated teachers are the most at risk. At a time when we are desperately trying to find and develop amazing individuals who want to become educators, this is a crushing blow. Even at Guilford Park HS, our newest school, where my daughter will be among the first graduating class and where I proudly serve as the first ever PTSA president, where we next year will be adding another grade's worth of staff, and welcoming many being moved from other schools, we may still lose some current staff due to this. This increase will negatively impact the educational experience of all secondary students and will lead to decreased class offerings available. It will also add to teacher workload at a time when teachers are already being stretched and broken.

There are additional, essential items that I hope that the Board can take another look at when the final budget number is in. Those decisions and deliberations will be theirs, but they will be very much impacted by the funding you decide on. I again implore you to fund the Howard County Public School System at the maximum you are allowed.

I look forward to continuing to work together as a county community, to advance public education and to find sustainable ways to adequately fund it every year.

FY25 Budget Hearing - April 2024

My name is Rebecca Otte, I've been a teacher in HCPSS for 23 years and a Howard County resident since 2019. My testimony this year starts with a story.

I've had occasional migraines since high school, but in the summer of 2009 I got a migraine every day for a week. That turned into several weeks, and then months. I could get the migraine to go away with medication or laying down in a silent, dark room, but inevitably, I would get another one the next day. This was tough enough to manage during the summer months, but then school started back up again. I taught wearing sunglasses. I locked myself into a dark bathroom every break I had. I had my mom read the students' papers to me and I tried to tell her how to score them, and then she entered grades into Canvas for me. In December, my principal suggested that I take several days off of work. I thought I might have to quit teaching, and I was devastated. That was when I knew that I hadn't just fallen into this job, but that I was meant to be an educator. I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

But two weeks ago, I applied for a job outside of teaching. I don't WANT to leave, but I feel like I need to. I still love teaching, I just barely get to do it these days. My class size is too large. My workload is too heavy. I've testified before the Board of Ed, this Council, and/or the County Executive in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and this past January - each time asking for the resources I need to do the job I was hired to do, the job I actually love doing. How is it that we get record funding each year from elected officials whose highest priority is education, yet I'm still back the next year asking for the same things? Smaller classes, more counselors, more special educators and related service providers, buildings that aren't overcrowded or falling apart, a salary

commensurate with my degrees and experience, a livable wage for our Education Support Professionals, enough staff in our school buildings to meet the needs of our students. How many years can educators be expected to scream into a void? I'm far from the only one feeling this way, and I'm terrified of how much more stressful things will be next year with the budget that the Board requested. Working in this school system has been getting harder and harder every year. How many more years does this county have before we have more vacancies than we have educators? I don't have an answer, but without a drastic change in the way we fund HCPSS, I know it won't be very many.

FY25 Budget - Jan 2024

Hi, my name is Rebecca Otte, and I've taught 4th and 5th grade in HCPSS for 23 years. I'm testifying in favor of a budget request that makes no cuts to existing services.

“What’s one more student? That can’t make much difference.” These are words that I’ve heard far too many times in my 23 years in the system. I can understand how people who aren’t in a classroom might see increasing the number of students by one as a good way to close a budget gap. But class size ratios are a little bit like fractions, where as the denominator gets larger, the piece gets smaller. The larger the number of students in my classroom, the less of my attention each student gets. Some of you may remember my testimony from just 3 years ago about how the upper limit of students in grade 5 has increased by 7 since I started in HCPSS, and how that has impaired my ability to meet my students’ needs, along with increasing my workload to an unsustainable level. Now this budget proposal suggests an increase of 2 students, while it also points out the fact that the needs of our students have been growing. Decreasing the attention I can give to students who need more of my attention doesn't make sense.

The budget proposal also states that the average number of students in a 5th grade class is 24.9. I actually laughed when I read that, because the last time I consistently had 25 or fewer students in my class was 2010. The thing about averages is that they’re only one aspect of data, and they don’t tell the whole story. An average of 24.9 means there are classes with fewer students and there are classes with more students. My teammates and I have had between 28 and 30 students in our classes for years now. So an increase of two more students for us means up to 32 students in our classrooms, not 27.

Another suggested cut in this proposal is the resource teachers for elementary science and social studies. I’m a generalist, not an expert in science, so I depend on the help that I get from Jen Brown-Whale. Not having her will mean that if there's a lesson where the science is hard for me to understand, I'll either teach it incorrectly or I might decide to skip it altogether. And there’s no possible way for a one-person social studies department to run Simulated Congressional Hearings at 42 elementary schools, so we’ll lose that program, which means we’ll also lose a state-mandated social studies assessment.

