

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY

PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 2026 SESSION

Collaboration between the Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) and the Howard County Delegation, as well as local elected officials, to address educational reform is paramount to the success of the Howard County School System (HCPSS) in providing the best possible education for all students.

The Board proposes the following priorities for the coming Session:

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Recognition of Funding Needs

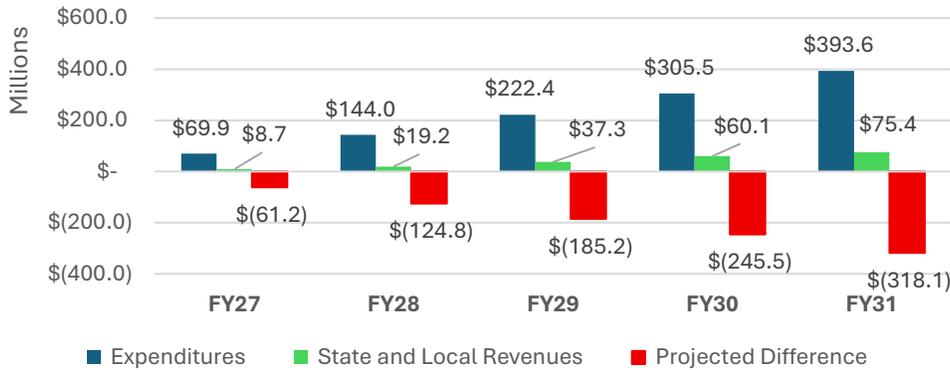
As a standing and fundamental legislative platform, the Board supports adequate and equitable funding to meet the needs of all students within HCPSS. Funding is the basis for the school system's ability to implement education programs and deliver support services. For FY26, the HCPSS General Fund Operating Budget totals \$1.21 billion. Funding from the Howard County government is increasing \$50.0 million to \$816.0 million, a 6.5 percent increase over FY25, while State aid increases by \$23.6 million to \$375.4 million, an increase of 6.7 percent driven by the ongoing implementation of per-pupil funding growth required in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Despite these increases, for the second year in a row HCPSS funding needs continue to outpace available revenues, compelling the district to implement service reductions, strategic reallocations, and rely on one-time funding to achieve a balanced budget without further reductions to services. Looking forward, the potential for lost revenues is especially concerning as future projections continue to indicate the annual rate of enrollment growth is expected to de-accelerate.

When comparing required local and state funding with projected expenditure growth, expected funding

will not be sufficient to support an average annual expenditure growth rate of 5.75%, which based on historical trends, staff believes is a reasonable estimate. By FY31, expenditure growth will exceed revenue growth by more than \$300 million. However, it is important to emphasize this does not include above-Maintenance of Effort (MOE) given it only includes required funding, and that it is for illustrative purposes to show the relationship between the projections. Each year the budget would have to be balanced, according to state law.

Comparison of Projected Cumulative Expenditure Growth to Cumulative Revenue Growth FY27 to FY31



This chart compares the cumulative projected expenditure growth to the combined projected cumulative change in required state and local funding (not including above-MOE).

As the main source of both required funding and fiscal mandates, prior legislative priorities of the Board often address the need for additional funds to support the school system, including:

For several legislative sessions since the passage of Blueprint, the Board has held up as a legislative priority the funding disparity between the required increases in State funding to meet mandated cost increases and the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) formula funding increases. In Howard County, where local funding levels exceed the required local share, even though the Blueprint legislation significantly increases per-pupil funding across all Major Aid areas, MOE increases are not large enough to eclipse how far above the required local share Howard County has historically been.

Given the lack of legislative interest in a statutory fix to the MOE calculation, in 2025 the Board amended its legislative priority to focus on an incremental approach. Specifically, the Board asked for an inflation adjustment to the MOE amount of local funding under Education Article § 5-235 that would ensure that local funding is at least keeping pace with inflation, a requirement already in place for State funding. With elected officials focused on the larger statewide budget, and both the State and local ability to maintain current commitments to Blueprint mandates, this topic has yet to attract legislative action. The current MOE formula is counterintuitive to the Blueprint expectation of increased funding to implement the mandates.

Another legislative ask from the Board's 2025 priorities related to the need for adequate funding is in the area of transportation. In Maryland, student transportation funding is calculated under Education Article § 5-218, separate from the per pupil Foundation Aid under § 5-201. Howard County receives a base grant of \$8,460,292, which is then adjusted annually via a formula that takes into account inflation per the Consumer Price Index and enrollment increases. The priority focused on the potential for a study to identify adequate levels of funding, with particular attention on differentiated costs for special populations, and expected expansion under the Blueprint. Ultimately, the goal of the study would be an increase in funding to more accurately fund the transportation needs of local school systems.

As recruitment and retention remains a high priority year after year for local school systems, prior legislative topics have focused on ways to incentivize school system employees to live locally in Maryland and Howard County and commit to longevity in the system. This has included offering housing incentives, rental assistance, tax credits, transportation, and other basic needs for school system employees. In FY25 the priority also focused specifically on incentives for special education teachers including recruitment bonuses, differentiated pay, as well as an ask for funding to increase apprenticeship opportunities at the high school level to keep students engaged with the school system for future employment.

