

A Message from the Superintendent

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The development of the annual operating budget is the primary opportunity to set the direction and meet the needs of the school system for the year ahead. A year ago, we embarked on a very difficult budget development process that resulted in significant cuts to cover necessary costs. While revenue constraints limit what can be added to this year's operating budget, we are beginning in a better fiscal position due to the decisions of a year ago.

In total, the Proposed FY 2026 Operating Budget is \$1.219 billion, which reflects an increase of \$74.3 million, or 6.49 percent, in expenditures above fiscal year 2025 and a net addition of 68.1 positions primarily in special education and safety and security.

The budget is largely a "same services" recommendation that:

- Retains all current employees;
- Increases supports and staffing for special education;
- Commits to high-quality staff through compensation and benefits;
- Prioritizes the safety of students and staff; and
- Maintains current programs and services.

Additionally, the recommendation maintains class sizes and does not propose impacts to current programs and services, including Gifted and Talented, fine arts, and opportunities provided at the Howard County conservancy. The recommendation also commits to implementing enhanced student transportation services.

The proposed budget is based on a County revenue request of \$67 million above Maintenance of Effort which includes \$61.8 million more than was allocated for FY 2025. Additionally, we anticipate a projected \$24.8 million increase that reflects the State's commitment to education, particularly under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future initiative, and use of \$7.0 million from the Technology Services Fund to address the increased investment in student device technology mandated by the Blueprint.

This is a reasonable, and necessary, request based on the work we did one year ago, revenue trends over several years, the shared commitments between the Board of Education, County Executive and County Council, and the information we have available to us at this moment.

However, it pains me that we are unable to invest further in staff to enhance recruitment and retention, school supports, athletic trainers, and other priority areas aligned with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, school safety, and the Board's Focus Areas.

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I want to acknowledge members of the Board of Education for their collaborative and forward-thinking work a year ago that resulted in a better starting position this year. Together, we will navigate this ever-evolving process that culminates in a budget that puts students first and fulfills our most dire needs. I am also grateful for the members of the HCPSS budget and finance teams who worked diligently to develop this budget document.

I look forward to receiving the perspectives of our students, staff, families and community members during public hearings, and collaborating with the County Executive and County Council to continue investing in students and educators.

We are very fortunate to be part of a community that prioritizes education to the high levels in which we do in Howard County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William J. Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William J. Barnes
Superintendent