

Final Op-ed Placed in Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/19/prince-georges-plan-build-schools-will-help-students-community/>

Prince George's plan to build schools will help students and the community

Our children deserve the opportunity to be educated in school buildings that are conducive to learning and reflect the importance we place on their education. The people of Prince George's don't want political grandstanding, excuses or bureaucracy; they want us to deliver on the promises we have made to build exceptional schools and classrooms befitting of our children, and we will deliver.

The county has an \$8.5 billion backlog in school construction, with 40 percent of school buildings built 60 years ago. This is unacceptable. This week, the Board of Education will have the opportunity to approve the construction of six new county schools over the next three years, a process that would typically take 12 years, through an Alternative Construction Finance Program. Prince George's County Public Schools chief executive Monica Goldson and her team have taken great care to ensure that safeguards are in place and the timeline of the program stays on track.

For example, all schools must be delivered no later than July 15, 2024, or the developer will be subject to liquidated damages for each day that they are delayed; a design-build reserve account will be in place for the developer to access should there be cost overruns or unforeseen charges. This is not additional money; it has been built into their availability payment.

Additionally, Prince George's County Public Schools doesn't make a single payment until 50 percent of the total design-build costs have been spent by the developer. That incentivizes the developer to proceed deliberately and expeditiously to deliver the schools on time. These are just a few of the safeguards under the contract to ensure the project proceeds on schedule; however, the school system's procurement process and the underlying intent of the public-private partnership is and has been available for public review online since last year.

This agreement also provides a generational opportunity to minority and county business owners, with \$137.7 million going to minority-based businesses during the design-build period, which is over 2.5 years, and an additional \$91.9 million during the services period. This will provide job growth and economic growth for the county and is estimated to bring 3,000 jobs and provide capacity-building for many small county-based businesses.

The multibillion-dollar backlog in school construction is, in large part, because of the astronomical costs of trying to repair dilapidated buildings and outdated infrastructure. Under this innovative agreement, the developer is required to maintain the buildings for 30 years, providing a cost savings of \$235 million over the life of the agreement.

Over the past week, people have spoken out against this proposed plan, disseminating misinformation to confuse the public, offering no alternative ideas and adding little to the conversation. These first six schools, which are scheduled to be completed by 2024, will help hard-working families and students who need them most in Landover, Capitol Heights, Adelphi and Hyattsville. Prince George's parents and our community have been waiting decades for new schools, and it's time the county delivers.