

## **Expanding After School Engagement Opportunities for Middle and High School Students**

**(Board Member Michael K. Lukas)**

Good evening. I am Michael Lukas, member of the Board of Education of Charles County.

I am here this evening to thank the members of the Board of Charles County Commissioners for their continued support of public education. I also want to highlight for you a key area of the Charles County Public Schools Fiscal Year 2025 budget request – the expansion of school engagement opportunities for middle and high school students.

The budget request includes a priority focus on Charles County Public Schools expanding after-school and extracurricular activities to middle school students. One perspective I have heard over the years as a longtime Board of Education member is the ability, or lack thereof, for students to access transportation for them to stay after school. Thousands of students have working parents or family members who are not able to pick them up or drop them off for after-school activities such as clubs or even for community league sports teams. This should not be a barrier for children, and I have lobbied for funding to help support our ability to transport students for sports and other after-school activities.

If you may recall, several years ago Charles County Public Schools operated what we called “activity buses” that ran routes to and from high schools for students participating in after-school programs. The cost to the school system at the time, which was around 2014, was about \$300,000 per school year with buses providing service after school for high school students participating in

clubs and sports. Unfortunately, the program was not sustainable, and the funding was allocated in 2015 in the budget to help fund costs to open St. Charles High School.

While I am just one member of the Board of Education, I continued to bring this up to my colleagues and school system staff year after year. I sought ways for the school system to make this effort work and at the end of the day, it all came down to funding. However, by eliminating activity buses, we eliminated the ability for hundreds of students to deepen their connection to school through athletics, clubs and afterschool programs.

The fiscal year 2025 budget request includes a \$3 million ask from the school system to support a middle and high school extracurricular and activities plan to increase student participation and engagement. The plan includes transportation for students and funding to cover extra duty pay positions for team coaches. The expansion of secondary-level athletics and extracurricular programs to middle school students will only grow and positively impact student and family engagement.

The plan includes bus transportation for students to and from practices and meet locations throughout the season. This plan will further support students with opportunities to feel welcome and safe at school, which is part of the Culture and Climate priority focus area of the Charles County Public Schools Strategic Plan.

By supporting this ask in the fiscal year 2025 budget request, you are helping to provide more resources for students – and solving a dilemma for families who cannot be in two places at once to transport their children to sports or other after-school activities while working. You would be

helping Charles County Public Schools provide more opportunities for students to be further engaged in their school community in a positive, and personally meaningful way. Together, we would be partnering to help students feel included as a part of something outside of academics.

On behalf of the Board of Education of Charles County and Charles County Public Schools, I urge the Board of Charles County Commissioners to fully fund our fiscal year 2025 budget request so that we can continue to support all children in Charles County. Thank you.