Other 2025 priorities that asked for direct funding included a response to HB0205 passed in 2021 that mandated supply of menstrual hygiene products for students in public schools, as well as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and several introduced but failed bills since that time seeking the financial backing to again offer universal meals (as discussed further below). A priority regarding capital match provisions for building, maintenance, and infrastructure needs and a priority highlighting the lagging per pupil indicators used to calculate funding were not direct asks for funding yet were aimed at changing the way funding is allocated in order to increase the likelihood of suitability in meeting school system needs.

Each topic discussed above continues to be a valid need of the system that would require additional revenues from our state and local funding authorities.

With ongoing requirements to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the uncertain fiscal outlook from the Federal government, and rising inflation and costs in all areas of the economy, coupled with a statutory funding formula based on demographic shifts that are subject to a [national downward trend](#), **the Board is seeking local and state funding authorities' recognition that expected school system revenues fall short of meeting adequate funding.**

As legislators have cautioned that an increase to school system funding in the current economy is unlikely during the 2026 session, every effort has been made to limit funding asks within the Board's legislative priorities, with particular attention given to changes in statute that give flexibility to local school systems to address fiscal burdens. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that improving student performance, well-being, and eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps, as well as our ability in Howard County to attract employees, residents, and business to the county, is dependent on sustainable financial resources.

Blueprint

Since the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, HCPSS has made concerted efforts to implement the programmatic aspirations to ensure academic success and social-emotional well-being of students. A significant infusion of new State revenue over the coming years will support these efforts. As discussed above, however, fiscal constraints are plaguing local school systems. While the Maryland General Assembly has attempted to address concerns over rigid deadlines and implementation hurdles as they arise, each pillar of the Blueprint continues to present challenges that have yet to be addressed, including:

Pillar 1

Under HB1441 passed in 2024 alterations to the original Blueprint requirements for early childhood included an extension of the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, established private provider career ladders and hubs through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and pushed back the dates by which 50 percent of slots had to be in the private sector. Despite these improvements, participation by private providers lags. Concerns include inconsistencies between educational requirements for public providers and regulations for child care facilities when working to support new providers. Given the Blueprint's requirement for teaching assistants to have their Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or an Associate's degree by SY27-28 to meet minimum qualifications, HB1441 also allowed existing teaching assistants to instead meet qualifications through documentation of experience in a publicly funded prekindergarten program for a minimum of five years. With no financial support for a pathway to the CDA, many teaching assistants who are just now coming into the system will struggle to meet the requirements by 2027. Additionally, while HB1441 extended the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, no additional flexibility in the use of grant funds were included, such as allowing it to be used toward obtaining EXCELS ratings which are often a barrier to new site participation.

Based on changes made to the phase-in of the prekindergarten per pupil rates within the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act passed during the 2024 legislative session, MSDE recently updated its [sliding scale guidance](#) for providers. For the current SY26, a limited portion of the sliding scale is to be implemented, with the full sliding scale for all Tier II families pushed back to SY27. HCPSS is currently prioritizing seats for both Tier I students and those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and offering seats to Tier II only when there are open slots at sites. Providers are concerned this new payment model will be a complex new process that will further complicate private provider participation.

Another bill that failed to pass in 2025 was HB1245/SB0852 Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Alterations, of which a portion reflected local school systems' understanding of the intent of the Blueprint to expand access to prekindergarten for the state's most vulnerable populations. While children with disabilities, homeless youth, and children from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language are currently identified under Education Article § 7-1A-06 as those who would be given priority in expanding prekindergarten slots to 3- and 4-year olds under the Blueprint regardless of income, and a change made in 2023 allowed for them to be counted as Tier I through school year 2025-2026, existing Education Article § 7-1A-01 which defines Tiers for purposes of funding does not include populations beyond income eligibility and homeless youth.

When amendments to address this oversight were proposed in SB0913 from 2023, staff estimated Howard County would gain an additional \$588,204 in the state share of prekindergarten funding for students with disabilities in full-day slots being served by the HCPSS Office of Early Intervention Service. From the most recent September 30 enrollment, approximately 160 students enrolled in full-day prekindergarten programs identified as either Tier II, III, or no income documentation provided who are also identified as receiving Special Education services. Additional information gathering would be needed to determine the funding impact for the current year, and of adding children who are from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language.

During the 2025 session, the legislature passed HB1475 Mixed Delivery Model Viability Act which mandates a study of many of the above areas of the early childhood requirements, with an interim report due June 2026 and a final report due December 2027. The long timeframe for the study is

warranted given the amount of topics to be addressed, but implementation pressures felt by both public and private providers are immediate.

Pillar 2

During the 2025 legislative session the Moore Administration and the Maryland General Assembly attempted to address the mounting fiscal pressures facing the State under HB0504/SB0429 Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act. As passed, the bill delays the date by which collaborative time must begin to be implemented to July 1, 2028, and makes the period during which it is implemented a seven-year phase-in, rather than an eight-year phase-in. Per pupil funding will contain the additional \$163 in FY26 attributed to collaborative time, however after FY26, collaborative time funding increases are paused until FY29.

