



Kent County Board of Education

Growing a Community of Leaders

February 2, 2024

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

RE: Support for HB0365 School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I am writing you today in full support of House Bill 0365: School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. Passage of this bill before you is an absolute imperative for Kent County Public Schools, our students and staff and our community.

This bill ensures the process launched in 2018 to renovate and modernize our school buildings culminates with the capstone project in the Kent County Public Schools Six-Year Facilities Strategic Plan: the construction of a new Kent County Middle School.

Students in Kent County are served by a single middle school, Kent County Middle School, located in the heart of our county seat of Chestertown. The current structure is more than 70 years old and has both serious structural and educational deficiencies.

Kent County Public Schools has sought to address the twin challenges of our aging schools and shrinking enrollment by streamlining our operations. It was not that long ago that we closed two elementary schools. Before that, we went from three middle schools to one.

Unfortunately, as shown in our Six-Year Facilities Strategic Plan, our current middle school building can no longer be maintained through general upkeep. Nor do the myriad additions and reconfigurations of classrooms effectively serve today's students.

The current 50/50 cost-share plan for school construction between the state and our county creates a financial burden that our Kent County community — with a total population of less than 20,000 people, a median household income about \$27,000 below the state average and all five schools serving areas federally designated as low income — cannot shoulder. HB0365 would shift that cost-share burden, granting significantly more financial support from the state for our middle school project.

A new Kent County Middle School will ensure all children in our community get the education they need during those very crucial middle school years — the years that see them truly begin to set a path toward their career ambitions.

As a parent of elementary-age children, I have a personal family investment in moving this bill forward in this General Assembly session and keeping the planning process on track for our middle school. My children could be members of the first classes to attend a new, state-of-the-art Kent County Middle School.

For all the children of the Kent County community, please send HB0365 forward with a favorable recommendation and urge your colleagues in the full House of Delegates to pass this vital piece of legislation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Divilio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Divilio
Public Relations and Communications Specialist
Kent County Public Schools

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