

Testimony on: FY25 Operating Budget
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Hearing Date: September 25, 2023



Prince George's County Board of Education Operations, Budget, and Fiscal Affairs
(OBFA) Committee:

Thank you for considering our testimony on the Prince George's County Public School (PGCPS) FY 25 Operating Budget. 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.

It has been just over a year since the Board of Education adopted the Climate Change Action Plan and we can see that PGCPS has been hard at work putting the CCAP into action. Having followed the progress in the mid-year and July reports produced by CEO Goldson it is clear that substantial progress is being made on implementing the CCAP and the funding needs to be provided for that to continue, especially since many of these solutions can lead to long-term cost savings to PGCPS.

In the FY25 operating budget please provide funds to:

- Continue to fund the new sustainability/resiliency officer position. Having a position in place to work across each department under the Superintendent will lead to continued successful implementation of the plan, especially on issues that cross departments.
- Continue to fund the Student Environmental Alliance Summit. The first event was quite successful in bringing student environmental leaders together, and this opportunity should be carried forward.
- Perform a comprehensive energy audit of all existing buildings. Energy use is a significant portion of the operating budget, and energy that is being wasted is money that is wasted. Completing a system-wide energy audit will augment the work already being done under the Decarbonizing Public Schools Program and provide building staff with the information needed to retrofit buildings in the most cost-effective manner. Saving energy will become even more important in light of volatile natural gas and electricity prices.
- Purchase solar energy through Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs). PGCPS can already lock in steady prices for offsite solar, and the use of long-term contracts can again help reduce the effects of volatile, rising electricity prices.
- Begin purchasing Electric Vehicles (EVs) and electric grounds maintenance equipment. At this point the long-term operations and maintenance saving on EVs make them more economical for fleet vehicles and some electric grounds equipment (e.g., small lawnmowers, leaf blowers) do as well.
- Fund a baseline assessment for food waste. In the most recent Waste Characterization Study, Prince George's County Government found that just under 60% percent of PGCPS's waste stream came from food waste. In addition, HB 264 now requires all "persons," which includes individual schools, that produce over 1 ton of food waste each week to begin composting this

January. Assessing the food waste will allow PGCPs to cut down on the waste being landfilled and properly assess which schools need to comply with HB 264 and by when.

- Provide staff funding for expansion of composting pilot programs to more schools, namely so that central staff can train school personnel and students on managing composting at individual schools.
- Provide funding for maintaining natural turf fields, both in terms of staff and supplies so as to ensure natural fields are in safe playing conditions.
- Ensure that purchases related to school food packaging lead to less packaging that is destined to the landfill by switching to packaging that is compostable, recyclable, or just reduced in amount.
- Invest in planting more native trees across the school system. Well-planned plantings can help out with storm water and energy costs as well. Also planting a variety of species and providing schools information about the species

We know that PGCPs is taking advantage of many funding opportunities to offset the impacts of these types of changes on the budget. We hope to see PGCPs achieve success in obtaining funds through these various means (note that some of these funds may be more appropriate for capital rather than operating budgets).

- Under the Inflation Reduction Act, the tax credits for installing solar panels and geothermal heating/cooling systems are now open to governments and other organizations with no tax liabilities. This is an important avenue for PGCPs to pursue in order to reduce costs of system installation and then to find ways to recycle the savings back into operational budgets for maintenance and other related costs.
- The Climate Solutions Now Act establishes an additional 5% cost share from the state to build net zero schools as well as a pilot program to work with utilities to offset the costs of electric buses and explore using the batteries for grid support when they are not being used for transportation purposes. We should note that net zero schools can result in net revenue for a building, and those revenues can be put back into operating budgets.
- The Climate Solutions Now Act also put in place a pilot program allowing for utilities to pay for the incremental costs of electric buses as long as the buses participate as backup power when not in use for transporting students, namely during summer months when this service is most useful.
- EPA is expected to continue issuing funds under the Clean School Bus Program. Especially since the hard work was done to develop an application under the first iteration of the program, PGCPs should continue to apply for funds.
- In the near future, EPA will offer grants to school systems to improve air quality at schools. According to EPA: "Funding includes \$37.5 million for grants and other activities to monitor and reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions at schools in low-income and disadvantaged communities, and \$12.5 million for technical assistance to address environmental issues, develop school environmental quality plans, identify, and mitigate ongoing air pollution hazards."

PGCPs has proven itself to be a national leader in tackling the climate crisis in the realm of education. We hope that PGCPs will demonstrate its continued leadership by prioritizing these actions in the FY24 budget.

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, reading "Joseph Jakuta". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Joseph Jakuta
Lead Volunteer