While the loss of expected funding means re-working future budgets, the final outcome of the bill gave the State and local school systems additional time to plan for collaborative time. Although the bill ultimately pushed back the issue of how to calculate the Blueprint's requirement that teachers on levels one, two, and three of the career ladder will teach on average 60 percent of their time, with the balance spent on identifying and working with students needing additional supports and improvement, as well as time for collaboration with other teachers, a collective effort between local school systems, MSDE, and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) to develop an implementation strategy during the delay is imperative to plan ahead for FY29. Whether the delay and teacher recruitment efforts at the statewide level will bring a significant influx of teachers is also yet to be determined.

As National Board Certification (NBC) continues to be the method by which teachers will be measured for movement up the career ladder, a closer look at the expected costs and relevance to different types of teachers and administrators would be beneficial. Most community colleges, for instance, require a Master's degree specifically in the content area (as opposed to a Master's degree in pedagogy of the content) to teach dual enrollment courses, limiting the pool of potential local school system teachers who could teach these courses within high schools to support expansion of post-CCR pathways when the Blueprint focuses on obtaining NBC. The Board also supported the portion of HB1245/SB0852 that would have removed NBC requirements for assistant principals and principals. In Howard County, and most other local school systems, principals and assistant principals fall under a separate bargaining unit than our teachers. The Blueprint career ladder structure assumes teachers and administrators flow through the same union and creates standards, such as National Board Certification and requirements for teaching time in the classroom, that are not appropriate benchmarks that can uniformly be applied to administrators. [MSDE's Education Policy Committee recently considered criteria](#) for achieving level four teacher leadership and administrator tracks on the career ladder, which was ultimately withheld given concerns over NBC being used as an indicator of principal effectiveness.

Pillar 3

In another area of the Blueprint, the current requirement to cover all post-College and Career Readiness (CCR) pathway costs for students is one of the innovative approaches to propel students forward by removing fiscal barriers. For that reason, it is also costly for local school systems. Recognizing that the current cost of tuition and fees for dual enrollment exceeded the formula funding available from the State, HB1426 was passed in 2024 to give the AIB along with the Maryland State Board of Education the ability to limit dual enrollment courses. The entities passed a [joint policy in April 2024](#) that set the minimum limit local school systems are responsible for financially at two dual enrollment courses per Fall, Winter, and Spring academic semester per student, along with exam fees directly connected to courses that students are enrolled in for their first attempt at an exam. While students are able to take additional courses, the costs are the responsibility of the student. HB1426 only allowed the authority to set limits, however, through FY27.

Multiple pieces of legislation from the 2025 session, including HB1262, HB1252, and HB1245/SB0852, attempted to address similar fiscal constraints for other areas of the three available post-CCR pathways. The bills would have allowed local school systems to limit costs for all post-CCR pathways if a local board develops guidelines and procedures for payments. For income-eligible students, the pathways would continue to be provided at no cost. The Board supported these bills given they allowed local boards of education to address the fiscal impact of this one-size-fits-all requirement under the Blueprint. None of the bills passed in 2025. When comparing the FY25 CCR revenues provided to HCPSS vs. FY25 unaudited actual expenses, there is a \$7.5 million variance in

additional costs to the school system. For the FY26 expected revenue and the related programs approved budgets, the difference is estimated to be \$6.8 million.

With the Blueprint's changes to the structure and oversight of Career and Technical Education (CTE), the CTE Committee within the Governor's Workforce Development Board, the Maryland Department of Labor, and MSDE all play a role in guidance around apprenticeships in Maryland. Looking at the [Youth Apprenticeship Policy](#) issued by the Department of Labor in 2022, and then cross referencing that with the [new guidance and language issued](#) by the CTE Committee and the AIB at the end of 2024, there are numerous discrepancies that include required hours and terminology. There is also no reference to the Apprenticeship Maryland Program (AMP), which is the program approved by MSDE and what all districts use to enroll students for participation in apprenticeship work-based learning and industry related instruction. This program has allowed our students to begin registered apprenticeship programs through a School to Apprenticeship model, which has been the standard pipeline for many industries. The decisions of the CTE Committee and the AIB have identified that only the high school level of Registered Apprenticeship, or Youth Apprenticeship with an approved Industry Recognized Credential (IRC), will count towards the Blueprint's statewide goal to achieve 45 percent of high school students completing an apprenticeship or industry credential by 2030. The required hours for Registered Apprenticeship, however, have been reduced by almost 50 percent and this now applies to both the high school level of registered and youth apprenticeship options.

