

## **KENT COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL**

### **House Bill 365 - School Construction – Local Cost–Share – Alterations**

#### **House Appropriations Committee**

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I wish to testify in support of House Bill 365, School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. Since 2017, I have assisted the Board of Education of Kent County with a range of facility planning matters. Based on a Facilities Master Plan approved by the Board in early 2018, the school system has carried out much-needed facility improvements, including security vestibules at every school, roof and HVAC replacements, and targeted renovations at two elementary schools. With these actions, the Board and Superintendent have demonstrated that they are responsible stewards of State and local funds, accomplishing projects within budget and at a high level of quality.

The instructional buildings of Kent County are now better positioned to support contemporary learning approaches, with the notable exception of the Kent County Middle School facility. On October 9, 2023, the Board of Education approved replacement of this facility on the existing site in Chestertown. The Board of County Commissioners supports the project, and the Interagency Commission on School Construction has approved design funds through the Built to Learn Act.

By increasing the level of State funding for the Kent County Middle School project by approximately \$17 million, House Bill 365 is the crucial piece that will allow this project to proceed through design and construction. The current facility presents many barriers to effective education, for example:

- **Deficiency of instructional and support spaces.** These include a complete absence of full, purpose-designed science laboratories, numerous classrooms without acoustic isolation, a lack of small spaces for pull-out instruction for students with special needs, the absence of teacher planning spaces, and an art room without natural daylighting. At a time when a great deal of emphasis is placed on STEM and STEAM instruction and on equitable instruction for students with special needs, these deficiencies translate to significant inequities for the students of Kent County.
- **Circulation.** During class changes students must pass through the Library Media Center, music students pass through the Gymnasium, and maintaining separation of the age groups during lunch periods requires a convoluted and time-consuming sequence of movements.
- **Accessibility.** The building does not meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. It has no accessible toilet for either students or staff, has no elevator to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and the front entrance is not ADA accessible. It has a single accessible route from parking to the ground floor. These deficiencies present serious barriers to students, staff members and visitors with disabilities.
- **Building performance.** Originally constructed in 1950 and only fully renovated once in 1976, the building is not energy efficient and most of the building systems are old and in need of replacement. The maintenance of these aged systems is a drain on the school system budget, diverting much-needed operational funds from the classroom.

This is a critical project. Since Kent County Middle School is the only middle school in the county, the deficiencies of the building affect the education of every public school student during their formative early adolescent years, when their attachments to achievement, education and the community are being shaped. An issue of equity is involved: without the increase of funding of approximately \$17 million that HB 365 will make possible, this project cannot proceed, and middle school students in Kent County will remain at a significant disadvantage relative to their peers in other Maryland school systems.

For these reasons, I urge the members of the House Appropriations Committee to give a favorable report on House Bill 365 - School Construction – Local Cost–Share – Alterations.