



# **Responding to Today**

# **Investing in Tomorrow**

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*A Guide to Understanding the  
Superintendent's Proposed FY27  
Operating Budget*

January 2026

## Table of Contents

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|  |   |
|--|---|
| Table of Contents .....                                    | 2 |
| Letter From the Superintendent .....                       | 3 |
| Alignment to the HCPSS Strategic Plan.....                 | 4 |
| Priority 1: Strengthen Learning & Instruction.....         | 4 |
| Priority 2: Cultivate Student Belonging & Well-Being ..... | 4 |
| Priority 3: Foster Staff Growth & Engagement .....         | 4 |
| Priority 4: Enhance Systemic Planning & Procedures.....    | 5 |
| Priority 5: Partner with Families & Community .....        | 5 |
| High-Level Budget Snapshot.....                            | 5 |
| An Investment in People .....                              | 6 |
| More Information .....                                     | 7 |
| Budget Glossary .....                                      | 7 |



## Letter From the Superintendent

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The 2026-2027 school year budget (Fiscal Year 2027 - FY27) requires us to make necessary and strategic decisions—decisions guided by the [HCPSS Strategic Plan](#). Our strategic plan encompasses the priorities of our students, staff and families, and must continually serve as a guiding light for our actions and budgeting. The vision solidified in our plan can't be achieved in a day, or even a year, but staff across our district are working hard towards the outcomes we collectively aspire to attain.

I often say to anyone who will listen that in Howard County, we are on a pursuit of greatness. But I also believe deeply that we can only claim to be a great school system once we are great for every student we serve. To clear that high bar requires us to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth - today, our school system is not great for every student. For some students, we are not even consistently good. If we are serious about achieving greatness for every student, then we must be equally serious about transforming education in Howard County, which requires change - real change - not incremental adjustments to existing practice.

For the past two decades, we have largely invested in and preserved the same structures, programs, and approaches. We know the outcomes that those investments have produced. The same student groups are experiencing the same frustrating outcomes year after year. For too many students, the needle has not moved. That is not the mark of a great school system.

Today marks a deliberate shift away from past practice, and away from managing the budget to accommodate fiscal realities, towards leveraging the budget as a strategic tool to advance our vision for all students. Rather than picking up last year's budget and putting it back down, we are starting with a different question: *How do we best serve all students?*

Throughout the next several months of budget development, I implore everybody to remain informed, engaged and grounded in the shared priorities we established through our strategic plan, which incorporates the collective priorities established by HCPSS students, staff and families.

Bill Barnes  
Superintendent



## **Alignment to the HCPSS Strategic Plan**

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The priorities uplifted in the Superintendent's Proposed FY27 Operating Budget are aligned with the priorities of the Strategic Plan. Here are the five priorities of the plan, with associated investments included in the Superintendent's proposed budget.

### **Priority 1: Strengthen Learning & Instruction**

*To create equitable learning environments, each student's experience is grounded in high expectations aligned to standards, guided by their needs, assets, and aspirations, and backed by necessary supports to prepare them for future endeavors.*

**This budget proposal prioritizes:**

- Expansion of prekindergarten in alignment with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future
- Enhanced special education resources and staffing to meet the growing needs of our students and workloads of our special educators and support staff
- Additional English-Language Development Teacher positions and Language Access positions to optimize support for multilingual learners and their families
- Increased staffing and supplies to expand Career and Technology Education offerings
- Additional Assistant Principal positions

To strengthen learning and instruction, this budget proposal invests in our special education program, multilingual learners, and prekindergarten.

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### **Priority 2: Cultivate Student Belonging & Well-Being**

*To inspire growth and engagement, each student thrives in a safe and supportive environment where their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met, and has equitable opportunities to co-create and shape their experiences.*

**This budget proposal prioritizes:**

- A Certified Athletic Trainer at each of our thirteen high schools
- Float Nurse positions
- School Culture and Safety Assistant positions to cultivate a positive school culture & safe learning environments

To cultivate student belonging and well-being, this budget invests in the health of students and increased offerings.

