

FW: Comments on draft Climate Action Plan & Funding for Climate-Resilient Schools

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To: Climate <Climate@montgomerycountymd.gov>

Subject: Comments on draft Climate Action Plan & Funding for Climate-Resilient Schools

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

There are many good recommendations in the draft Climate Action Plan but it seems to lack many clear action steps for schools either for the short-term during COVID (when schools need usable outdoor spaces sheltered from sun and rain for more safely reopening during a pandemic) or in the longer term when the County will increasingly experience climate-related events. Students and families in historically under-resourced communities have [less access to heat-mitigating green spaces](#), sheltered recreation areas, [trees](#), [school gardens](#), [community gardens](#), pedestrian connections and other climate-friendly and community resilience amenities and improvements. Public schools serve the youth of the County; and public school families (and MCPS staff who work outdoors) are also more diverse than the general County population, so prioritizing climate-adaptation and resilience for public schools and especially Title 1 communities will help reach the groups that are disproportionately hurt by climate change: young people, and [black and brown communities](#).

The draft Climate Action Plan should include the following measurable action steps related to schools and school district properties, which is also one of the largest sources of land in the County:

- Install solar canopies over [blacktop recess areas and outdoor class spaces](#), (starting with Title 1 schools and with their involvement), which can be used during COVID and will also allow more "outdoor recess" days in the long-term during rainy weather & to provide shade for [high heat days](#);
- Install solar canopies over school parking lots;
- [Plant native trees](#) and install Rainscapes rain gardens or Conservation Landscaping at all Title 1 schools who want them with ongoing maintenance assistance from County Parks staff [creates green jobs];
- Install sustainable agriculture demonstration gardens (permaculture, food forest, community garden) at all Title 1 schools who want them with garden maintenance and

volunteer coordination provided by County staff [green jobs], and provide [garden curriculum, activities or programs](#) for teachers to use with their classes in school gardens;

- Develop a County program to [open up school gardens to the community during the summer](#) when schools aren't using them;
- Map usable green spaces and other outdoor learning areas on all public lands, including MCPS properties, starting with lower income communities;
- Connect Title 1 schools to adjacent parks with all-weather pedestrian paths to expand usable outdoor space for schools during COVID, and in the long-term for more nature-based learning for public schools;
- Develop grade-level-appropriate County Climate Action Plan presentations for Family STEM Night events at public schools (K-2, 3-5, etc.) and start offering them to Title 1 schools this spring;
- Create an optional Drawdown-type climate course for MCPS staff (starting with building & grounds maintenance, and bus fleet maintenance staff) and offer it through MCPS PDO so that staff can be paid for attending.
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- Work with MCCPTA, Linkages to Learning, and community organizations like Corazon, One Montgomery Green, and Audubon Society to provide culturally relevant Climate Adaptation & Resilience workshops for parents (starting at Title 1 schools).
- Set a goal to discontinue single use lunch packaging, and move toward on-site lunch preparation, reusable trays, and composting of food waste.
- Create a Pilot Project for on-site composting of school lunch waste, which could also serve as a community composting site for neighborhood families;
- Incentivize all schools to provide bike racks for students and staff;
- Incentivize County and school district staff to bike, walk, or take transit to work for example by providing discounted or free transit passes, and wellness incentives for biking and walking to school;
- Create a [traffic garden pilot project at a school](#) with design involvement by the schools students, staff and families.
- Develop countywide traffic garden design standards for other MCPS schools who want to install one, like DCPS has done;
- Implement an equity-focused program ([like DCPS](#)) to [teach all 2nd graders to ride a bike during PE](#) ;
- Distribute information to students through the MCPS SERT program about County requirements for apartment managers to provide recycling services to residents;
- Prioritize retaining existing affordable housing units near Purple Line stations to prevent displacing low-income families who most need transit from those neighborhoods.
- The County and school district should work together toward a goal of MAEOE Green School certification for 100% of MCPS schools, like school districts in [Calvert County](#) and [Queen Anne's County](#) have already accomplished, and which [Anne Arundel County Public Schools](#) has set as a goal;
- Advocate for state legislation that incorporates climate justice into K-12 subject areas, like [HF 550 and SF 666 in Minnesota](#).
- Ensure that schools are adequately prepared to serve as community resource centers during power outages and climate emergencies. [For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic the schools have done a great job of continuing to provide food, materials,

and Chromebooks for students, **but Montgomery County Department of HHS School-Based Health Centers at Title 1 schools have been closed creating additional barriers to healthcare in low income black and brown neighborhoods where families are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.]**

FUNDING:

Climate-friendly improvements which also make schools more COVID-resistant can be funded by CARES, the omnibus bill passed by Congress in December, and the American Rescue Plan, all of which include money for schools distributed through the states. There is also likely to be another major federal investment package later this year that is expected to include a focus on infrastructure and climate.



For COVID-19 Information and resources, visit: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COVID19