HCPSS has one of the highest School to Apprenticeship percentages for youth apprenticeship in the state, meaning many of the youth apprenticeship positions our students hold as seniors also count as their first year of registered apprenticeship, and provide a direct transition to advanced standing in registered apprenticeships. Traditionally, the AMP is its own CTE program of study. In May 2025, [MSDE proposed a new model for the CTE programs of study](#) that, among other major changes, would eliminate the ability of local school systems to offer the AMP as its own program. Instead, an apprenticeship becomes an option only after a student has taken two sequential courses in a CTE pathway, or two years of the same world language or sequential courses in a comprehensive arts program, or inclusion in an IEP/504 transition plan with supporting documentation. This would limit students who have not met the requirement such as those that previously used Career Research and Development as the first course into entering AMP. Some students used AMP only as a program of study to both meet their graduation requirement and complete apprenticeship. Therefore, they did not meet the previously described requirements to access apprenticeship. Also, students may begin in a CTE program of study but switch to apprenticeship before completing two sequential courses, therefore they would not have access to apprenticeship or other work-based learning opportunities either. With Blueprint's goal of 45 percent of students participating in the high school level of a registered apprenticeship or completing an industry recognized credential, it is concerning that apprenticeship has been linked as a third course in a sequence rather than highlighted as the gold standard program that was described in guiding documentation.

Pillar 4

Foundational to the Blueprint is the increased funding available for at-risk populations to address additional educational and social-emotional needs. Particularly for students in circumstances of poverty, compensatory education weights, as well as additional per pupil funding and personnel grants to establish and enhance community schools in areas of concentrated poverty were added by Blueprint. Under Education Article § 5-222 the calculation for compensatory education enrollment includes students who are directly certified. Direct certification is an automated system that matches student information with data from other public agencies, such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and Medicaid. If a student is enrolled in one of these programs, they are automatically certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and used for purposes of calculating compensatory education funding and enrollment. Using direct certification data allows schools to identify and support these students more efficiently.

With the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA) by the Federal government [Maryland schools are expecting to see significant financial impacts](#). OBBA's reduction to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility may result in fewer children automatically eligible for free school meals and compensatory education. Declining percentages of eligible students would also decrease the number of funded community schools over time, despite students continuing to need services and being further disadvantaged by changes at the federal level. Similar to ensuring at-risk populations were not impacted by the drop in per-pupil dollar amounts under HB0504/SB0429 in 2025, a hold harmless

provision for compensatory education weights and community school eligibility would support local school system efforts to maintain services for the state's most vulnerable populations.

Recent legislation and workgroup recommendations have also recognized funding challenges specific to special education. Under HB0504/SB0429, in consultation with AIB, MSDE must use an independent entity to conduct a study of funding for special education. A [Special Education Workgroup](#), convened in 2023 as part of the Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan, issued its [final report](#) in December 2024 and an [addendum](#) in May 2025. Both the required report under HB0504/SB0429 and the work plan recommended by the Special Education Workgroup are not due, however, until December of 2026.

Pillar 5

Under the initial passage of Blueprint, updates to the State's Financial Reporting Manual were required by July 1, 2023. When that deadline had passed, the legislature addressed this issue by withholding funding from MSDE to compel reporting on implementation of their new financial reporting system and the manual under SB0360, with its [report issued in August 2024](#). Given the difficulties highlighted in this report, the AIB and MSDE issued [a policy on the implementation of Minimum School Fund reporting](#) in May 2024. The AIB also recently [revised](#) a policy and process for requesting waivers under Education Article § 5-406(f) that allows local school systems to request "greater flexibility in meeting this requirement for reasons including a significant shift in total enrollment or at-promise enrollment between schools from the prior school year to the current school year."

As part of HB1245/SB0852, which did not ultimately pass in 2025, amendments were proposed to minimum school funding to allow the eight Blueprint funding categories to be reported in the aggregate at the school level. The implementation of minimum school funding reporting requirements under Education Article § 5-234, remains a significant new financial process.

Given the breadth of the issues outlined above, **the Board is asking the Howard County Delegation to support legislation that refocuses the Blueprint to maintain overall goals while giving discretion and control to meet those goals to the local boards of education.** The Board remains committed to the success of the original tenants of the Blueprint, and acknowledges the Maryland General Assembly's efforts to date to make changes to statute to ease implementation. More can be done, however, to pull back on the inflexible pace and mandates found throughout each pillar. The Board and HCPSS will also continue to collaborate with the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) and the Public School Superintendent's Association of Maryland (PSSAM) to prioritize statewide legislative asks leading up to session.

Summer School Tuition

During the 2021 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB0394 Public Schools - Fees for Summer School Courses - Prohibition. This, now law, prohibits a local school system from charging a student a fee for enrollment in a summer school course if the student attends a school in the local school system, credit for the course is required for graduation from a high school in the local school system, and the student previously took the course, but did not successfully complete or receive credit for the course. At the time, the Board supported the bill with amendments to both narrow the application of the tuition waiver and ask for sufficient funding to cover the cost of the delivery of services by the local school system similar to per pupil funding for the provision of traditional school services. Summer courses are not required offerings, therefore the only way tuition waivers are feasible is through the collection of equivalent fees from funding authorities. Testimony from Howard County as well as other local school systems pointed out that without such funding, school systems will be forced to cut, or significantly reduce, programming when making budgetary decisions.

