

Testimony on: Blueprint Schools and FY23 Capital Improvement Plan
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Meeting Date: September 22, 2022



Prince George's County Board of Education

Thank you for considering our testimony on *5.4 Approval of the Blueprint School Phase II Package and Resolution of General Terms for Blueprint Schools Phase II Package (Alternative School Construction Financing Package II) under a Public-Private Partnership Model* and *6.1 Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2024-2029*.

Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, increase the climate resilience of our school infrastructure and capacity, and benefit the children, educators, and staff who will be impacted by a changing climate. Our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) for PGCPS as part of a Board of Education Focus Workgroup.

5.4 Approval of the Blueprint School Phase II Package and Resolution of General Terms for Blueprint Schools Phase II Package (Alternative School Construction Financing Package II) under a Public-Private Partnership Model

The Alternative School Construction Financing (ACF) model has proven to be quite successful. One cannot deny that the pace at which the first tranche of schools was constructed is quite amazing and vital for the students, especially those struggling in swing spaces. That five of the six are being constructed using ground source heat pumps and the sixth has a highly efficient HVAC system is important for the health of the students, PGCPS energy expenditures, and the health of the climate. While it remains to be seen it does appear that the requirements to modernize schools to current codes will be crucial at the end of that phase as well in terms of student health and climate.

We would like to encourage that the more detailed RFPs include several additional requirements that we believe were not found in the RFPs for the first six schools in order to improve upon the success of the first tranche of schools in terms of sustainability.

- Include the relevant requirements to meet the Sustainability (Energy Use) Policy, even if it is not adopted by the time of the RFP issuance, most specifically the requirement to have individual building metering and digital energy use reporting.
- While it is expected that the next phase of buildings will result in the same decisions involving HVAC systems, it would be better to specify priority for zero on-site emission systems, namely ground-source and air-source heat pumps.
- In order to save possible costs down the road, even if they are borne by the private contractor, ensure that the buildings are solar, EV, and scratch-cooking ready.
- Place requirements to avoid or minimize forest removal.

6.1 Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2024-2029

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, 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.

Upon reading the final CIP we are glad to see the prioritization of school replacements that “improve[s] walkability/safety” and that have an “impact on bus transportation.” Both of these factors will reduce the impact of transportation on the students’ health and the climate, especially if the impact on bus transportation takes into consideration increasing the number of routes that can be electrified. It is also encouraging to see that almost 10% of schools received HVAC replacements and another 27 are underway given the impact that HVAC systems have on energy costs to the school system and the need for students to breathe healthy air, though it would be great to note how many of these projects resulted in installation of zero onsite emission HVAC systems.

We would like urge for next year that the CIP to 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 should factor into future CIP prioritization:

1. Phaseout of R22-based HVAC systems;
2. Once “energy usage information for each facility” is collected, buildings that are high energy consumers;
3. Reducing paved surfaces;
4. The potential for implementing scratch cooking,
5. Reusing already developed properties for school sites; and
6. Preserving existing trees and woodlands during the site development process.

We also would urge that PGCPS attempt to install ground-source or air-source heat pumps whenever possible as part of its FY23 projects, especially on buildings with many years of useful life remaining and that roof retrofits allow for future solar panels when reasonable.

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.” 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 is critical for success in school.

As part of the FY23 projects we want to urge PGCPS to:

- Ensure all new construction should include plans for kitchens that are equipped for scratch-cooking;
- Ensure all facilities have the infrastructure for composting food waste on campus and meet the requirements of HB 566;
- Designate school land for food production, such as raised beds, and if possible, greenhouses; and
- For the “Kitchen and Food Service” upgrades planned for FY23 kitchens should be retrofitted to meet the above-mentioned standards as much as possible.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BSPdabwAOxJGMAq0KgdKcZlp9TMB6L1A/view>

We know many of these issues are on your radar, but they need to be addressed more directly in the RFPs for the Blueprint schools, in future CIPs, and in project development for FY23 CIP to ensure that 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Jakuta". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Joseph Jakuta
Lead Volunteer