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### **Priority 3: Foster Staff Growth & Engagement**

*To promote excellence and well-being, each employee is viewed as a valued member of a learning and working community where their expertise is valued and professional growth is prioritized.*

**This budget proposal prioritizes:**

- Employee compensation increases primarily related to negotiated agreements and more staff receiving National Board Certification
- A new position and resources for the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified and diverse workforce

To foster staff growth and engagement, this budget commits to our educators by strengthening our ability to attract top talent, keep exceptional employees in our classrooms and offices, and build the long-term organizational health needed to deliver on every other priority in our plan.

## Priority 4: Enhance Systemic Planning & Procedures

*To be innovative and accountable, dynamic systems are built to plan, allocate, and monitor resources, striving for safe and healthy environments that prioritize need and advance equitable outcomes.*

**This budget proposal prioritizes:**

- Continued current levels of student transportation services
- System budgeting support to provide critical support for labor costing, minimum school funding, and grants
- Repair/replacement of ice machines, washers and dryers at each high school
- A Staff Attorney dedicated to special education
- A Budget Analyst position to support labor costing, minimum school funding, and grants

To enhance systemic planning and procedures, this budget invests in school culture, safety and operational supports across our school system.

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## Priority 5: Partner with Families & Community

*To strengthen belonging and access for all students, family engagement opportunities and community partnerships are established to extend learning and supports for students within and beyond the classroom.*

**This budget proposal prioritizes:**

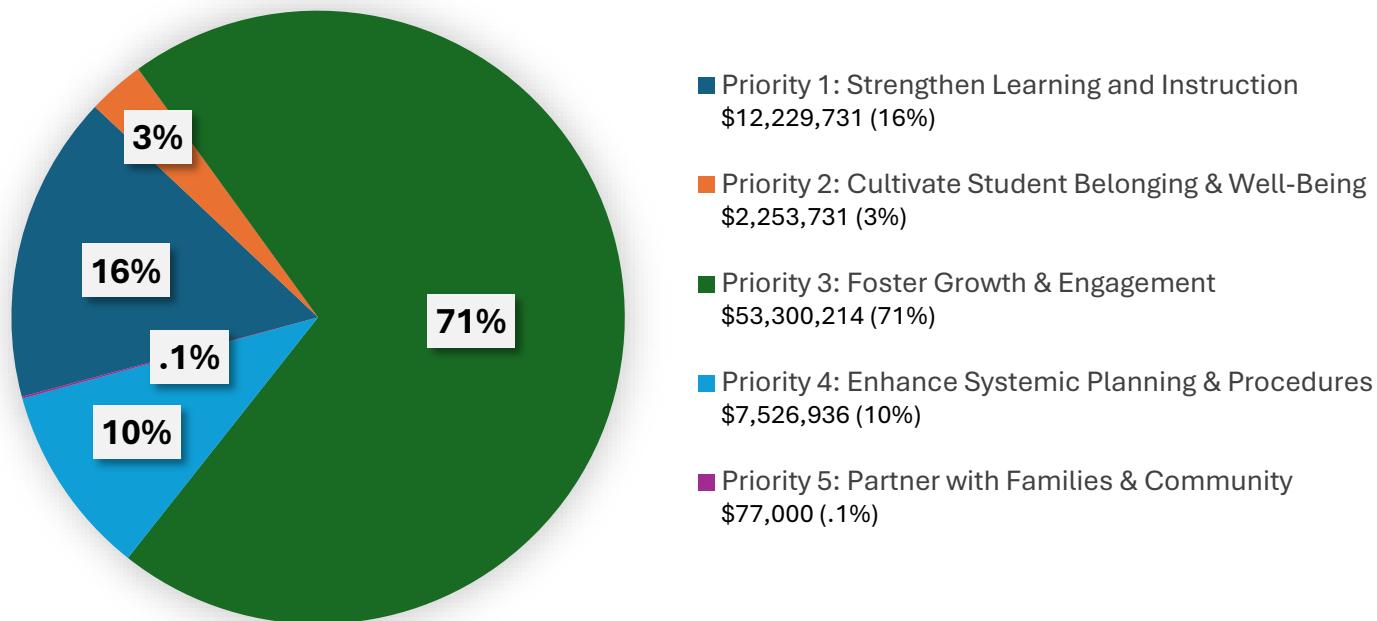
- Increased hourly rate for interpreters to support multilingual families