Since the passage of HB0394, coupled with a rise in students retaking courses, HCPSS staff have seen a shift in revenues for summer school courses that is unsustainable. Approximately 70 percent of participants are retaking a class, with only 30 percent being required to pay tuition. During Summer 2025, 649 students qualified for tuition waiver under the legislation, totaling \$415,350. The cost for teachers, materials, and other resources needed for the operation of a summer school class continues to increase, however, regardless of the percentage of students HCPSS can charge tuition.

Current costs for a summer school course with HCPSS are \$325 for a 0.5 credit course and \$650 for a 1.0 credit course. Students eligible for Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs) automatically receive a 50 percent tuition reduction upon verification, and parents can also complete a Financial Assistance Application to be reviewed for potential additional tuition reductions when a family experiences financial hardships such as unemployment of a parent or guardian, pending foreclosure or eviction, and medical hardship. With additional financial assistance, some families receive a reduction of 75-100 percent.

Prior to the passage of HB0394, HCPSS charged a nominal fee of \$50 per course for any participant repeating a course. This proved to be an incentive for registering families to attend summer school courses, where tuition was listed as a barrier to participation. Since the implementation of HB0394, staff have seen a 23 percent increase in the number of students eligible for a fee waiver that register for a course, but never attend. During Summer 2025, that percentage was 39 percent (250 of 649 students). We believe this is because there is no recourse for a student to participate.

The Board agrees with the intent of HB0394 to ensure cost does not become a barrier to students completing and graduating from high school. For most students, when needing to retake one or two classes, they can fit them within their regular schedule during the school day and still graduate within four years. When students fail multiple classes, then they normally have to take an extra course outside the school day/year at some point to stay on track for graduation. Beyond summer school, HCPSS has expanded evening programs, and students can enroll in a fully online or Howard Community College course as needed. At the time of introduction, the sponsoring legislator also wanted to ensure affordability of summer school wasn't heightened for those families impacted by the pandemic. However, it is overly broad in the sense that any credit-bearing course taken during high school towards a graduation pathway is eligible for a waiver of fees.

The Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for amendments to Education Article § 7-211, in combination or as separate options, as follows:

A local school system may not charge a student [a fee] **MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF LOCALLY ESTABLISHED TUITION** for enrollment in a summer school course if:

- (1) The student attends a school in the local school system;
- (2) Credit for the course is required for graduation from a high school **THAT SUMMER** in the local school system; and
- (3) The student previously took the course, but did not successfully complete or receive credit for the course.

Reportable Offenses

Following the [arrest of a Howard High School student](#) in 2024 and subsequent discussions statewide on the topic of reportable offense reporting, HCPSS staff reviewed Education Article § 7-303 for potential improvements in the current law.

The Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE), following a request from members of the Howard County Delegation, [adopted an emergency regulation on October 22, 2024](#), to amend COMAR 13A.08.01.17F *Confidentiality of Information and Retention of Documents* soon after the events in Howard County. Specifically, this change shifted a “may” to “shall” in regard to sharing information when a student with a known reportable offense transfers between school districts in Maryland. The State Superintendent of Schools along with MSBE also [testified before](#) the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR) in early December 2024 to discuss the emergency regulation as well as present on potential areas of the reportable offense statute that [might be fixed via legislation](#).

To address gaps in communication beyond inter-county sharing, **the Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for amendments to Education Article § 7-303 within the following three focus areas** based on local experience and a review of the current process:

- Express the need for law enforcement to share reportable offense information expeditiously, and with greater detail to the extent it would help the school system make a placement determination - recommended amendment under § 7-303(b):
 - (1) Shall notify the following individuals of the arrest [and the charges] within 24 hours of the arrest **AND PROVIDE THE ARREST REPORT OR A DESCRIPTION WITH DETAILS PERTINENT TO SCHOOL SAFETY TO INCLUDE WHETHER ANY VICTIMS WERE STUDENTS AND THE TYPE OF WEAPON INVOLVED IF APPLICABLE. CHARGES SHOULD THEN BE PROVIDED** [or] as soon as practicable:
- Create a support system at the state level that would facilitate sharing intended by changes to COMAR 13A.08.01.17F and help with locating enrollment when reports are received for a non-local student - recommended addition under § 7-303:
 - **(D) THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SHALL DEVELOP A STATEWIDE DATABASE AND GUIDELINES FOR SHARING REPORTS RECEIVED UNDER SUBSECTION (B) TO FACILITATE AWARENESS OF LOCAL SUPERINTENDENTS WHEN STUDENTS TRANSFER BETWEEN JURISDICTIONS AS WELL AS LOCATING THE SCHOOL OR JURISDICTION OF ATTENDANCE WHEN A REPORT IS RECEIVED BY A LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM FOR A STUDENT NOT CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN THAT COUNTY.**
- Require the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) to share reportable offense information in the same manner law enforcement does - recommended addition under § 7-303:
 - **(G) FOR A STUDENT UNDER THE CUSTODY OR SUPERVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL NOTIFY THE LOCAL SUPERINTENDENT AND THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OF A SCHOOL IN WHICH THE STUDENT IS ENROLLED OR TO WHICH THE STUDENT HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED OF THE STUDENT’S REPORTABLE OFFENSE OR OFFENSE THAT IS RELATED TO THE STUDENT’S MEMBERSHIP IN A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION, THE DISPOSITION OF THE REPORTABLE OFFENSE, AND THE LAW ENFORCEMENT REPORT OR A DESCRIPTION OF THE OFFENSE INCLUDING DETAILS PERTINENT TO SCHOOL SAFETY TO INCLUDE WHETHER ANY VICTIMS WERE STUDENTS AND THE TYPE OF WEAPON INVOLVED IF APPLICABLE.**

