

Calvin Ball
for

HOWARD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

EDUCATION WHITE PAPER

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Education

As both a parent of children in Howard County schools and an educator, I understand how critical the Howard County Public School System is to the success and well-being of our students and families as well as growing our future leaders. As your next County Executive, my top educational priority is to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all children; one in which they can achieve their full potential and where our educators and administrators receive the resources and support they need to thrive.

Through strong collaboration across all levels of our education system and government, we can create an atmosphere that encourages creativity, critical thinking, and innovation instead of one in which standardized testing rules the classroom.

While direct oversight of the school system rests with the Board of Education and Superintendent, the County Executive has the ability to influence the school systems effectiveness by funding its budget. Failure to provide sufficient funding can lead to larger classroom sizes, a reduction in teachers and support staff, cuts to resources and deferred maintenance. Appropriately funding these education budget priorities takes courage and leadership but worth the investment. In Howard County, we pride ourselves on having some of the best, if not the best, schools in Maryland and across the nation. That is not possible without helping to ensure our students and families have the same access to resources and provide an exceptional learning environment so that every child can thrive. This will also help us breakdown barriers of what school is more desirable as all our schools have unique and supportive opportunities for every student. It takes a County Executive with courage and a sense of urgency to push past mere platitudes of wanting to invest in our schools, but who is willing to demonstrate the leadership to ensure our school system lives up those values.

Where We Are

Growing Budget Deficits and Funding Failures

According to a Maryland State Department of Education report, our school district annually receives \$56 million less than it needs to ensure every child has an opportunity to reach their full potential. Under prior democratic leadership, our level of funding for education was approximately 61% of the County budget. Recently, the County's level of commitment to education has dropped to as low as 52% of our total budget. We can easily see the impact this has had on our school infrastructure, our students, teacher resources and beyond. In addition, the school system is facing a school budget deficit that has ballooned to nearly \$50 Million which has greatly impacted our system's ability to adequately support its health plan, maintain sufficient class sizes, ensure equity in bring your own device (BYOD) policies and programs, provide access to world language programs and other equity-focused curriculum, and even provide for some class offerings at the Applications Research Laboratory.

Deferred Maintenance

As we have seen over the last few years, maintenance of our school facilities is critical to providing healthy and safe learning environments. Air quality concerns like mold have become widespread, but deferred maintenance presents other challenges as well. Currently, we have approximately \$500 Million in outstanding and unfunded deferred maintenance costs. A majority of existing schools have aging HVAC systems, many requiring significant repairs or replacement, with electrical and plumbing systems in our schools also showing signs of significant wear. Today, HCPSS does not have the maintenance staff or funding to be able to support the mechanical and other systems that keep our school buildings open, safe, and functioning at maximum capacity. If we don't address this, we could likely face other challenges impacting nearby jurisdictions including possible school closures during extreme weather conditions for failure to provide air conditioning, heat and healthy learning environments. Any closures will then result in lost instruction time for our students and educators causing a strain on families and communities.

School Overcrowding and Class Size Increases

Over the past three years, class sizes have increased across the system by two students per classroom. Additionally, the process used by HCPSS to assign teachers has changed, resulting in more students in each class, and fewer electives at the secondary level. During my tenure on the Council, I have had the honor of visiting schools across the County. In those twelve years, I have seen a significant change in class sizes. They have grown significantly and common areas are now overcrowded. I used to see Kindergarten & 1st grade classrooms with 18 and 20 students, and now I frequently see up to 25 six-year-olds in those same rooms. Class sizes are larger and common areas are overcrowded with some of our schools at 130-136% capacity. This is unacceptable. Just as we have taken steps to address the development challenges that exacerbate school crowding, it is incumbent upon the school system, the Board of Education, and County

Government to work together to ensure that our system's capacity is being used as efficiently as possible, that our capital funding programs within the County Government and School System are aligned, and that we are being proactive in our collaborative approach to planning both development and the infrastructure to support it.

College-Ready

Only 29% of our low-income high school students are college-ready in reading and writing, and just 26% are college-ready in math. That's far below the 65% of all high school students who are college ready in reading and writing and 63% who are college ready in math. Approximately 80% of Latino HCPSS students graduate high school, compared to 91% of all HCPSS students, which is an 11-point gap we must close. There are similar achievement gaps across other demographic lines.

We must work to understand what is causing these deficiencies and how we can work collaboratively to close them. Our school system can work better for all students, which is why I supported funding for an HCPSS leadership position focused solely on equity and inclusion. It should be our collective mission to ensure that the promise of the Howard County Public School System be a reality for all students, regardless of their background or where they began their educational journey.

School Safety

In order to thrive, students need to feel safe, nurtured, and supported so that they can concentrate on their studies. Families entrust us with their wellbeing and as such, we have a duty to ensure there are safeguards and security measures in place which promote safety but do not result in schools feeling like correctional facilities. We must not provide the illusion of safety, especially if it comes at the expense of some students feeling less safe. Any solution involving changes in security protocols in our schools should come only after we have a community conversation with our students and families who will be impacted so that we can identify the most culturally appropriate solution(s).

