

**Dr. Monica Goldson  
Prince George's County Public Schools  
Sasscer Administration Building  
14201 School Lane  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772**

**May 1, 2023**

**Re: Feedback on Climate Change Action Plan Task Force Summary Report**

Dear CEO Goldson:

Thank you for considering our comments on the Climate Change Action Plan Task Force Summary Report. Overall, it demonstrates real leadership on climate change and education issues and provides transparency regarding the quality work PGCPs is undertaking. We did want to provide our feedback on the progress in achieving each of the eight priority recommendations. We also want to reiterate that, if community support needs to be shown in funding opportunities, we would be more than willing to show such support. Also, we would recommend posting this excellent report on <http://pgcps.org/climate>. Finally, on the overarching areas of note, it would be positive for future reports to report more on the "Measurement and Tracking" sections found in the Climate Change Action Plan.

**Priority 1: Support Environmental Justice Through Climate Curriculum, Training, and Partnerships**

*Operational Action 1.* These actions are good first steps toward advancing climate education goals. The student composting initiative highlighted in the promotional video "Trash Talk" on PGCPs-TV is particularly commendable. We hope students across the school system can be supported in similar initiatives at other schools. We applaud the Schmidt Center for organizing the EcoAction Art Contest, which represented a good opportunity to engage students and to work in partnership with an outside organization (Prince George's County Sierra Club). However, in the range of entries submitted, we noted an overemphasis on recycling as a theme, which may point to a failure on the part of the school system to impart a broader sense of the issues at stake and to effectively convey to students that taking action to protect the environment involves much more than just recycling or not littering.

*Operational Action 2.* PGCPs seems to be on target in its planning for the leadership summit.

*Operational Action 3.* It appears that processes are in place to expand student access to climate information. It is our understanding that there are issues collecting some data from the utilities and we would be happy to join you in advocating for better access to data. It would be good to also make sure CTE students are getting access to current technologies as well so that they can learn through doing.

*Operational Action 4.* These two new programs show progress in training the next generation of workers in tomorrow's technology. There is also a clear need to train future electricians and HVAC technicians to understand emerging technologies (e.g., solar, heat pumps), and we hope that the next year of action can focus on those areas too. While it was not addressed as clearly in the CCAP we also would hope



that PGCPs can advocate with the General Assembly that when they develop legislation for workforce training, they move their focus beyond already working-aged persons and include elements that can benefit those in the CTE program.

*Operational Actions 5 and 6.* These are excellent first steps to undertaking these actions that we would expect to be implemented in year three and we expect to see such continued progress in the next report.

## **Priority 2: Reduce Carbon Footprint from PGCPs Buildings**

*Operational Action 1.* PGCPs has clearly undertaken this action, in that they are including the recommended language on tax credits in their contracts. Vigilance by PGCPs staff will still be necessary to ensure contractors adequately follow through on the contract requirements.

*Operational Action 2.* This action is also well underway and well ahead of schedule. We are glad to have learned that PGCPs received funds from the Maryland Energy Administration's Decarbonizing Public Schools Pilot Program (DPCPP) and has obtained some of the necessary energy use data.

*Operational Action 3.* It is definitely a crucial step that a sustainability officer is in the FY24 budget. This position will be the lynchpin for much of this work. While we have anecdotally heard of progress in training other staff and building capacity, in the future we would recommend those efforts be described as well when reporting on this action.

*Operational Action 4.* We do applaud efforts to move staff to telework since telework can have the benefit of reducing commuting emissions, but it is unclear from the report where any specific progress is being made to consolidate administrative staff. That being said, this is already more progress than expected for an action that is expected in year 5.

*Mitigation Action 1.* It is good to see progress is being made under the DPCPP. Upon completion of the audits, there should be consideration of implementing a policy that specifically calls for this information to be considered in the EFMP, though this would likely need to be initiated by the Board of Education rather than the CEO.

*Mitigation Action 2.* It is great to see both the progress on using school buses as resiliency hubs, using federal rebates, and the work on the Mullikin bus lot. We do realize this is a long-term goal and look forward to seeing more information on the net-zero construction guidelines being formulated in a subsequent report.

*Mitigation 3.* Unfortunately, we do not see how the projects described are relevant to the use of thermal energy from wastewater to save on heating costs. That being said, we realize that this is a longer-term goal and hope synergies can be developed with WSSC to pursue such projects in the future if they are found to be viable.