During the 2025 session close to ten separate bills related to reportable offenses were introduced and contained amendments ranging from adding and/or removing offenses, changing agencies with reporting requirements, and altering the definition in regard to where an offense occurred. One bill, HB1265,

passed out of the House of Delegates after considerable amendments were made to attempt to balance the issues that had been raised. As it became evident during the 2025 session that many advocates had feedback on the topic of reportable offenses, including local school systems, the Maryland State Department of Education, law enforcement agencies, and DJS, HB1265 was amended to include a workgroup that would bring together stakeholders to identify and discuss operational matters within the process. None of the bills ultimately passed.

As an alternative to specific amendments, **the Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for legislation establishing a workgroup as proposed under HB1265** to address operational matters including those in our recommended language above for timeliness and contents of reports to local school systems, state-level facilitation in sharing between counties, and proposals for future amendments to Education Article § 7-303 such as authority for information sharing by DJS.

Capital Funding – HB1450 Report

HB1450 Howard County Task Force to Study Revenue Options for School Capital Needs was a local bill passed in 2024 that intended to bring together stakeholders to identify capital needs of HCPSS and study options for closing any identified funding gaps. The Task Force convened in August 2024, and was required to submit its findings and recommendations by October 2024. Specifically, the Task Force charge was to:

- Identify the capital needs, including deferred maintenance, of Howard County Public Schools through 2035;
- Determine the projected funding expected to be allocated to HCPSS capital projects through 2035;
- Identify the anticipated funding gaps for HCPSS capital projections under current revenue projections through 2035; and
- Study options for closing any identified funding gaps for HCPSS capital projects under current revenue projections through 2035, including:
 - Allocating a higher percentage of revenue from the transfer tax to HCPSS capital projects;
 - Enacting a commercial excise tax;
 - Exercising existing authority, the County may use to generate additional revenue; and
 - Studying any other potential revenue sources the Task Force determines appropriate.

Given the short turn-around time, the group continued work on the report through summer 2025, with its final report issued in early August. The report initially identifies a \$40.7 million per year projected gap in capital funds on average for the next 10 years. It also highlighted the volatility in available revenues over the years, while the cost of construction has continued to climb and the State's share of capital projects for Howard County dropped over those same years from 61 percent to 56 percent in FY24, to 51 percent in FY26 and an anticipated 50 percent in FY27.

Recommendations for closing the gap are broken down into those for county administration, state leaders, and Board of Education/HCPSS leaders. Of those with a legislative focus for state and local leaders, the report includes:

- Increase County funding to HCPSS projects and establish a baseline of 10-50% of annual PAYGO spending to HCPSS capital projects.
- Work with the State to seek additional taxation authority where possible while balancing the overall local tax burden on businesses and residents.
- Increase the amount of State funding available in regular annual IAC allocations.
- Consider another round of dedicated one-time capital funding, to address Blueprint-related State mandates, and/or show more flexibility in thresholds, timelines, and implementation requirements in meeting unfunded mandates.
- Establish a floor for State share percentage for eligible project costs to stop the continued shrinking of State participation for HCPSS projects.
- Evaluate the re-allocation of Transfer Tax.

The Board encourages the Howard County Council and Howard County Delegation to act on the recommendations from the HB1450 Task Force report to continue progress towards efforts that will garner additional capital resources for the school system.

Universal Student Meals

In 2021 the Universal School Meals Program Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to permanently provide free meals to all school children regardless of income following the end of funding from the Federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic. With no movement in either chamber, [eight states](#) have implemented legislation or extended funding to prolong free meals beyond the federal investment. Despite [extensive support](#) from local school systems including HCPSS, the Maryland Association of Boards of Education and the Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland, and many Maryland health advocates, a similar Maryland bill failed to pass in 2023. The same version introduced in 2024, SB0579, ultimately became a study bill mandating a report on the cost to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students in public schools in Maryland.

The resulting report [issued in December 2024](#), when accounting for expected federal reimbursements, projected the costs for universal meals in Maryland to be \$162 million for SY26 and \$169 million for SY27. No subsequent legislation was introduced during the 2025 session.

For HCPSS, nearly 70 percent of students (based on the school system's current 30 percent rate of Free and Reduced-priced Meals (FARMS) eligibility) are required to pay for meals if they choose to participate in the school's program. If all meals are served free of charge to all children, regardless of their income eligibility – although some households will continue to provide packed lunches at their discretion – HCPSS Food and Nutrition Services staff envisions participation rates will increase significantly (similar to the levels experienced during the pandemic when all meals were free). Student participation in meal programs is critical to the viability and sustainability of the program and the expected increase would result in increased net income, since 55 percent of Food and Nutrition Services costs are fixed (labor and benefits). A positive impact of the proposed legislation would also be reduced meal debt. HCPSS had \$1.5 million in debt at the end of SY25, which must be covered by operating funds if unpaid by families.

