



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GROUP

Dr. Alvin Thornton
Chair, Prince George's County Board of Education
14201 School Lane
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

January 6, 2021

Re: Support of Adoption of a Resolution Committing to Implementation of a Climate Change Action Plan Focus Workgroup

Dear Dr. Thornton,

The Prince George's Sierra Club supports the adoption of a resolution to form a Focus Workgroup to create and implement a Climate Action Plan for Prince George's County Schools. The Sierra Club is our country's oldest grassroots environmental organization, comprised of state chapters and local groups that engage the public in protecting the environment and advocating for environmental and social justice. Addressing the climate crisis while addressing historic social inequities is our most urgent priority. For our children's health and future well-being, we urge the Prince George's County Board of Education to develop a Climate Action Plan to decrease greenhouse gas emissions in school operations and adapt our infrastructure for climate readiness.

With wildfires and extreme weather events of 2020 and recent years, it is increasingly apparent that climate change is not a distant threat in a far-off future. It is here, now. If we don't act urgently to mitigate human impacts on our atmosphere, we endanger our children's future. We urge the Board of Education to adopt a clear timeline to transition Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) to 100% clean energy, including the energy used for electricity, heating, cooling, cooking, and transportation. New, more efficient systems require some initial investment but decrease the expense of fuel and maintenance over the long run. Retrofitting older buildings to improve energy efficiency decreases greenhouse gas emissions and fuel costs as well. Moreover, it is essential that the school system's facilities – including outdoor areas and natural spaces -- be designed and built to withstand and mitigate the impact of more frequent extreme precipitation events and excess heat days. We support of initiation of a Focus Workgroup to develop a School Climate Change Action Plan that will outline how to implement necessary changes in a timely, cost-effective, and equitable manner.

With documented impacts of climate change threatening human health and well-being as well as natural habitats, our County has a responsibility to use all available tools to decrease our emissions of greenhouse gases and to adapt to the changes that are occurring. While we can lament the fact that so

much damage has already been done, the sooner climate-mitigating local and regional policies can be implemented the less harm will occur in years to come. As you know, Prince George's County's Climate Action Commission is developing a Climate Action Plan for the County. County efforts to decrease greenhouse gases, adapt our infrastructure to withstand changing conditions, and build resilience in our communities will be incomplete if the school system does not adopt similar measures. We know that our schools can be a beacon for the change we need to see and by acting can be an example for us all. To give our children the future they deserve, schools must lead by example, modelling sustainable choices and behaviors to create the social norms of the future.

A well-developed Climate Action Plan will

- Reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of our county school system;
- Limit exposure of children to air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels in the buildings and on buses;
- Allow for improved heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems that will improve indoor air quality in the learning environment;
- Create buildings that are more resilient to flooding and storms;
- Reduce food waste and associated pollution;
- Save money from reduced maintenance and fuel costs over time;
- Create an opportunity for STEM, vocational, and other students to learn, hands on, about the technologies of the future;
- Set up a healthier more equitable learning environment for all students.

As you plan for systemic change in the post-COVID world, we urge you to build for the future we can expect, not the past we have experienced. Act urgently to address both the causes and the effects of climate change. Prioritize improvements in schools that serve our most vulnerable populations who have been hit hardest by the COVID 19 pandemic and are at greatest risk from the effects of climate change. The children of Prince George's County deserve this investment in their future.

Sincerely,



Janet Gingold, Chair

Prince George's Sierra Club

CC:

Edward Burroughs III, Vice Chair, District 8
David Murray, District 1
Joshua M. Thomas, District 2
Pamela Boozer-Strother, District 3
Shayla Adams-Stafford, District 4
Raaheela Ahmed, District 5
Belinda Queen, District 6
Kenneth Harris II, District 7

Sonya Williams, District 9
Paul Monteiro, Appointed
Sandra D. Shephard, Appointed
Curtis Valentine, M.P.P., Appointed
Ninah Jackson, Student Member of the Board