*Mitigation 4 and 5.* These are excellent updates and we hope that the evaluation when it is completed in June of 2023, can be presented to the public in a timely fashion.

*Adaptation 1.* For clarity, some of the items mentioned earlier, specifically "utilizing electric buses as resiliency hubs at school location" should go in this section. That being said, we did see clear indications that work is being undertaken on this issue and ahead of schedule.

### **Priority 3: Commit to Renewable Energy Sources for a Net Zero Emissions Future**

*Operational Action 1.* We are glad to see that research is progressing on strategies to solve this complicated operational action. We do implore PGcps to pursue the new solicitation, as is stated in the reports, to allow for power providers to be selected independently unless of course, BRcpc pursues net-zero electricity.

*Operational Action 1.* We would acknowledge that if any feedback is needed on the dashboard our group would be happy to provide feedback.

*Mitigation Action 1.* This is excellent news. We expected that solar would not be seriously considered until Blueprint Phase 2 and to see it potentially moving forward on Phase 1 is excellent. We do believe that PGcps should also look into this option for conventional builds and during roof replacements as well.

*Mitigation Action 2.* We would be interested to see more information on the approaches PGcps is pursuing in subsequent reports.

*Adaptation Action 1.* It is a positive direction that PGcps is considering using school buses as a potential backup power source. This is a crucial tool that allows the higher-cost electric buses to be better utilized. We would hope that PGcps would also examine onsite batteries to be paired with solar installation as well given that battery costs are reducing and numerous tax credits and grants are becoming available.

### **Priority 4: Commit to Low Carbon School Transportation**

*Operational Action 1.* The effort to optimize bus routes is commendable, though it would be good to be able to quantify the improvements to determine how positive this action is or if some alterations are more successful than others. Still, we would also note that this action is ahead of schedule.

*Mitigation Action 1.* It is good to see that ESSER funds are being pursued for bus electrification, and we do hope that PGcps continues to pursue EPA grants even though no funds were awarded in the first round. We are concerned that there is no update on the pilot electric bus funded under Volkswagen. Additionally, there is a fund that was set up by the state of Maryland to fund school bus electrification, but no money was put into it. We would encourage PGcps to advocate for funding that program with the current Governor during the next legislative session. Finally, while the program may not be ideal, we would encourage PGcps to evaluate the program set up by Maryland through the Climate Solutions Now Act to create a vehicle-to-grid pilot program as another potential funding mechanism and report on whether that program should or should not be pursued.

*Mitigation Action 2.* Attending vision zero meetings is important and we would also recommend attending the regulation State Highway Administration meetings held by Delegate Nick Charles. Of course, more work and collaboration will be needed on this challenging goal, but it is already headed in the right direction.

*Mitigation Action 3.* The action PGcps is undertaking to reduce unnecessary idling is quite encouraging, and any information that can be provided in future reports, such a survey of progress, would be illuminating.

*Mitigation Action 4.* It is unclear from the report if these actions are planned or already undertaken, but regardless, they are positive. An update in future reports of the number of buses with seat belts installed would be an important step.

*Mitigation Action 5.* It would be positive in future reports to more clearly indicate what options are being explored for light-duty fleet electrification, but it is positive that this is being pursued.

## **Priority 5: Reduce Food Waste and Grow Climate-Friendly Food**

*Operational Action 1.* Although Food and Nutrition Services conducted a survey in December, it appears that it reached a limited audience (select body of students), especially at the elementary level. It is unclear who the FNS student advisory council includes or how active SGAs are throughout the county and we hope to see improved outreach to students and families in the future throughout the county for broader representation. We would particularly like to see any surveys get distributed to the PTA/Os and via other school communication channels. We would be happy to share such surveys in the future through our network. The upcoming parent survey would be an ideal opportunity to leverage the CCAP food advocacy group as questions for the survey are developed and for disseminating the survey.

*Operational Action 2.* We would like to seek clarity on the steps being taken to conduct baseline food waste audits. What places other than meeting with CCAP and student representatives at Eleanor Roosevelt has FNS visited? This could possibly be done in conjunction with the Department of Environment which already does waste audits for all landfilled materials including the school system so as to not duplicate efforts and save on resources for the school system.

*Mitigation Action 1 and Adaptation Action 1.* We are thankful that Food and Nutrition Services met with us and others to discuss climate-friendly foods and pursue some possible vendors for both meat-free options and locally sourced produce. We look forward to seeing how this progresses toward implementation starting in year two and would recommend that as new options are considered, what is the carbon footprint?

