2026

Legislative Program

2026 MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF WASHINGTON COUNTY | 10435 Downsville Pike, Hagerstown, MD 21740

Washington County BOARD OF EDUCATION

2026 Legislative Program

Approved: October 21, 2025

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Notations

It is the practice of the Superintendent of Schools and staff to monitor legislation introduced during the session and to alert members of the Board of Education and the Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly of matters that require attention and action.

Some of the information and comments that appear in this report are based upon information provided by the Maryland Association of Boards of Education.

Questions? Please contact Washington County Public Schools' Office of Chief Legal Counsel at 301-766-2946, or at 10435 Downsville Pike, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740.

Core Values

For Washington County Public Schools to achieve its mission of educating and empowering each student to achieve independence and contribute to a diverse and evolving society, the Board of Education of Washington County has adopted the following core values for the 2026 Maryland legislative session:

- **Adequate and equitable state funding**
- **Local control**
- **Mandates that are limited and fully funded by the State of Maryland**
- **Classrooms that are safe and promote high quality instruction**
- **Alignment of state laws and frameworks with federal laws and requirements**

It is with these core values in mind that the Board of Education will support legislation that helps each student succeed, provides access and opportunities for each student, promotes safety and wellness for the entire learning environment, and promotes community engagement.

Adequate and Equitable State Funding

1. **Equity in Funding**
   The Board of Education of Washington County supports adequate and equitable state funding formula that takes into account the percentage of students who qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs), multilingual learners, the needs of special education students, transportation costs, the age of schools, and the diverse needs of the school system.

2. **Publicly Funded Full Day Prekindergarten and Prekindergarten Expansion**
   One of the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is to increase the availability of high-quality, publicly funded prekindergarten programs for our youngest learners through the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program and Prekindergarten Expansion Fund. The Board of Education of Washington County supports universal state funding at or above the required amounts to ensure that all children in Washington County have full access to high-quality prekindergarten at no cost to their families.

   Data shows that 66% of kindergarten students who accessed Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) prekindergarten program were scored as demonstrating on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) in the 2023-2024 school year, while only 12% were scored as emerging. In contrast, just 34% of kindergarten students who did not participate in a WCPS prekindergarten were scored as demonstrating, and 30% were scored as emerging. Data indicates that by removing financial barriers, every student can benefit from the strong educational foundation that prekindergarten provides, even at a very young age.

3. **Aid to Education**
   The Board of Education of Washington County supports adequate state funding to support the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, including supplemental local per pupil funding for prekindergarten, multilingual learners, low-income students, and students receiving special education services, and advocates for greater flexibility in the use of state allocated funds to address the unique needs of the school system.

   Any effort to reduce the level of school funding should be met with an equal reduction in mandates from the state. The Board of Education of Washington County supports ensuring that local boards of education retain decision-making authority over how funds are allocated.

   The Board of Education of Washington County opposes legislation that would provide additional school budget authority to local governments, over and above what is already required in the law, reduces state funding, shifts state funding obligations to local governments, or further imposes excessive restrictions on the use of state funds or weakens the local requirement to fully fund the requirements of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

4. **Adequate and Equitable State Funding to Improve School Buildings and to Create Capacity**

   Washington County Public Schools has forty-seven (47) school facilities to serve the needs of approximately 22,000 students. The need for new school construction and the repair and modernization of aging facilities is particularly acute in Washington County, as many of these buildings are ageing and in need of significant repair or replacement to provide safe, secure, and high-quality learning environments. Concurrent, adequate state funding, through equitable, effective formula, will supplement the local contribution that is required to address these needs. The need for investment is driven not only by seat capacity, but also by the condition and state of repair of these facilities. The Board of Education of Washington County strongly supports an increase in state funding for school construction for the improvement of school facilities with a fair and equitable funding formula.