Regarding the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA) at the federal level, receipt of Medicaid is one factor used in determining whether schools can participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of free breakfasts and lunches to all students in a qualifying school. HCPSS currently has 11 CEP schools, and based on current levels it is expected this program will continue at these schools at least for FY26.

With impending cuts to Medicaid, children who qualify for free meals under Medicaid without the need to submit a FARMS application would no longer have access to free meals unless they individually apply. This may inadvertently result in an overall reduction in the HCPSS FARMS percentages. The potential reduction in federal funds means the estimated numbers for universal meals above would also likely need to be increased.

The Board continues to seek Howard County Delegation support of State funded universal meals to increase meal participation, reduce food insecurity, improve academic performance, improve nutrition and dietary intake, and reduce/eliminate excessive unpaid meal charge balances. If estimated costs are deemed not feasible for the State, the Board seeks hold harmless legislation for FARMS funding, and CEP schools specifically, based on the real possibility future eligibility will decrease.

School Calendar

In order to maximize instructional time, the Board has a long-standing legislative position on the need for flexibility in the development of the local school system calendar. Setting the school system calendar begins with meeting the parameters set forth under Education Article § 7-103 and further requirements of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) under COMAR 13A.03.02.12. In particular, schools must:

- be open for pupil attendance 180 days during a 10-month period;
- have a minimum of 1,080 hours of instruction at the elementary and middle school levels;
- have a minimum of 1,170 hours of instruction at the high school level; and
- have a minimum of three hours of instruction to count as a school day.

Limiting the requirement for schools to only count hours, instead of hours and days, would be a true reflection of overall time students are learning in the classroom and allow local school systems to determine how those hours are distributed without reducing the amount of instructional time occurring. Maryland is already [at the top of the nation-wide range](#) in instructional hours as one of eight states that sets at least a minimum of 1,080 hours regardless of level. Locally, MSDE [issued recommendations](#) in 2017 to enhance student achievement through innovative school schedules. The report recognized flexibility is key to accomplishing academic gains shown to result from increasing instructional time, while focusing mainly on ways to reduce prolonged lapses in instructional time for students. Similarly, a [2017 study of competency-based education](#) in the U.S. by ExcelinEd and EducationCounsel recommended states consider providing “flexibility with regard to how annual calendars and daily schedules can be constructed” to ensure instructional focus remains on the quality of education and student performance rather than quantity measured by time in seats. Learning-loss associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the topic of calendar flexibility further into focus as a means to be innovative in the delivery of education.

Following several years of failed bills aimed at removing the 180 day and 10-month requirement to allow school systems statewide to explore the use of innovative scheduling models, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) successfully advocated for the passage of HB0226 in 2025 as a local pilot allowing them to count hours instead of days through the elimination of early dismissal days. [AACPS noted in testimony on the bill](#) that half-days are disruptive to students, families, and employees.

Similar to AACPS, calendar development staff for HCPSS have noted attendance on early dismissal days is often lower than average full-days. When the data was last explored for SY23 and SY24, average student attendance across all days for Howard County schools ranged from 92.7 percent to 93.9 percent. Attendance data from half-days throughout each school year showed attendance dropped as low as 81.6 percent. HCPSS had 13 half-days in elementary and high school incorporated into the SY25 calendar, and 11 half-days in middle school. Thirteen half-days are scheduled for all levels in the SY26 calendar.

In addition to attendance, the authority under HB0226 could be beneficial for continuity of learning by shifting two half days needed for professional development or teacher work time to one full day of school and one full day of professional development. A full day of instruction is routine for student learning without interruption, while a full day of professional development also minimizes interruption for staff. Half-days can also present struggles for parents who need full-day childcare, including those parents who are also staff within the school system who must complete their normal work hours. **The Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for local legislation similar to HB0226.**

Taking into account stakeholder input at the local level, the HCPSS school year calendar development process further balances curriculum requirements, professional development for staff, the potential for regional weather closings, mandated holidays, and the operational impact of religious holidays reflective of the county’s diverse population. Education Article § 7-103(c) designates the following as public school holidays:

- Thanksgiving Day and the day after;
- Christmas Eve and from then through January 1;
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day;
- Presidents’ Day;

- The Friday before Easter and from then through the Monday after Easter;
- Memorial Day; and
- Primary and general election days.

In attempting to meet the requirements for minimum hours and days, local school systems can submit applications to the Maryland State Board of Education for adjustments in the requirements including through changes in length of the school day or year, going beyond the 10-month timeframe, or being open on holidays only if normal school attendance is prevented because of a natural or civil disaster, or severe weather conditions.