These are just two of the hundreds of recommended cuts to the services we provide to our kids. The impact of this proposed budget on our school system will be devastating - our students’ learning will suffer, and it will push even more educators out of the

profession. We all deserve better. The county can only give us the funding that we ask for - please request what we need to keep all of our existing services. Thank you.

Good evening Dr. Ball, and members of the administration. My name is Rebecca Otte. I'm a resident of Laurel and have been a classroom teacher with HCPSS for 21 years.

I first want to thank you for your support of educators in the county. The recent one-time bonus of \$1800 was a meaningful boost to overburdened staff in a school year where many educators are wondering how much longer they'll be able to cope with the stresses. And the passage of CB-82 means that our food service workers, who remained in person every day of the pandemic, will all make at least \$15 an hour for the first time next school year. These were tangible ways of showing support and appreciation, and they are an important part of recruiting and retaining employees for our county's public school system. Thank you for working with HCPSS and the County Council to make them happen.

I'm here tonight with specific budget requests that will be the next steps in the recruitment and retention process. The first is to fully fund HCEA's negotiated agreements, which provide needed cost of living adjustments, the aforementioned increase in food service worker wages, and put us on the path to go beyond the Blueprint-mandated \$60,000 starting salary for educators. I personally know 3 people who left HCPSS in the last few years to go work for Montgomery, and we will start losing educators to many other counties if our salaries and benefits don't remain competitive.

My second ask is to fund the new special ed positions in the HCPSS budget request. A major source of the stress driving educators out of the classroom is the workload, and its impact is likely felt most deeply by our

special ed staff and related service providers. We were still trying to come back from staffing being scuttled when the pandemic hit. Now we have to make up ground with students whose needs may not have been fully met in virtual instruction, and we're tasked with doing it with staffing levels that weren't sufficient to begin with. A colleague was taken to the hospital this year with what she thought was a heart attack, and it was a panic attack due to the stress of her job. The school system absolutely must have these new special ed positions to meet the needs of our students and our special educators.

Finally, I'm asking that you fund the proposed new counselor and school psychologist positions. Everyone in the community experienced trauma the last few years, and it's crucial that our students have access to the mental health resources to deal with that. We are seeing so many more behaviors this school year as a direct result of the pandemic and building closures, and again, we were already short staffed to begin with. National standards suggest that school counselors not be responsible for more than 250 students. In 2019, the counselor at my school had 631 students. Our students cannot be available for learning if their health and wellbeing needs aren't being met - they need these new positions funded.

I know there are many worthwhile programs and services that all ask for a piece of the budget. As a resident and a classroom teacher, I ask that you be sure to include HCEA's negotiated agreements and funding for proposed new special ed, counselor, and school psych positions. Thank you.

Good evening Dr. Ball, and members of the administration. My name is Rebecca Otte. I'm a 5th grade teacher in my 21st year with the Howard County Public Schools and a resident of Laurel.

When I started outlining my testimony for tonight, I went looking for statistics on the funding of HCPSS over the years. My plan was to compare the budget requests of superintendents and Boards of Education to the final budgets that were passed, which never include the full amount requested. But there are a lot of moving parts in any given budget, so it's hard to really compare from year to year without quickly getting into the weeds. We try, of course - quoting the percentage of the county budget going to "Education", the average per pupil spending amount, the dollar amount over Maintenance of Effort, or the flashy but meaningless phrase "record funding", since even a dollar over the previous year's budget would be "record funding". So I realized that the best way for me to compare funding levels would be to talk about what it's actually been like in my classroom these 21 years.

When I started teaching, the maximum class size in grades 3-5 was 25 students. It's currently 32. Seven more students changes the dynamic in my classroom in a lot of ways, but the most easily quantifiable is in the grading. 7 more students means at least 14 more minutes of grading per subject, which adds at least an hour to my weekly workload - 2 when I'm grading writing. Note, that's not an hour or two of grading, it's an hour or two MORE than the 3-5 hours it would take me each week to grade 25 papers.

Another thing that has increased is special ed caseloads. In my first two years of teaching, each grade had its own special educator and special ed para, and they had a caseload in the 4-8 range. Currently, special ed caseloads are frequently near 20, or even more. My school has 4 special educators shared between 6 grade levels, which is why I've sometimes been asked to act as the special educator. We write IEPs to meet students' needs, but when the Department of Special Ed doesn't have the budget for Close Adult Support staff, we pull staff from other areas to cover. One year, I was asked to be the general educator, the special educator, and the Close Adult support all at the same time. No matter how skilled I am at my job, I will never be able to be three people simultaneously.