5. **Equitable National Board Certified Teacher Salary Enhancement and Funding**

   Washington County Public Schools has 123 National Board Certified (NBC) Teachers. Beginning on July 1, 2022, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future required school systems to enhance the salary of NBC teachers by $10,000 and an additional $7,000 if the NBC teacher is teaching at a low-performing school as identified by the Board of Education of Washington County in accordance with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. However, the salary enhancement for recertification under the Blueprint is only for teachers who recertify after July 1, 2022; it does not contemplate salary enhancements for those NBC teachers who recertified prior to July 1, 2022. The Board of Education of Washington County supports an increase in state funding so that all NBC teachers, regardless of their year of recertification, can receive the salary enhancement(s) mandated by the Blueprint for those certified after July 1, 2022, and supports equity among its NBC teachers.

Local Control

1. **Governance Authority for Local Boards of Education to Set Educational Policy and School Budgets**

   The Board of Education of Washington County supports autonomy for all local boards of education to adopt education policies that promote high standards for academic and fiscal accountability, curriculum, a safe and secure learning environment, and school calendars tailored to meet the needs of each individual county. Students are best served when local boards of education, in partnership with their local community, have the authority to make informed decisions that directly impact educational equity and student outcomes. The widely recognized success of Maryland schools is a testament to the effectiveness of this governance model.

   However, the Board of Education of Washington County urges the state to eliminate burdensome restrictions, mandates, and limitations on how education funding must be spent at the local level. Local boards of education are best positioned to determine how resources should be allocated given their knowledge and understanding of the community and the needs of the local schools. Many restrictions placed on how education funding is spent by local governments and boards of education prevent the flexibility necessary to address local priorities, improve efficiency, and ensure that resources are more effectively directed to student success based on the needs of Washington County. Overly burdensome state-imposed spending restrictions hinder much needed innovation, limit flexibility, and prevent local boards of education from efficiently and effectively directing resources where they will have the greatest impact on student success based on the needs of the local community. The state's one size fits all approach is not effective for Washington County.

   The Board of Education of Washington County therefore opposes any legislation or regulatory initiatives that would diminish local governance authority or restrict budgetary discretion.

2. **Charter Schools**

   Local boards of education must retain the sole authority to grant charters and to administer funding to charter schools.

Legislative Mandates Should be Limited and Fully Funded by the State of Maryland

The Board of Education of Washington County opposes new unfunded mandates and urges the legislature to consider carefully the financial and policy implications of any new unfunded mandates. The Board of Education recommends that any new legislative mandates be coupled with mandated full funding from the state.

Classrooms That are Safe and Promote High Quality Instruction

1. **Classroom Management**
   The Board of Education of Washington County supports any legislation that promotes learning environments where students and staff feel safe and supported. Classrooms should be well managed to allow for high-quality instruction, meaningful relationships, and academic growth. The Board of Education supports legislation that provides schools with the necessary tools, resources, and authority to maintain safe and productive classrooms, while promoting behavior support for students in need, which includes the ability to remove students who are negatively impacting the learning environment.

2. **High-Quality Teachers**
   The Board of Education of Washington County supports legislation that promotes recruitment, retention, and supports highly effective teachers regardless of their status as National Board Certified.

3. **Funding to address student behavioral challenges.**
   The Board of Education of Washington County urges the General Assembly to provide more targeted and sustainable funding to support the behavioral challenges that are becoming more prevalent in today's classrooms. This funding must be flexible enough to allow local boards of education to implement strategies that reflect the needs of the unique student populations, school communities, and school infrastructures.

Alignment of State Laws and Frameworks with Federal Laws and Requirements

Local boards of education are required to comply with both federal and state law which is necessary to serve the best interests of students. In many instances, compliance with these laws is directly tied to the receipt of federal and state funding. When federal and state laws are not aligned, local boards of education are forced to choose which law to follow and hence, local boards become at risk of losing the funding necessary to meet the needs of the students they serve. The Board of Education of Washington County supports efforts to align state laws and frameworks with federal laws and requirements to eliminate risk of necessary funding loss and to ensure that local boards of education are not placed in the difficult position of choosing between legal obligations and financial stability.

