

Dear Prince George's County Board of Education

These comments are of the Sierra Club Climate Parents campaign in Prince George's County. Climate Parents is a campaign that is calling for 100% Clean Energy Schools throughout the nation.

We want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the FY2023-28 six-year Capital Improvement Plans (CIP). It is important for these short- and long-term capital decisions to consider the environmental health of the students in an equitable fashion, the long term climate impact and resilience, and ways to improve the financial well being of the school system. We have several general comments on the approach that PGCCPS should take with respect to energy choices in capital projects as well as two specific comments with the proposal document.

The Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) Buildings Subgroup is currently drafting a report that points not just towards the environmental and health benefits of relying on electric heating systems, but towards the cost savings as well. In the draft report<sup>1</sup> when new large commercial buildings (of which schools would be equivalent) install all electric heating systems (namely air source heat pumps (ASHP) or ground source heat pumps (GSHP)) they are projected to result in cost savings over using gas-fired systems. Of course, with heating systems being electric, it also makes sense for cooking and water heating systems to follow suit. When it comes to retrofits, the cost savings of electrification are even more substantial (more than a third), as long as an existing gas heating boiler is maintained for backup purposes. PGCCPS should follow this lead.

And PGCCPS should follow this lead in all circumstances. The evidence of the recently constructed buildings that relied on conventional financing is that they are heated and cooled with GSHPs and are also LEED Gold certified which points towards the projects in the pipeline being on the right direction, but the new ACF schools are only being certified LEED Silver and there is no evidence that the private partners are being required to install efficient, electric heating and cooking systems. Guarantees should be made that the six current schools in the ACF pipeline to follow the more economical long-term route of electric heating and cooking systems and future ACF schools should include this requirement any Request For Proposals (RFP) from the start to avoid any problems.

There are other benefits financially to PGCCPS in choosing GSHPs. Recently the Maryland General Assembly passed "Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard and Geothermal Heating and Cooling Systems" SB 810/HB 1007 that created a carveout in the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) that would allow any GSHP systems that come online after January 1, 2023 to sell credits to power providers.<sup>2</sup> An additional carve out exists if these systems are installed in schools with high levels of reduced price/free lunch use. Participation in this program could result in further long-term cost savings for installing GSHPs in both conventionally-financed and ACF schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the analysis presented here:

[https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MWG\\_Buildings%20Ad%20Hoc%20Group/Maryland%20Buildings%20Analysis%20Early%20Results%20E3%20Presentation%2007132021.pdf](https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MWG_Buildings%20Ad%20Hoc%20Group/Maryland%20Buildings%20Analysis%20Early%20Results%20E3%20Presentation%2007132021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/bills/hb/hb1007E.pdf>

Concerning specific comments on the proposal, the five point prioritization structure on page 9 should be amended to add a sixth area of concern and that is eliminating fossil fuel use. This would align the prioritization with the March 1, 2021 adoption of the Prince George's County Board of Education Climate Change Action Plan Focus Work Group Resolution, which outlined a goal to phase out fossil fuels in buildings by 2040.

Secondly, it is unclear from the descriptions what boilers and HVAC systems in existing buildings are being replaced with during a renovation process, nor is it clear what type of HVAC systems are being put in new buildings. The evidence of PGCPs having 10 schools with geothermal heating and cooling systems (i.e. GSHPs) points towards these replacements and new builds likely being fossil-fuel free, but it is challenging to discern from the documentation. Clarity in the final document would help members of the public provide more salient feedback.

In summary, PGCPs has made great strides to achieving a sustainable future for our children. We hope that future iterations of the CIP can make those efforts clearer. We also need to make sure that all new buildings, regardless of how they are financed, are all electric and efficient, and that efforts are made to replace boilers with electric options while maintaining old boilers for back-up purposes.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at [climateparentsPGMD@gmail.com](mailto:climateparentsPGMD@gmail.com).

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Jakuta".

Joseph Jakuta  
Lead Volunteer  
Climate Parents of Prince George's County