Testimony on: FY23 Educational Facilities Master Plan
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Hearing Date: June 21, 2022

Director Matlock:

Thank you for considering our testimony on the Prince George's County Public School (PGCPS) FY 23 Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP). Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in our schools and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with PGCPS technical staff, elected officials, students, and other advocates to develop a Climate Action Plan for PGCPS as part of a Board of Education Focus Workgroup.

Through that work we are knowledgeable of the great many things that PGCPS is accomplishing with its new buildings and major retrofits. The fact that nearly all new buildings are being constructed with ground source heat pumps, efficient lighting, and, in some cases, with solar panels is a testament to the progress being made by PGCPS. This progress would not have happened without thoughtful analyses being conducted by staff that consider the health of the students and environment, as well as the long term costs to taxpayers.

That being said, we would like to see the final EFMP cite specifically from the final Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP)[1] as adopted by the Board of Education on April 28, 2022. Several recommendations from the CCAP that the EFMP needs to discuss are:

1. Prioritizing phase out of R22 based HVAC systems;
2. Ensuring new buildings are constructed as resiliency hubs;
3. Including installation of solar panels;
4. Consolidating PGCPS staff in a central efficient building;
5. Reducing paved surfaces;
6. Reusing already developed properties for school sites; and
7. Preserving existing trees and woodlands during the site development process.

There are important parts of the CCAP that are in the EFMP that we are thankful for. That the next cycle of condition updates will include collection of "energy usage information for each facility" for use in building evaluation is crucial. Though this information also needs to be included as a criteria in determining the order of building replacement. Burning fuels in buildings produces harmful air pollution that can affect students' learning and fuel costs are becoming more volatile and expensive, so prioritizing such replacement will lead to healthier learning environments, less pollution, and more cost savings.

Food waste in PGCPS is unnecessarily contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and we have the opportunity to take action now as new schools are being built and existing schools are being "retrofitted". We urge Facilities to reference the final CCAP and take the following steps which would reduce food waste and promote climate friendly foods:

- All new construction should include plans for kitchens that are equipped for scratch-cooking;

[1] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BSPdabwAOxJGMaq0KgdkCZlp9TMB6L1A/view

- Ensure all facilities have the infrastructure for composting food waste on campus;
- Designate school land for food production, such as raised beds, and if possible, greenhouses; and
- Existing buildings should be retrofitted to meet the above-mentioned standards as much as possible.

Shifting to plant-forward, scratch-cooked menus has the potential to lower food costs, decrease food waste, promote local food, and most importantly, improve nutrition standards for our students which are critical for success in school.

It is also vital to address the location of new builds in the EFMP, namely to attempt to eliminate construction of schools and other facilities in flood plains, to minimize the school grounds covered in asphalt or concrete surfaces, and to reduce, if not eliminate, the need to remove trees as part of construction. Buildings in flood plains will result in school assets being exposed to higher costs due to damage, especially as climate change caused flooding worsens. Additionally, efforts to minimize paved surfaces would reduce stormwater runoff by eliminating large concrete surfaces, provide students with access to nature (which helps cognitive functioning), help reduce heat island effect by creating more shade and greenery, and ensure schoolyards work with the natural environment. Finally, what little we have in forest cover in Prince George's county should not be removed since it acts as a carbon sink and reduces flooding. Siting projects on underutilized properties such as parking lots, unused office space, etc will reduce the impact of new construction.

There are also two pieces of legislation that need to be considered in the EFMP. One is the Safe Walk to Schools Act (HB19[2]), which requires a pedestrian safety plan for all new schools that is to be submitted to the Interagency Commission in School Construction (IAC). The second is HB 566[3] which requires that new schools be designed with "waste disposal infrastructure" that includes a place for the disposal of trash, recyclables, and food scraps and a sink for liquid waste. Both bills have now become law and go to implement parts of the CCAP.

We know many of these issues are on your radar, but they need to be addressed more directly in the EFMP. That way as the EFMP informs the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) these issues that are important to the long-term financial well being of PGCPS and the health and welfare of the students are not neglected. Especially as the ACF program advances under Built to Learn, it is vital that these decisions are made with sustainability in mind. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and if you have any questions please message climateparentsPGMD@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Joseph Jakuta

[2] https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/hb0019
[3] https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/hb0566

Lead Volunteer