Every recent spring, people have gone to the BoE building to fight for the programs they want to keep because we haven't received the full budget request. We've lost tech teacher positions, math support and reading support staff. We've had to fight to keep instrumental music. I realize that these are decisions that the Boards of Education made, not the county, but they've only had to make these decisions because we haven't been given the funding that they said we need.

Telling the school system to "live within its means" has meant that students have large classes and less time with teachers. It has meant educator burnout due to unmanageable workloads. We must do what it takes to adequately fund our school system. Thank you.

FY21 Budget Hearing - March 2020

My name is Rebecca Otte, and I'm a 5th grade teacher in HCPSS. I'm in my 19th year with the school system, and as of October, I'm finally a Howard County resident. It's always been my desire to live in Howard County - I grew up here, I never wanted to work anywhere but here - so I'm thrilled things finally came together and I can live where I work.

As a resident, I am begging you to raise my taxes. We've already heard that it won't be possible to fund the school system's request with the current revenue expected, so it seems to me that this is the only option. And I will gladly pay more for the services that Howard County residents have come to expect, particularly a quality school system.

Last year the school system's budget request wasn't fully funded, so the Board of Education cut paraeducator and technology positions. As a result, I am now expected to find time during my classes for my students to practice their typing once a week. That doesn't seem like too big of a deal, until you consider that we have 6 computer carts for the entire school to share between 42 classrooms and state-mandated computer-based tests, along with the standards that I'm already responsible for in the 6 different subjects that I teach. Now factor in that most days I don't have my paraeducator in my classroom for instructional support because he's supporting more than one grade level - when he can actually do his job, that is, since he's spent most of this year taking unfilled sub jobs. Also add in that I'm collecting data for my students who receive special education services, because our special educators and special ed paras are split between two or three grade levels, I'm counseling students when my school counselor is busy with one of the other 650 students on her case load, and I'm managing the behaviors and needs of up to 31 students - perhaps you can understand how typing practice is the straw that broke the camel's back.

In about a month, I'll be teaching puberty education to my class. We split the grade by gender, and only educators who have been trained are allowed to teach the unit. One of my teammates will be on paternity leave, so we planned to have our special educator take his group. But because she's managing a caseload of 22 students across 3 grade levels, she's not available to do so. Because of this, we're splitting all of the boys in the grade between two of us, and I will be teaching a group of 39 boys. I don't even know how I'll fit 39 students in my classroom. Consider if you had to try to learn anything in a group of 39, let alone a topic like puberty. This is not the educational quality Howard County parents and students expect.

Last budget cycle, the school system was pitted against the Department of Public Works in a Battle Royale of "what services can Howard County get?" Already this year, we've heard "that's the cost of 400 police officers". I didn't move to Howard County so I could choose between services. I want schools and roads and police, and I want a government that funds all of them.

FY20 Budget Hearing - May 2019

Hi, my name is Rebecca Otte, I teach 4th grade at Fulton Elementary. This is my 18th year teaching, and I've been at the same school for the last 16. I wanted to speak today in favor of special education staffing. I often teach an inclusion class, which may include students who have IEPs, who read below grade level without IEPs, English Language Learners, students with emotional disabilities, in addition to my students who read on or above grade level.

Five years ago, I had 6 students with IEPs. The special educator assigned to my grade had the same planning time as I did, and we were able to co-teach for language arts. By being able to plan and teach with my special educator, all of our students benefited and made fantastic growth. This year, my special educator is split between two 4th grade classes, as well as being in Kindergarten and 3rd grade. We don't have common planning. We do our best to make it work, but it's difficult for us to streamline our instruction so that our kids can get the most out of our teaching.

Over the years, as we have been asked to do more with less, more and more of the responsibility for my students' IEPs has fallen on me to do. This year I've had to provide data for my special educator on how my students with IEPs are progressing towards meeting their annual goals in addition to learning a new writing curriculum, planning for and teaching 6 other subjects a week, benchmarking my below grade level students once a quarter, and making accommodations for my English Language Learners.

