



Washington County BOARD OF EDUCATION

BEFORE THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

IN THE MATTER OF THE PROPOSED CLOSING OF HICKORY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND FOUNTAIN ROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL YEAR

DECISION AND ORDER

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Each member of the Board of Education of Washington County (“Board of Education”) received a copy of the *Superintendent’s Report and Recommendations for the Closing of Hickory Elementary School and Fountain Rock Elementary School and the Construction of a Replacement Elementary School at Downsville Pike*, dated May 2, 2023 (“*Superintendent’s Report*”). The *Superintendent’s Report* has also been made available to the members of the public for their consideration and comments through the Washington County Public Schools (“WCPS”) website and through the availability of hard copies at the Center for Education Services and each affected school.

On May 2, 2023, school system staff provided the public and the Board of Education with a comprehensive briefing with respect to the *Superintendent’s Report* during the Board of Education’s regularly scheduled public business meeting. The briefing included a careful review of the eight (8) COMAR factors to be considered when closing a school.

A notice was placed in two (2) newspapers circulated in Washington County notifying the public that the Board of Education would be conducting a public hearing on June 5, 2023, and that the Board of Education would be considering voting on the *Superintendent’s Report* at its public business meeting

scheduled for June 20, 2023. On June 5, 2023, the Board of Education conducted a public hearing for the purpose of seeking input from the community with regard to the *Superintendent's Report*.

The members of the Board of Education have carefully considered the *Superintendent's Report*, the briefing provided with respect to this report, the comments offered by the community, the responses to comments provided by school staff, and the official transcript of the Board of Education's public hearing conducted on June 5, 2023, on the closing of Hickory Elementary School and Fountain Rock Elementary School, which are hereafter collectively referred to as the official record of these proceedings.

The *Superintendent's Report* includes the following important findings:

- Hickory Elementary School, originally constructed in 1975, is the lowest scoring elementary facility in the annual WCPS *Facility Assessment*.
 - The 39,571 square foot facility is located on a 10.23-acre site on Hickory School Road that is accessed only from U.S. Route 11 (Virginia Avenue) to the South. It is bounded by the Crosspoint Shopping Center (shopping mall – Target, Kohl's, Petco, etc.) property to the North, West Grosh Avenue to the West, and a privately owned parcel to the East.
 - The site is partially limited by its geography (wooded areas/building location/property lines/infrastructure) and shape, which reduces the options and ability for students to participate in outdoor activities. The proximity of the commercial property to the north affects the outdoor instructional environment with noise and potential increased security risks.
 - The current facility does not have a sprinkler system, lacks specifically designed specialty instructional spaces, a dedicated media center, and employs two (2) relocatable classrooms for needed additional educational space.
 - The existing school lacks adequate spaces for art, music, small-group instruction, administration, and student services.
 - The school is an "open school," with students having to walk through or beside adjacent open classrooms when moving to core or specialty instructional spaces. This type of design is disruptive to the educational environment.

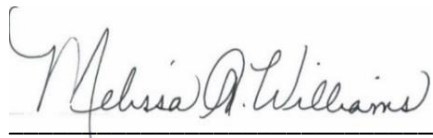
- Fountain Rock Elementary School, originally constructed in 1970, is the fourth lowest scoring elementary facility in the WCPS *Facility Assessment*.
 - The current facility lacks specialty instructional spaces and a dedicated space for a media center and employs two (2) relocatable classrooms for needed additional educational space.
 - While relocatable classrooms have helped serve as a temporary solution, the existing school still lacks adequate spaces for science, art, music, computers, small-group instruction, administration, and student services.
 - Like Hickory, the school is an “open school,” with classroom areas designed by temporary partitions and not solid walls. Students walk through or beside adjacent open classroom areas when moving to core or specialty instruction spaces. This type of design is disruptive to the educational environment.
 - The current facility is also not serviced with public utilities for water and sewer.
- Educational opportunities will be enhanced at the new replacement elementary school at Downsville Pike. A new four (4) -round school, that will include core space to accommodate a phased build-out of up to five (5) rounds, will allow full-time staffing of various education programs that are now part-time at the two smaller schools.
 - Specific ways that a new facility will help improve the delivery of educational programs include:
 - Self-contained classrooms
 - Dedicated instruction spaces
 - Science
 - Art
 - Music
 - Small Groups
 - Special Education
 - Larger and improved core spaces
 - Gym
 - Cafeteria
 - State-of-the-art media center

ORDER AND DISPOSITION OF THE CASE

After due consideration of the *Superintendent’s Report*, the briefing provided with respect to this report, the reasoning in support of the school closings set forth in the *Superintendent’s Report*, the comments offered by the community, the responses to comments provided by school staff, and the other documents which are part of the official record of these proceedings, the Board of Education of Washington County by a majority vote at its public business meeting conducted on June 20, 2023, approved the following motion:

Approval of the closure of Fountain Rock and Hickory Elementary Schools upon the successful construction completion and opening of “Downsville Pike” Elementary School.

Accordingly, it is this 20th day of June, 2023, ORDERED, by the Board of Education of Washington County that upon completion of a new elementary school at Downsville Pike, with a projected date of completion for the 2027-2028 school year, that Hickory Street Elementary School and Fountain Rock Elementary School be closed at the completion of the 2026-2027 school year. Students in the attendance zone for Hickory Elementary School and Fountain Rock Elementary School at the time of the closure will be assigned to the new school or to another Washington County public school.



Melissa A. Williams, President
Board of Education of Washington County

June 27, 2023

Date

NOTICE OF APPEAL

You may appeal this Decision and Order to the State Board of Education as provided by §4-205(c) of the Education Article of the *Annotated Code of Maryland* and Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations Section 13A.02.09.03 and Sections 13A.01.05.01 to .11. An appeal taken to the State Board

of Education shall be taken within 30 calendar days of the decision of the local board issued on June 27,

2023. The State Board of Education's mailing address is as follows:

Maryland State Board of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201