Legislative Priorities

The Board of Education of Washington County will pursue the following initiatives during the 2026 legislative session:

1. **Adjusting Funding Formulas to Support Desired Educational Outcomes**
   The funding formulas of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future were codified into law during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and then followed by historic inflation. To help address inflationary pressures, the per student allocations should be reviewed and recalculated annually to ensure that the revenue allocations provided for in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future are adequate for school systems to provide the desired outcomes as required.

   The Board of Education of Washington County opposes any reductions in Blueprint Funding without a reduction in the mandates of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

2. **State Funding of School Resource Officers to Support Safe and Secure Learning Environments**
   The Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018, and its subsequent updates, have helped local boards of education achieve the goal of providing a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff through grants and the training of school security employees ("SSE") and school resource officers ("SRO"). Under the Safe to Learn Act, grants from the Safe Schools Fund awarded to school systems to enhance school safety are supplemental to, and not intended to take the place of, funding that otherwise would be appropriated to school systems for school safety. School systems are only authorized to use the grant monies for the purposes set forth in the Safe to Learn Act.

   Washington County Public Schools, uniquely, pays 100% of the cost for salary and benefits of each of its 10 contracted SROs. While the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 set appropriate goals to provide adequate coverage of SROs, the funding provided by the grants does not meet the fiscal needs of Washington County's SRO program. Washington County is unique in the state in that the Board of Education of Washington County pays for the full cost of each SRO's salary and benefits. In fiscal year 2026, the Board of Education budgeted $1,633,511 to support the SRO program. The adequate coverage grant administered by the Maryland Center for School Safety only provides $316,456 leaving a shortfall of $1,317,055 that the Board of Education must make up.

   The Board of Education of Washington County encourages the state to allocate additional funding to the Safe Schools Fund in order to fully fund SROs for school systems while still maintaining the level of grant funding currently being awarded to school systems.

3. **Ensuring Classroom Order and Enhancing Discipline to Protect Learning Environments**
   The Board of Education of Washington County prioritizes safe, orderly, and productive classrooms where each student can focus on essential learning without disruption. To achieve this, the Board of Education supports legislation to strengthen student discipline policies that include granting teachers greater authority to remove students who consistently disrupt the learning environment in order to ensure uninterrupted learning for other students. Giving teachers greater authority to remove students ensures swift and effective action to address disruptions immediately and provides early interventions and support for both the removed student and the students in the classroom. The Board of Education of Washington County supports holding students accountable through more substantial consequences for repeated or severe behavioral interruptions, expanding access to alternative educational settings for students removed from classrooms, and ensuring students removed from classrooms receive the necessary access to academic and behavioral health supports.

4. **Parental Accountability and Truancy**
   The Board of Education of Washington County acknowledges and recognizes that regular and reliable attendance is essential to student success. During the 2025 Maryland legislative session, Senate Bill 75 was introduced which would have given additional authority to judges in the juvenile justice system to impose mandates on parents/legal guardians to participate in rehabilitative services with their student when their student is adjudicated of certain criminal offenses or the student is in need of supervision because the student is required by law to attend school and is habitually truant.

   The Board of Education of Washington County recognizes the need for and encourages the requirement of participation of a student and the student's parent/legal guardian in rehabilitative services in all cases of habitual truancy. In addition, the Board of Education supports the establishment of a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program in Washington County.

Legislative Watch List

During the 2026 Maryland legislative session, the Board of Education of Washinton County will pay particular attention to any legislation concerning the following matters:

1. **The Blueprint for Maryland's Future**
   During the 2021 legislative session, the General Assembly voted to override the Governor's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Because implementation of the legislation was delayed a year (due to the veto), the General Assembly introduced new legislation that updated some implementation deadlines and addressed additional educational issues that were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, additional legislation was introduced to further refine funding for and implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. In light of the state's looming budget deficit, all matters related to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future should be closely monitored for any changes that may affect implementation dates, funding, the career ladder, teacher certification, the teacher shortage, the Accountability and Implementation Board, dual enrollment, and any other matters covered by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

2. **Breakfast and Lunch Programs Universal Expansion**
   During the 2024 legislative session, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring the State Department of Education, on or before December 1, 2024, to report to the General Assembly on a cost estimate for providing free breakfast and lunch to all students.

