VP Advocacy Office Report, Laura Stewart

December 2020

This past month I have attended the following meetings.

Black and Brown Coalition

The coalition is continuing to work on their original “asks” especially is getting access to more experienced and effective principals and teachers.

CRAG (Community Recovery Advisory Group)

This group advises the Executive Branch on what is needed in various communities. We also receive information that could be useful in helping our respective communities in the recovery effort. Last week we gathered in small groups in order to help each other suggest solutions to aid in recovery.

Virtual Learning Committee

Requested to meet with MCPS to discuss Outdoor Learning opportunities, we have not received a response as of yet. We will follow up with unresolved tech questions and issues. Committee is collaborating with the Mental Health subcommittee. We continue to add new members to the committee and will advocate for more support during this emergency.

Health and Wellness Committee

Continuing to dialog with MCP concerning HVAC, air quality, water quality, sanitizing procedures, and PPE. Another meeting is planned for December.

SSP Subcommittee

This is a summary of the plan which had a final vote on 12/8. A veto was overturned, unanimously.

Moratoria is eliminated throughout the county.

Two geographic zones were created for student generation rates, along with different rates for housing types. Infill has lower student generation rates and will therefor pay for less impact. Additional discounts to impact tax rates in some targeted zones were not approved.

Impact tax will now cover 100% of the seat, instead of 120%.  .

Recordation Taxes were not covered and will be delayed until spring.

Utilization Premium Payments will be paid in overcrowded areas. This is determined by school level. This was part of a proposal that replaces moratoria.

Yearly utilization test: If a project exceeds school seats open by a certain percentage, or a specified seat threshold, they will pay the Premium Payment. This is the same test that was used for moratoria.

Opportunity Zones: These are now exempted from all school impact tax, instead of Enterprise Zones.

CIP Committee

BOE CIP hearings have been completed. Next set of hearings are after break, and will be at the Area Vice President level at the County Council.

BOE CIP has been passed. Less than 4 million more was requested, but 10 million will be needed in FY22, and possibly more HVAC money will be needed in FY21. I had a meeting with Seth Adams and Adrienne Karamihas to discuss the final CIP Budget that was passed.

Testifying to Government Bodies:

Local Priorities Hearing for the Montgomery County Delegation

Supporting the UPP at a County Council Hearing

Copies of Oral Testimony are below.

**Oral Testimony in Support of the Resolution to Establish Utilization Premium Payment Rate for Public School Improvements – December 8, 2020**

Good Afternoon President Hucker and Councilmembers,

My name is Laura Stewart, MCCPTA Vice President of Advocacy, and I am here speaking for our Subdivision Staging Policy Subcommittee. We strongly support the Resolution to Establish Utilization Premium Payment Rate for Public School Improvements.

I want to thank you for the hard work it took to produce this final product, which is part of the new Growth and Infrastructure Policy. I think we can all agree that moratoria did not fix the realities that kids are experiencing in their overcrowded schools. This payment helps us replace moratoria with more school construction funding. We haven’t been keeping up with our facility needs, and this payment will help cover our large capacity needs, while freeing up other funds for our huge maintenance backlog. This is more important than ever, considering the extra strain that our facilities will be under when we re-open in the COVID -19 environment.

However, I am worried that we haven’t reached CIP funding goals due to the new Progressive Recordation tax piece being delayed until spring. The Utilization Premium Payment will only fulfill capacity needs if we also cover turnover impacts with the Recordation Tax proposal. I strongly urge you to look for a way to increase school construction funding in a way that will take advantage of the anticipated new state funding through the Built to Learn Act.

I also want to take a minute to thank you for funding the South Lake project and the HVAC request this year. Passing this resolution and the Progressive Recordation tax later this spring, along with the appropriate state funding will help our county actually provide us with the necessary resources to complete long overdue projects like the Poolesville High School, Eastern Middle School, and Twinbrook Elementary school renovations.

Thank you again for all your work on the new Growth and Infrastructure Policy, taking time to hear from parents and education advocates, and for supporting Montgomery County Schools, one of the most important assets to our county.

Laura Stewart

MCCPTA Vice President of Advocacy

**Maryland General Assembly Priorities Hearing November 2020**

Good Evening,

My name is Laura Stewart, Vice President of Advocacy for MCCPTA and I am speaking on behalf of 193 PTAs today. We recently passed our Advocacy Priorities for the year, and you won’t be surprised that the COVID-19 emergency dominated the conversation. Even though that is the case, many issues that have surfaced existed long before the crisis. We need to keep that in mind and keep focused on the long term goals for our county and state when it comes to educating our children.

The first order of business should be overturning the veto of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. This is essential to Montgomery County so that we may provide an equitable education to all students, no matter their zip code. In order to recover from the learning loss, which has hit some communities more than others, we will need The Blueprint resources for mental health services, more tutoring support, more teachers, expanded Pre-K, and to help deliver a challenging culturally relevant curriculum. The Montgomery County BOE has recently approved an anti-racism audit of MCPS. The Blueprint will help our system eliminate some of the inequities that perpetuate the opportunity gap for Black and Brown children.

After you overturn the Blueprint veto, please pass and implement the Built to Learn Act, which is more important now than before the Covid-19 Emergency. Our old HVAC systems need to be updated in order for schools to open safely. MCPS had asked for 6.8 Million dollars to get the upgraded filters and updates to HVAC systems before students return to the classroom. They found 3 million that they could repurpose, but eventually they will need more and at this time the county council has not allocated that money. We must assure teachers that when the metrics allow for a return, they WILL have adequate PPE.

There are other concerns about the county budgets. Maryland should hold school systems harmless due to loss of enrollment due to Covid-19. There are also concerns that more teachers will need to be hired in order to eventually have a hybrid option for students. Please keep these factors in mind when passing legislation this year. Families continue to need financial support as well, and need state help so they can get the basic necessities through this crisis. One of those necessities is access to broadband internet, now an essential for all children. Some student’s learning loss will be so dire, they might need an extra year in order to receive all the instruction they need to graduate.

There are other priorities we would be honored to work on throughout the year, including safe routes, healthy environments and transparent data.

Laura Stewart

MCCPTA VP of Advocacy