

**Expanding rigorous and career-focused course options, materials and staffing to best prepare our students for life after graduation (Board Member Samichie K. Thomas)**

Good evening. I am Samichie Thomas, member of the Board of Education of Charles County.

I am here tonight to thank the members of the Board of Charles County Commissioners for their continued support of public education. I also want to highlight an important area of the Charles County Public Schools Fiscal Year 2025 budget request – providing rigorous and career-focused course options for students that prepare them for life after they graduate.

Charles County Public Schools currently provides students with diverse options at the secondary level to expose them to higher learning, career options and advanced coursework. This includes innovative career and technical education programs, a variety of Advanced Placement courses (with college credit options), and dual or early college enrollment options. Beginning at the middle school level, students are educated on options they can pursue to support them with their post-graduate goals. It is the mission of Charles County Public Schools to ensure every student leaves high school with a plan and pathway for their future.

Part of this mission is providing students with options – whether they are on track to take several AP (Advanced Placement) classes, finish a college associate degree while still in high school, complete a career pathway with industry certification before they graduate or enter the Armed Forces. It is critical that our school system provides many options to all students.

The fiscal year 2025 budget request includes areas of expansion by the school system to increase post-graduate options for students and provides up-to-date resources and materials to

supplement these programs. As part of the 2024-2025 Early College Program expansion, Charles County Public Schools is offering three new certificate completion programs: medical coding, pharmacy technician and electrical engineering. These are high-demand workforce areas, and our students can take these programs at no cost. When they graduate from high school, they can enter the workforce with skills and credentials to be hired in high paying jobs immediately. Why would we not support the funding of such options for students?

Charles County Public Schools is launching a theater pathway at Maurice J. McDonough High School. Part of the 2023 renovations at McDonough included a complete redesign of space to support this new pathway. Students from across Charles County can apply to enroll. While theater arts courses and opportunities are available at all Charles County high schools, this new pathway features specialized courses, hands-on training and more “learn by doing” for students interested in set design, acting, directing, producing and more. If you have attended any of our recent plays or musical productions, we have so much talent among our students. Talent that we need to support and grow. I am so excited to see this pathway begin.

The school system also needs funding to buy supplemental course resources and materials. Many of our CTE (Career and Technical Education) courses require materials of instruction or subscriptions in order for students to gain industry certifications and credentials. These requirements are built into the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Pillar 3 indicating that school systems must pay for such certification exams. When new programs are added for students, such as Biotechnology, ProStart culinary arts, barbering and CASE natural resources management, the school system can include starting costs and materials into grant funding. When the grants expire,

the school system must absorb these costs to keep the programs running and available for students. We cannot afford to take away any option for students.

There are other essential resources and instructional costs identified in the fiscal year 2025 budget request. As we pilot more Advanced Placement courses for students, we must buy the materials that accompany them. These materials help to prepare students for College Board exams. As you may be aware, Charles County Public Schools is launching a dual language, two-way immersion program at Arthur Middleton Elementary School this fall. To effectively open the program, we need funds to purchase English and Spanish curriculum, library materials, signage and other resources to support our students learning English and Spanish. We cannot provide high-quality courses or a quality dual language program without having the materials to support them.

The school system is also looking to continue supplementing home and hospital services for students. Unfortunately, the nationwide teacher shortage affecting school systems and Charles County Public Schools also impacts our home and hospital program. We struggle to secure certified teachers in specialized content areas to work with these students. Services are supplemented through the EdOptions Academy online. Costs for these curriculum supplements are allocated in the budget request.

Another reality we face is our attempt to engage and expand student interest in performing arts. As I mentioned earlier, we have so many talented students. For any student interested in learning how to play an instrument, money should not be a deterrent. We are finding since the pandemic

an increasing need for students to receive practice instruments from the school system at no cost. This funding must come from somewhere and is built into our fiscal year 2025 budget request.

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, year-round, in Charles County. Thank you.