Students with Special Needs

The population of students requiring special education services grows every year, in part because our school system provides some of the best services in the state. However, our staffing levels have not kept pace with this growth in student population and have failed to provide adequate resources to those in need. HCPSS must work to ensure there are sufficient qualified educators and staff to meet the needs of those with special needs and learning disabilities to support this includes providing training for these designated educators and providing these students with enriching and appropriate educational opportunities.

Supporting Educators

Howard County has always worked to pay our educators a competitive salary. Investing in our workforce is an important hallmark of not only attracting new and experienced teachers but retaining educators who possess the knowledge and expertise to see our children succeed. This also attracts diversity which reflects the rich tapestry in our student population. We know that when students see themselves reflected in staff, they thrive. Therefore, we must acknowledge opportunities for growth in this area. As we know, negotiated salary increases have not kept pace with other Howard County employees who have received steps and cost of living adjustments for consecutive years. In fact, while the starting salary for our educators is competitive, teachers in their first three years will likely only receive a total of only a \$600 salary increase.

Increasingly, Howard County educators often find themselves in a conundrum when deciding where to live as their salary does not often allow for them to find affordable housing opportunities in the County. Based on surveys, we know that 42% of HCEA members live outside Howard County. When compared to our neighboring jurisdiction of Montgomery County, that number drops to 34% of union members who are teaching in Montgomery County but live elsewhere. Critically, when we assess HCA members whose age range from 24-35, we find that 56% are living elsewhere, giving them a longer commute, which reduces the amount of time they can be available to their students and families. This is also the age range where educators are deciding or whether or not to stay in the classroom or find another career.

It's not enough to lead the state in compensation for our educators. We must hire and retain educators that reflect the diversity of our communities at every level. Nearly 22% of our students are Asian, but fewer than 5% of our educators are. Meanwhile, 24% of our students are African-American, compared to only 16% of our educators. Other similar disparities exist for Latinos, as well. Our schools are diverse, and our teaching force should reflect that diversity.

Where We're Going

Investing in Education

As an educator, I pledge to provide students and educators the resources they need to succeed. Under my administration, we will increase funding for our schools and address the persistent budget shortfalls that have characterized the last several years. We will not support golden parachutes for school administrators who fail our children and educators and will work with the County Council and Board of Education to hold HCPSS accountable.

Capital Improvements

I have a proven track record of working with colleagues on the County Council to ensure smart investments in our communities and will do the same as County Executive. I have fought to restore funding for teachers, reduce class sizes, and ensure appropriate investments in our school infrastructure. We will work with the Board of Education to prioritize deferred maintenance projects, ensuring funding is available to provide safe, healthy teaching and learning environments for all. Additionally, we will re-invest in our school's maintenance staff who work to ensure the capital investments we make into our schools are cared for properly. Furthermore, I will hold developers accountable and pay their fair share so that we can begin to close both our \$500 million deferred maintenance deficit and address as critical capital needs to support growing capacity. An investment in today's infrastructure is an investment in our future. We must build and maintain sufficient school facilities for all students, teachers, and communities.

Furthermore, increasing portables should not be a way of life in Howard County. As County Executive, I will work with the Board of Education to stem this practice to the greatest extent possible.

College and Career Readiness

We must expand access to learning opportunities for the careers of tomorrow, including vocational programs for students who choose an alternative path to higher education following their graduation. My administration will facilitate partnerships with the school system, Howard Community College, the Library, employers, and other universities both locally and at distant Ivy League universities. We must appropriately challenge and prepare all of our students, including our gifted students to compete globally for entrance into our nation's most prestigious universities. At the same time, Howard Community College is a premier educational institution and is a great fit for many of HCPSS graduating seniors. As an educator and strong supporter of HCC, I support working toward as a smooth a transition for HCPSS students who want to attend HCC as possible.

Class Sizes and School Capacity

Our current dual predicament of thwarting class sizes increases and overcrowding in certain schools is not insurmountable. We must remember that in many instances, this issue arose from both action and inaction, and can be addressed through better collaboration, planning and effective leadership. As County Executive, my administration will make stronger county-school collaborative planning a top priority. We will work together to better understand patterns of residential growth and its impact on existing neighborhoods to better assess and identify opportunities to resolve them.

While a more integrated and collaborative planning approach will help address long-term challenges, we have schools and classrooms that need immediate relief. To address the growth in class sizes, my administration will work to close the gap and restore education funding to previous levels. As we have seen, a “maintenance of effort” level of funding is not sufficient for our schools. Additionally, my Administration will take a collaborative approach to addressing overcrowding in our schools, including partnering with our school system, County Council and other stakeholders to ensure our school boundaries promote and strengthen our school communities, efficiently and effectively use existing school capacity, limit excessive transportation or travel time on our buses, and align with our neighborhoods. Schools are central to Howard County and drawing attendance areas should be done comprehensively and collaboratively.