*Mitigation Action 2.* It is quite an accomplishment to already have fourteen schools with composting programs up and running. It is a testament to the knowledgeable staff working on the issue. We would hope that as composting is provided to more schools that a staff member or contractor can be dedicated to the needed on the ground start up for these programs in order to speed up the successful implementation for the remaining schools.

*Adaptation Action 2.* This is a first step towards resilient on-campus food production, but the most crucial step will be to change policies to ease the use of such food for consumption by students. Also, though it was specified in the initial recommendations from the CCAP Focus Workgroup, ensure all soil is tested for lead and for the soil to be replaced if necessary.

## **Priority 6: Commit to Sustainable Materials Management and Procurement**

*Operational Action 1.* It is great to see that PGCPs is moving so quickly to update its sustainable purchasing policy. If it is not yet final, we would welcome any opportunity for outside feedback and it would be good after it becomes final to track challenges with the implementation of the new plan.

*Operational Action 2.* We are encouraged that PGCPs is looking into options for more sustainable packaging and do understand that these decisions can come at tradeoffs in terms of food waste. That being said we would like to see the next report outline more clearly how the evaluation of the products stands.

*Operational Action 3.* These are great ways to involve students in recycling programs in the school system. In future iterations of the report, we would like to see tracking of progress with recycling rates.

*Mitigation Action 1 and 2.* The steps being undertaken by PGCPs are necessary steps to reduce the carbon footprint of the waste collection system and expand the tracking of waste diversion. We look forward to seeing progress in future reports.

### **Priority 7: Commit to Climate Resilient Land Management**

*Operational Action 1, 2, and 4 and Mitigation Action 3.* These are all important steps toward expanding the installation of green infrastructures and we hope to find information on green infrastructure installations in future reports.

*Operational Action 3.* This is a good first step, though we would encourage these topics to be adopted into the curriculum, as was done for recycling.

*Mitigation Actions 1 and 2 and Adaptation Action 3.* This is an exciting development and we look forward to seeing the results of the forestry plan and the opportunity to provide comments on it during its draft phase.

*Mitigation Action 4.* These are reasonable first steps for implementing this action item. We would encourage a more firm policy to be put in place to put a moratorium on new synthetic turf fields until this evaluation is completed.

*Adaptation Action 1.* These are good first steps for implementing this action item.

*Adaptation Action 2.* It is great that PGCPs is weighing the various uses of roof space to make the most valuable use of the space and both solar and blue roofs are also valuable solutions.

*Adaptation Action 4.* A review of swing spaces and existing sites is a good first step for this action.

### **Priority 8: Lead by Example to Support Transformational Change**

*Operational Action 1.* Moved to Priority 2.1

*Operational Action 2.* It is heartening to see that Equity & Excellence is tasked with this action, and we look forward to the progress made during the next period.

*Operational Action 3.* Upon reading this report, it may actually make sense to evaluate this action under Priority Area 1.

*Operational Action 4.* We are thankful that the evaluation of contract requirements that contradict the CCAP has been assigned, though we would like to see if and when these are redressed in future reports.

*Operational Action 5.* PGCPs has regularly tracked legislation and we could see from what was supported and opposed at the March 23, 2023, Board of Education meeting that PGCPs has been implementing this goal. We would encourage the process for evaluation legislation to be moved up one month so that it can play more of a role in informing the General Assembly committee process since most bills have already completed that by late March.

*Operational Action 6.* The report appears to be keeping with the needs and schedules of this operational action. It is particularly important that the PGCPs Master Specifications for Construction Projects are being updated.

*Operational Action 7.* There also may be funds available through the federal Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program to fund this work. We do not know who will be managing the funds for the Washington, DC area given a different approach taken to this, but it is something to follow and consider to ease this work.

*Operational Action 8.* This report was quite insightful, and we encourage it to continue regularly. We also would not expect an update to the CCAP itself until at least 2025.

### **About Climate Parents of Prince George's**

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.

### **Summary**

Reading through this report we see how seriously PGCPs is taking implementing the CCAP. While there are a few areas needing improvement, the vast majority of the action items are progressing at or ahead of schedule. We hope future iterations will provide statistics in tracking recommendations in the CCAP.

Our children cannot thank you enough for this work.

Sincerely,



Joseph Jakuta  
Lead Volunteer  
Climate Parents of Prince George's