

Expanding Community Schools (Nicole M. Kreamer, Board Vice Chairperson)

Good evening. I am Nicole Kreamer, vice chairperson 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 critical area of the Charles County Public Schools Fiscal Year 2025 budget request – the Community Schools Program. Community Schools are outlined in the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future education reform law and require school systems to provide wrap-around services to schools, students, and families most impacted by poverty. Community Schools bring families and community partners together to strengthen the home-to-school-to-community connection that in turn supports the improvement of student outcomes. Some of these supports include a community coordinator and liaison who works with families, students, and staff daily to ensure children have access to resources they need both at school and at home to be successful.

Community schools also offer families and students access to extra resources such as food from community pantries, extended learning programs and tutoring support, social-emotional learning activities and supports, and targeted mentoring for students. Also, each Community School has its own dedicated school nurse who not only supports students, but also parents, families, and staff. Families also have more access to other health services such as vision and dental screenings and services. Our community school coordinators provide referrals to local agencies and organizations for families in need of extra help, and often help families make the initial connection or outreach. Another important note about Community Schools is that staff in these schools

receive additional trauma-informed care training so they have a better understanding of some of the needs of their students that may fall outside of the academic setting.

There are currently five Community Schools in Charles County: Dr. Gustavus Brown, Indian Head, Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, J.P. Ryon and Eva Turner elementary schools. With the fiscal year 2025 budget request, Charles County Public Schools seeks to expand the Community School program to five additional school campuses: Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer Elementary School, Benjamin Stoddert, John Hanson and General Smallwood middle schools, and Thomas Stone High School.

As my colleague Board Chairperson Yonelle Moore Lee shared with you earlier, the percentage of Charles County Public Schools students impacted by poverty has increased from 33% in 2013 to an estimated 49% for this upcoming school year. This is a 16% increase in just 11 years. We know that being impacted by poverty creates conditions that can negatively impact students from maximizing their potential and succeeding in school. Expanding the Community School program outlined in our school budget would help us provide our students and their families with the resources they need to succeed.

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.