School calendars and the inclusion of religious holidays was the topic of local legislation for HCPSS during the 2025 session under Ho.Co. 10-25, as well as HB1169 which would have required schools in both Howard County and Montgomery County to close for students in observance of the following additional holidays:

- Diwali
- Eid Al-Adha
- Eid Al-Fitr
- Lunar New Year
- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur

The Board opposed HB1169 on the grounds of local control. Under current practice, the HCPSS Calendar Committee includes representation of local religious groups and readily available resources to guide planning and any recommendations around impacts of the school calendar in relation to holidays. Planning typically starts two years in advance of a school year, and the Committee's best efforts are used to make recommendations around any potential fluctuation in dates.

By requiring closures in law as opposed to allowing local flexibility to set and adjust the calendar to meet operational needs, HB1169 presented logistical challenges. Current holidays mandated under Education Article § 7-103(c) are statewide and thus have set dates well into the future. Holidays proposed under HB1169, particularly those that are based on the sighting of the moon, [are often not set until the weeks or days leading up to the event](#). Without State guidance on the particular day of closure for a holiday, however, HCPSS could very easily be out of compliance last minute without a practical way to shift dates if legislative mandates such as HB1169 were to pass.

As an alternative to legislative mandates for the addition or removal of school holidays, **the Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for legislation that would study school system calendar needs** focusing on operational impacts and the authority of local boards of education to create policies around religious holiday observances, as well as potential flexibility in the use of existing holidays identified in statute based on local needs.

Board of Education Salaries

Under Education Article § 3-703, Board of Education of Howard County members are each paid \$16,000 annually, with the Chair of the Board receiving \$18,000. Additional compensation is provided in the form of reimbursement for travel and other expenses if available in the school system budget, and Board members are able to participate in health insurance and benefit programs. The statute was last updated in 2018, when Board member salaries increased by \$1,000 under HB0340.

For other elected officials serving Howard County, the local County Charter requires the establishment of a Compensation Review Commission in the year before an election year that is charged with making recommendations to the Howard County Council on changes to compensation in the following four-year term. [Most recently, in 2021](#), this Commission set the base salary adopted by CB3-2022 at \$73,663 for the first year of a County Council member's term that begins December 2022, and increased the salary annually up to \$83,256 in the fourth year. The Council Chair receives an additional \$3,500 annually. Like Board of Education members, County Council members are expected to attend multiple meetings per month, set governing policy, and manage a budget of over one billion dollars. While only one portion of the total public services provided to county residents, Board of Education members represent nearly 9,000 employees, 56,000 students, and the Howard County community at large through stewardship of taxpayer revenues.

The Howard County Delegation addressed Board of Education compensation under a portion of Ho.Co. 2-24 and Ho.Co. 2-25, which failed to pass both years. The bill contained provisions to establish a Howard County Board of Education Compensation Commission consisting of five residents of Howard County to be appointed by the Howard County Executive and confirmed by the Howard County Council, and be staffed by the Howard County Government. The role of the Commission would be to study the salaries of the members of the Board and issue a report on the appropriate compensation every four years. Once the Council receives the Commission's report, they may recommend changes to the salary, however not more than the recommendation of the Commission. If approved by resolution, the Council would then submit to the Howard County Delegation who have the option to alter the salary of Board members via legislation.

The compensation portions of Ho.Co. 2-24 and 2-25 were similar to [HB0150](#) which passed in 2018 as a local bill applicable to Board of Education of Montgomery County. The one difference, however, is HB0150 mandated the above report be sent directly to the Montgomery County Delegation for potential action, without the additional step requiring resolution action by the local County Council found in Ho.Co. 2-24 and 2-25. Since establishment, the Montgomery County Board of Education Compensation Commission has [reported once in 2019](#) and recommended an annual salary of \$60,000 for members, \$70,000 for their chair, as well as a stipend and scholarship for the student member equal to 20 and 40 percent of the board's respective salaries. No change in statute for board members has since been made by the Montgomery County Delegation.

In other counties across Maryland, annual local board member salaries range from \$25,000 in Montgomery County down to \$2,000 in Kent County. Baltimore County salaries were recently increased from \$7,500 to \$16,500, with the chair receiving \$17,500, under HB0108/SB0451 passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2024. During the 2025 session, Anne Arundel County increased the scholarship award for a student member under HB0402/SB0307 from \$8,000 to \$15,000, and Montgomery County passed HB1207 which gives student members flexibility in the receipt of compensation. As introduced, HB1207 also contained salary amendments for board members, starting with \$62,000 in December 2025 and increasing to \$124,000 in December 2026. All increases for board members were removed, however, prior to the bill's passage. Wicomico County added a student member of the Board under HB1524 in 2025, which also authorized the Wicomico County Council to set a salary greater than the current annual compensation amounts required for elected members (\$3,700) and the chair (\$4,000).

Investments in Board salaries that reflect the executive level demands of the position would help attract a diverse pool of candidates, and could contribute to longevity on the Board when members are able to financially sustain participation. To address the need for a salary increase in Howard County, without the use of a Compensation Commission which to date has not proven to result in timely changes, **the Board is seeking Howard County Delegation support for legislation that increases Board member salaries.**