



Kent County Board of Education

Growing a Community of Leaders

*Dr. Karen M. Couch
Office of the Superintendent*

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Room 121 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Mark S. Chang
Room 121 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SUPPORT

BILL: HB0365

TITLE: School Construction – Local Cost–Share – Alterations

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation/ Education, Energy and Environment

CONTACT: Dr. Karen M. Couch, Kent County Public Schools Superintendent

Dear Chairs Barnes and Chang,

The Kent County Public Schools (KCPS) supports House Bill 0365, School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations.

The replacement of Kent County Middle School was approved by the Board of Education on October 9, 2023. KCPS has applied for Planning Approval and design funds in the FY 2025 Capital Improvement Program and the Interagency Commission on School Construction approved design funds through the Built to Learn Act. House Bill 0365 increases the level of State funding participation for this project and will provide KCPS with a crucial piece to proceed through design and construction.

This construction of a new middle school in KCPS is an urgent project, as the existing facility does not support a contemporary middle school instructional program and the building also presents a host of performance deficiencies. As the only middle school facility in the county, KCPS bears a large responsibility to provide essential educational as well as support services to the children of Kent County in their crucial early adolescent years. The existing facility impedes the delivery of the educational program in many ways, as the recently submitted Feasibility Study amply demonstrates. An issue of equity is involved: without the modernized

facility, the middle school students of Kent County will remain at a permanent disadvantage relative to the opportunities that their peers enjoy in other parts of Maryland.

Consequently, the Board of Education is seeking to increase the State funding participation in the project through a number of means: the percentage add-ons that are enabled through COMAR 14.39.02.05, an adjustment to the gross area baseline and/or the baseline gross square footage through an analysis of the space usage that is currently in progress (COMAR 14.39.02.06), and most important, a legislative action to increase the State funding percentage. The model for this action is found at 5-303 in the Built to Learn Act legislation, which was narrowly drawn to increase the State funding percentage in order to allow one jurisdiction to undertake necessary projects, a number of which are now well underway. This legislation will similarly allow the Board and the County Commissioners to proceed with a project that is of essential importance.

For these reasons, I urge the members of the House Appropriations Committee on a favorable report on House Bill 0365- School Construction- Local Cost-Share-Alterations.

cc: The Kent County Board of Education
The Honorable Stephanie Smith
The Honorable Stephen S. Hershey, Jr.
The Honorable Jefferson L. Ghrist
The Honorable Jay A. Jacobs
The Honorable Steven J. Arentz
The County Commissioners of Kent County