Two years ago, I had two separate students who struggled with transitions – whether it was moving from one location to another, changing activities, or

starting work on an assignment. Their IEPs provided for Close Adult Supervision. However, since we don't transition constantly, it was determined that transitions took about 50% of the day. Since each student only needed a Close Adult 50% of the time, one adult would count for both students – 50% for one student, 50% for the other. Unfortunately, the students didn't cooperate in taking turns struggling with transitions, so my one adult really had to be with both students at the same time. And in practice, what this really meant was that she took one of the students and I took the other, so if any of my other students needed something, well, they just had to wait. Also, Mrs. Powers was entitled to, and greatly deserved, a lunch break and two 15 minute breaks during the day. At that time, I was able to act as both students' Close Adult Supervision, while also meeting the needs of my two other students' IEPs, and being the teacher for all 28 of my students.

No matter how well I multi-task, or how many years I've been teaching, I will never be able to perform the functions of three separate people simultaneously. And it's not fair to me or to my students to ask me to do so. All of our students deserve to get the attention from educators that they need, so we must fund the proposed increase in special ed staffing. Thank you.

Good evening, Council Members, and thank you for this opportunity. I am Robert Miller, and I reside in Columbia.

I have lived in Howard County for 43 years, taught for 34 of those in our public school system, and raised two children who attended Bryant Woods Elementary, Wilde Lake Middle, and Wilde Lake High Schools. I know the life-changing importance of our school system to its students and parents. First and foremost, our students and families benefit greatly by having high-quality schools and accompanying opportunities, for their entire lives. That said, I also know its importance to homeowners who did not have students in our system. Most people would rather not pay higher taxes, but most people would rather not lose \$100,000 of equity in their homes. There are many reasons that so many people choose to pay that much extra for a home in Howard County instead of across county lines, and most would say that the biggest reason is the quality of our school system. We shouldn't be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Some people may not have the perspective to see this, but we need our leaders to see it. It appears that county funding of HCPSS has dipped slightly percentage-wise recently, and a couple of percentage points is having a very detrimental effect. We need to re-group, look at the changes coming from Blueprint and other initiatives, and do what it takes to maintain a high-quality school system for our students, parents, and other residents. We shouldn't have been caught by surprise. I feel so fortunate that my children went to Howard County schools, and I want all parents and students to feel similarly. I also feel fortunate that my investment in a Howard County home, though more expensive than it would have been in neighboring counties, appreciated in value more than it would have in those counties, largely because of our school system. Furthermore, having a great school system brings tangential benefits that accompany a population that values education, too. Our school system is the centerpiece of what makes Howard County what it is.

I appreciate your efforts and those of Dr. Ball and the Board of Education during this challenging budget season. Please do your absolute best to provide our school system with as much funding as you can this year; I encourage you to add the \$3.2 million to fully fund the Board of Education's operating budget request. Then, please, set up a task force and/or some other means to look at the mandates from the Blueprint and other initiatives, as well as the other needs of the county, and help determine how to responsibly fund our school system so it will be a very healthy heart of our county for the foreseeable future. Many thousands of lives will be affected by the path you take. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Dear Councilmembers,

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. Like our Board of Education and County Executive, I am here to ask that you fully fund the BOE's requested operating budget. The stark reality is that to do anything less would devastate our schools in what will already be a challenging year ahead. Residents of Howard County know that even fully funding the BOE's budget request still means the loss of teachers, reduced health services, unspecialized special education, and dirtier schools. My oldest son has just started his school journey-- is it going to be like this for the next 11 years? If not fully funded, do the programs that make Howard County's schools special ever come back? When? What's the plan? The Board of Education makes cuts to 3rd grade strings and significantly reduces gifted and talented programs and pretends that these students can "make do" because of where they live. Are you too going to tell me that our schools will have the same standard of education while at the same time reducing funding?

And Howard County can afford to spend more on our schools. Yes, per pupil spending is going up, yes the County has been spending above MOE in recent years. However, the County has not been keeping up with inflation. In fact, Howard County has not funded our schools at the same percentage of General Fund that it has in years past-- it has gone down close to 3% since 2019 and even more by other analyses. Please don't take the Spending Affordability Advisory Committee's advice that the County limit-above MOE spending; they sound callous in their report, and do not take into account many of the factors that everyone here has talked about. They don't consider that school children are 17% of our County population and that at least 100,000 people are either in the schools or a guardian of a child who is. Their economic growth analysis does not take into account that our schools are a major reason why many people move to Howard County. With property taxes set to increase next year, Howard County should respond to its residents by fully funding the BOE's requested budget.

Thank you for your time,

Ryan Powers

Glenwood, MD