3. **Free and Appropriate Education – Burden of Proof and Fee Shifting**
   In due process hearings, the burden of proof rests with the parent. In the event a decision is made to change this long-standing practice, it will increase the cost of such hearings to the local boards of education. More importantly, teachers will be required to redirect valuable instructional time away from students and instead be focused on satisfying new legal mandates that the Supreme Court has already determined are not required.

   Under current law, the prevailing party in a due process hearing may be awarded reimbursement for their legal fees. Costs associated with the litigation, including the cost of any experts the party retains, are not reimbursable. Any deviation from this current standard may discourage parents from engaging in a collaborative process with the school system to resolve disagreements and incentivize litigation.

   The current burden of proof standard should be retained and the shifting of any additional costs, including expert fees, to local school systems should be opposed.

4. **Contest Any Further Increases in the Transfer of Pension Costs**
   Current law places the burden of pension costs on local governments and requires local boards of education to absorb the "full normal cost" of the teachers' pension system. The Board of Education of Washington County's full normal pension costs are over $8,500,000. These pension costs are being funded primarily from the general education fund budget. These costs will continue to increase in light of the substantial increase to teacher

compensation provided for by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Costs will also increase as a result of the additional staff local boards of education are required to retain under the Blueprint.

Pension costs should be separate from the education budget.

5. **Safe and Secure Learning Environment**
   Students want to learn and staff want to work in a school that is safe and secure. The Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 has helped local boards of education achieve the goal of providing a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff through grants and the training of school resource officers. The Board of Education of Washington County recognizes the importance of mental and behavioral health services for students in achieving the goal of providing a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff.

   The Safe to Learn Act in its current or enhanced form should be supported. Also, any effort to provide additional adequate and equitable funding to local school systems to ensure they are able to provide sufficient mental and behavioral health services to students should be supported to help local boards of education provide a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff.

6. **Electric School Buses**
   The Board of Education of Washington County supports responsible and reasonable environmental stewardship and is committed to improving energy efficiency in school operations. However, the Board of Education opposes the current law that requires Maryland school systems to replace school buses with electric school buses without providing adequate funding, flexibility, or consideration of local infrastructure that does not support electric school buses and the operational challenges associated with transitioning to electric school buses.

   Transitioning to an electric school bus fleet demands significant investment in charging infrastructure, grid updates, driver and mechanic training, and long-term maintenance planning. These burdens are especially difficult for school systems that are geographically expansive, mountainous, rural, and economically disadvantaged which cannot support the changes necessary for the infrastructure required.

   The Board of Education of Washington County supports any bill that delays or repeals the electric school bus purchase requirement until adequate state and federal funding is available to fully support the transition, and recognizes the regional differences in power grid capacity, bus route length, and topographical challenges that affect electric vehicle performance. The current requirements place an undue strain on education budgets intended for student academic success.

7. **Reportable Offense Laws**

The Board of Education of Washington County is committed to creating a safe, engaging, and supportive learning environment for each student and staff member. A student's conduct occurring off school premises that results in a reportable offense or arrest related to a student's membership in a criminal gang can affect the safety and/or emotional well-being of others in school and/or have a direct effect on the order and general welfare of the learning environment. School staff rely on reportable offense reporting procedures to help maintain a safe learning environment. However, gaps in reportable offense information sharing currently exist, which, in some cases, can lead to unsafe learning environments.

The Board of Education of Washington County supports any bill that closes the information gaps so that school systems can receive critical student information in a timely manner when a student has been arrested for a reportable offense. This information assists staff in determining the best placement for the student and in maintaining a safe, engaging, and supportive learning environment for each student and staff member.