

Dear Howard County PTA members;

The last year has been especially challenging for the education community and families of Howard County. The focus on educating through a pandemic has added a significant workload, in addition to the core mission of advocating for children. As Howard County gradually returns to regular activities, it is important to remember that many items that require PTA involvement such as policy updates, budgeting, and educational activities did not pause during the pandemic and continue on today.

One item that PTACHC has focused on is the status of our school facilities. It is not the sole item of interest, but it is a key item that affects community, equity, budgets, redistricting, class sizes, prioritization, safety, and more. Many of you are aware that providing capacity competes with other resources. The capital budget is limited to priorities, rather than what is needed in order to provide enough permanent facilities for enrollment and sustain maintenance. Even with three major school projects underway, the needs outpace the available resources from the state and county tangibly shown by the continued use of 232 portable classrooms, which include eight (8) units to be added this year.

PTACHC has provided regular updates on this topic and suggested actions that can be taken as opportunities arise. One of the most significant opportunities is underway right now as the General Plan is updated which includes the growth patterns for the next 20 years. The facilitators have taken some steps to have educational resources addressed in presentations, but there is still a significant need to address the educational infrastructure needs of land acquisition, school construction, funding and guarantee of adequate capacity without overcrowding countywide.

The county facilitators of the HOCO BY DESIGN General Plan Update scheduled four (4) meetings on future growth that filled up. They have scheduled two (2) more meetings, of which only one is still open on March 30th (as of this writing). While this is not the sole way of providing input, it is the most direct and effective way to express the need for educational resource considerations applied to the 20-year plan. The link to HOCO BY DESIGN meeting website is included below. Please take the time to attend and review the materials. While reviewing, consider how various actions will affect students and check if each proposal has a mechanism to ensure quality school resources for all children in each plan. Consider what changes to educational safeguards need to be made with your advocacy to solve issues sustainably. Also, consider how separate county initiatives can be accommodated concurrently with appropriate education resources, rather than in exchange for education resources. PTACHC board members have been involved in this issue for some time, but still need local PTA involvement to express to planners and legislators what priorities need to be addressed in the General Plan that guides most future decision-making.

https://www.hocobydesign.com/scenario-planning/widgets/29537/key_dates

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