Another opportunity for us to address overcrowding concerns, especially at the high school level, is for us to take a stand on High School 13 and 14 and invest appropriately. Like many of you, I have been paying close attention to this important issue and I look forward to hearing more from the community in tonight's Board of Education Public Hearing. However, in addition to any recommendations and immediate solutions the Board may propose to implement to reduce overcrowding for the 2019-2020 school year, we also need to prioritize a more long-term solution. Two new high schools (HS13 and HS14) will help us address overcrowding and the plan to construct these facilities in five or more years when there is an imminent need is unacceptable. As County Executive, I will prioritize funding and take immediate steps with the Board of Education and County Council to meet our school infrastructure needs. Our community has spoken. While there have been significant and vocal conversations about the need to construct HS14 where the children are, for those with concerns about the preservation of Rockburn Park, I assure you that my Administration will not pursue or accept a school site here. Further, I ask the Elkridge School Site Task Force to release their findings before voting starts next month so that we can have a meaningful and collaborative conversation of where HS14 should be constructed.

Making our Schools Safe

As a father with two children in our public schools, I'm counting on our schools to be safe for teaching and learning. If we harden schools to feel like prisons, we may exacerbate the school to prison pipeline. We must first evaluate the data to identify best practices which ensure the highest level of safety possible, then have a public, transparent community conversation about our findings. This will allow us to come together around a set of strategies that can be tailored to the individual needs of our different schools and communities, but which remain reflective of our values. Critically, we will not ignore one of the root causes of school safety concerns: the proliferation of guns and the ease by which some young people can access them. Furthermore, my Administration will not support funding to arm our teachers or Administrators.

Under my Administration, we will integrate and make restorative practices a priority system wide as well as increase pupil personnel workers, school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, health assistants and bus attendants. Those staff additions will help ensure a safe, nurturing school environment at every level and for everyone involved. Another opportunity to increase safety is as we address overcrowded classrooms. Too many students in any given class especially those with special needs raises the stress and anxiety level for everyone. We should assess the cost and logistics of any strategy that seeks to strengthen school safety before they are hastily and prematurely announced in a press conference. The vision and way forward should be developed collaboratively with our fellow community with a seat at the table so that we can all have an opportunity to be a part of the solution.

Students with Special Needs

We must meet each student where they are, and for many, additional resources are needed. My administration will work with HCPSS to lower the number of students with IEPs assigned to the same class to ensure education is attuned to each individual student. We will expand partnerships with Recreation and Parks for students with disabilities for special work outside the classroom, provide structured social gatherings and continuing education to reinforce the academic skills they learned.

We will expand partnerships with HCPD for training to officers on how to helpfully engage students with disabilities and create training opportunities for students with disabilities on how to engage with law enforcement. My administration will work with SECAC, Autism Speaks, Down Syndrome Society, HCEA and other prominent groups to review current programs, assess challenges and opportunities, and work to ensure we are meeting the programmatic and educational needs of students with special needs, their families, and educators.

One of our school systems most vital responsibilities is ensuring students with special education plans receive the additional resources and services they deserve. But when we ask special education teachers to do two jobs— provide instruction and casework—yet only give them enough time or the resources to do one, it becomes an impossible task and students are then bound to fall through the cracks. This is not acceptable, and we can do better. Our children are counting on us. Under my Administration, I will work with the school system to reach a more

manageable caseload for all special educators with a better ratio of students to special education teachers.

To achieve an adequate student-to-teacher ratio, we need to hire more than a hundred teachers. This will likely cost an additional \$10 million per year. This is a large undertaking both fiscally and to meet our educational needs, therefore, I recommend we phase this in gradually but I am resolute that we must start immediately.

As we know, special education teachers are not alone in serving as a beacon of hope for our children with special needs. This takes a team of para-educators who are critical to meet the needs of individualized instruction and support. Over the same four-year period, the school system will also need to invest in these important positions in our schools.

Pay Our Highly Qualified Teachers More

Howard is one of just four districts in Maryland with an average teacher pay above \$70,000 a year and we must invest in our workforce if we are to remain competitive. Our educators remain the single largest in-school factor in our children's academic success and we cannot afford to let their salaries stagnate. Educator salaries have increased by about 2.5% a year in the last four years, and while that is positive progress, we can do more to compete for the best educators in the state and with other industries. My administration will work to ensure our educators receive increases that will help keep them here—through annual contract steps and cost-of-living-adjustments.

Howard County schools aren't just great because of our teachers. It's the support staff members who make instruction possible every day. Our bus drivers, cafeteria workers, clerical workers, paraprofessionals, building service workers, nurses and health assistants, and many other important positions keep the lights on, the classrooms clean, and our kids nutritiously fed. But more than 1,000 of these hard-working education support professionals make less than a living wage in Howard County. As County Executive, I will ensure all school employees make a living wage.