

## ***Support with Amendments SB161/HB200***

*Submitted January 22, 2024*

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) has 11 Community Schools with 10 through Concentration of Poverty (COP) Grants. With varying program implementation of 5 to 2 years, encouragingly, these Community Schools have already shown concrete academic improvements and increased collaboration between the community and schools. This early success is a promising sign as we continue to refine and expand our Community Schools initiative in Harford County.

HCPS strongly supports proposed changes in the bill that allow districts to allocate up to 10% of the PPA grant funds to support community schools. We believe this allocation is crucial for the effective implementation of the Community Schools strategy. Community School Coordinators have a substantial workload, including grant and budget management, stakeholder engagement, needs assessment, program implementation, school support, and data management. Allocating funds to support Coordinators in these areas, along with professional development, would enable them to focus more on engaging families, supporting students, and collaborating with community partners to enhance the community school strategy. We believe that without district support, we are not fully realizing the potential of the Community Schools model.

For perspective, the HCPS 10 COP community schools represents a budget of \$3,957,841 with no dedicated coordination or support. Over the next few years, the Community Schools budget is expected to exceed that of Title 1 (which has 6 district-support professionals) and district support is urgently needed to ensure that these funds are used with fidelity and the Community Schools vision is realized with improved student outcomes.

HCPS also supports the portion of the bill that allows determination of the number of Community School Coordinators per school based on enrollment, recognizing the varying workload between schools with different student populations. We advocate for a more nuanced approach that considers the unique circumstances of each school.

Additionally, HCPS appreciates the expansion of wraparound services to include student transportation, off-site learning opportunities, and apprenticeship programs. We recommend further expansion to school climate, culture, and learning environment under the umbrella term "community" in the engagement and supports area of wraparound services. Community is the people inside and outside of the school building.

HCPS opposes language in the bill that grants the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) the authority to both approve and make changes to needs assessments and implementation plans. We believe in a collaborative approach where MSDE provides feedback based on evidence-based best practices, allowing districts to make revisions aligned with their overall strategic and performance plans. HCPS argues that the unique needs of each school and community should be the sole focus, and giving

MSDE final approval or the ability to make changes without intimate knowledge of stakeholder groups goes against the goals of Community Schools.

Regarding the needs assessment document and data collection tools, HCPS emphasizes the importance of incorporating a more hands-on family-centered approach. We support the idea that these documents and tools should actively involve and address collaboration with families, reflecting a commitment to collaboration and partnership with families in shaping and implementing effective strategies within the Community School framework.

Finally, HCPS opposes the requirement in this bill for districts to use the implementation plan template provided by MSDE in its current state. We advocate for a more holistic document that can be co-created with district offices, aligning with existing district and state-required plans such as Title I and School Performance. The collaborative nature of Community Schools should not be hindered by an additional plan created independently, as it creates work continuity barriers and increases the workload for Coordinators and schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S Bulson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sean Bulson, Ed. D.  
Superintendent  
Harford County Public Schools  
[sean.bulson@hcps.org](mailto:sean.bulson@hcps.org)  
410-588-5202