

Strong Systems of Operation

I am here tonight to thank the members of the Board of Charles County Commissioners for their continued support of public education. As a student, I see the impacts of the funding of education firsthand each day. On behalf of the more than 28,000 students I represent, thank you for your support over the years of teaching and learning in Charles County Public Schools.

All the areas my Board colleagues shared with you tonight are important for students. From services expanding over the summer and several post-graduate options students can pursue to targeted interventions and trained staff to provide them, everything outlined in the fiscal year 2025 budget request is necessary in helping every student learn, thrive and grow.

For Charles County Public Schools to successfully help students learn and grow, the school system must have the programs, people and technology in place to make the success happen. As the school system expands its services to accommodate a growing Charles County community, the need for more staff, advanced programs and technology to manage this work is essential.

For example, Charles County Public Schools is experiencing workforce shortages and impacts that school systems across the U.S. are also seeing. Staff in the Office of Human Resources work daily to recruit, hire and retain employees – from teachers and instructional assistants to bus drivers, substitute teachers and food service workers. The school system cannot hire people fast enough to fill all the vacancy areas. We need more people to help with employee recruitment, hiring and retention.

Charles County Public Schools continues to purchase buses to allocate enough routes so the 23,000 plus students who ride school buses daily can ride a safe, uncrowded school bus on an efficient route. However, we always have bus driver shortages. We simply need more drivers to drive students. While I do not ride a school bus, I have several peers who do and when a driver is out sick or needs to take a day off, there may not be another driver to cover the route. That is a reality of Charles County Public Schools bus service. We need the funding to hire more bus drivers and staff to manage an increasingly internalized operation of bus services.

Earlier this school year, Charles County Public Schools replaced an aging, 30-year plus financial and staff data management system with Oracle Cloud. While as a student I do not have experience using the platform, I am aware of the massive undertaking such a conversion takes. And the school system teams who undertook this work did so without the recommended staffing to support it. Over the summer and fall of 2023, many Charles County Public Schools employees worked overtime to ensure Oracle was up and running. However, there is not one direct staff member whose sole responsibility is Oracle oversight. We need to hire additional budgeting staff to support this advanced operating system.

Part of the team to launch Oracle included staff from the Office of Technology. During the implementation of Oracle, technology staff were moving forward with implementing a new advanced learning management system, Canvas. Canvas is used by school systems nationwide and is an online tool teachers can use to host course materials, communicate with parents and students, share assessments and more. Canvas will launch fully this fall and integrates with our current student information system, Synergy. With the launch comes an increased need for staff

who support the platform (and teachers that will be required to use it). The school system needs more technology positions dedicated to Canvas and the advancement of school to home student and parent communication.

The last point I want to touch on is the replacement of technology. As you know, the pandemic forced schools to close and quickly pivot to virtual instruction. Charles County Public Schools was committed to providing every student with a learning device; students could not learn and grow if they could not access the instruction. Fast forward to now, and the Office of Technology is seeing aging equipment, equipment that is damaged and broken and limited abilities for families to cover repair costs. As equipment ages, the costs to replace or repair it increase and for the school system to continue offering a 1:1 model – one device for every student – it must reallocate classroom resources to ensure access remains. Coupled with the fact that most education curriculum providers share online, or digital resources as opposed to paper and bounded books, the need for students to have an electronic device to learn remains unchanged. Costs to provide and/or repair this technology will only continue to increase. This funding must come from somewhere and is built into our fiscal year 2025 budget request.

By supporting the school system's fiscal year 2025 budget request, you are helping support strong operational systems committed to the education of every student. 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.