

Testimony for: HB0614 - Education - School Building Energy Usage - Monthly Report

Committee: Appropriations

Submitted By: Deborah A. Cohn

Hearing Date: March 19, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Barnes and Committee Members:

I reside in Montgomery County as do my grandchildren, one of whom will start elementary school this year. I have closely followed the capital requests of Superintendent Thomas Taylor of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to address deferred maintenance and upgrades of major school infrastructure systems, including water, lighting and HVAC, and his approach to new school building system retrofits, redesign and new construction, including use of geothermal and solar energy generation where appropriate. He stressed that MCPS spends significant amounts on energy use annually and must reduce these costs. He indicated how energy use benchmarking provided the data to identify (before utility bills arrive) how MCPS could implement low-cost steps to significantly reduce wasted energy. He summarized his long-range plans to use continual energy use data collection to identify more quickly the need for system repair or replacement and to apply energy efficiency goals in the design of new MCPS major systems and building facilities.

Energy costs are the [second largest operating expense](#) of K-12 school systems after personnel costs. EPA's [ENERGY STAR program](#) has shown that more than 30% of energy use in schools goes to waste, with 10% easily recovered through low-cost operational improvements alone. Across the country, school districts are finding that through monitoring energy costs can drop 15-25% within the first year, without replacing equipment, disrupting classrooms, or needing capital budget approvals. The greatest [school energy waste](#) results from:

- HVAC systems running at full capacity during low or zero occupancy periods, (wasting 40-50% of total energy spending);
- Equipment degradation such as aging compressors, worn bearings, and failing belts that lose 15-30% efficiency long before they stop working entirely;
- Over-ventilating spaces to compensate for unmeasured indoor air quality instead of responding to actual CO2 and occupancy data; and
- Problems that go undetected for days or weeks because nobody checks temperature monitoring logs over weekends and breaks.

In his capital budget request for longer term capital investments in energy efficiency, these are exactly the strategies that Superintendent Taylor indicated MCPS has already implemented in several schools to significantly reduce energy demand.

At a time when local budgets are extremely stressed, HB0614 would apply a similar data driven approach by the Board of Education of each county, requiring each Board to collect and report data energy usage to the Interagency Commission on School Construction (ICSC), enabling the Commission to recommend strategies to those Boards to improve energy efficiency, reduce energy demand and reduce school system costs for taxpayers. And MCPS' results show this cost-effective approach works.

Smaller school systems deserve the ability to take advantage of these low-cost energy savings modifications. Benchmarking is the first step. Many smaller school systems may not have appropriate staff or financial resources to collect and track energy use data. The Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) offers several programs to help educational institutions reduce energy demand. In particular, its Decarbonizing Public Schools Program provides support to public schools for energy monitoring.

The second step is the data analysis to identify affordable and tested cost-saving measures. Again, smaller school systems may lack the technical expertise and financial resources to identify appropriate strategies. HB0614 directs the ICSC to provide the data analysis and recommendations.

HB0614 is an inexpensive and appropriate step to reduce costly and wasteful energy consumption in public schools, save taxpayer funds, and allow our state and local governments take the lead on reducing energy consumption. For these reasons I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB0614.