To better partner with families and community, this budget proposal invests in communication and partnership with families.

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## High-Level Budget Snapshot

In total, the Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget is \$1.278 billion dollars, which reflects a \$61.9 million dollar—or 5.1% increase—above fiscal year 2026 and a net reduction of 4 positions, primarily as a result of decreasing enrollment.



# An Investment in People

We are constantly pursuing enhanced employee compensation and benefits that align with evolving workloads, and that demonstrates the high value our community places on educating children.

## People Make the Difference for Students

Curriculum, technology, and facilities matter, but it is educators and staff who bring learning to life every day. Students succeed because of the relationships they build with teachers, counselors, custodians, administrators, and the many support staff in their buildings. Investing in people is an investment in those who directly shape student learning, safety, and well-being.

## Competitive Compensation is Essential to Attract and Keep Great Educators

Public schools are competing in a tight labor market. When compensation and benefits fall behind, schools lose experienced staff and struggle to fill vacancies. An investment in our staff helps stabilize the workforce, reduce turnover, and maintain consistent, highly qualified adults in our schools and offices.

## Supporting Staff is the Most Direct Way to Support Students and Families

New proposed positions are not “extra.” They are targeted supports that expand opportunities for early access to instruction, strengthen special education, and improve family communication and access to resources. When staff workloads are manageable, they can better meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of every student.

## Strong Schools Depend on a Healthy and Supported Workforce

Educators and school staff are carrying more responsibilities than ever before. Competitive benefits, professional supports, and adequate staffing show respect for their work and help prevent burnout. When employees feel valued and supported, they are better able to focus on students and families—and build positive school cultures.

## Investing in People is a Responsible, Long-Term Use of Public Dollars

People are the system’s most valuable asset. Stable staffing, reduced turnover, and highly qualified employees lead to better outcomes and lower long-term costs associated with recruitment, training, and vacancies. Investing in people today strengthens the school system’s ability to serve the community well into the future.



## More Information

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To find more information about the FY27 budget process, visit:



## Budget Glossary

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**Benefits:** Health insurance, retirement contributions, and other non-salary compensation.

**Capital Budget:** Funds used for long-term investments such as school construction, major renovations, and large equipment—not daily operations.

**Enrollment:** The number of students attending the school system. Enrollment trends directly affect revenue and staffing needs.

**Existing Service Commitments:** Items that are required or already committed to fund.

**Federal Funding:** Targeted funding for specific purposes (e.g., Title I, IDEA). These funds are restricted and cannot be used broadly.

**Fiscal Year (FY):** The 12-month financial period used for budgeting and accounting. HCPSS operates on a July 1–June 30 fiscal year.

**Full-Time Equivalent (FTE):** A standardized way to measure staffing levels.

**Maintenance of Effort:** The minimum amount of funding that must be provided by the State and County to the school system.

**Operating Budget:** The annual plan for day-to-day expenses required to run schools—salaries, benefits, supplies, utilities, transportation, and services.

**Public Hearing:** A formal opportunity for community members to provide input during the budget development process.

**Realignment:** Shifts in spending to stay within available funding.

**Restricted Funds:** Must be used for specific programs or populations.

**State Aid:** Funding provided by the state, often through formulas based on things like enrollment and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

**Unrestricted Funds:** Can be allocated based on local priorities.

**Work Session:** Public meetings for elected bodies (Board of Education, County Council) to deliberate on the budget.

