

BRES PTA Advocacy Work Plan Outline: Confronting Overcrowding

Background

Bayard Rustin Elementary School (BRES) opened in September 2018 in Rockville, Maryland to alleviate overcrowding in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Richard Montgomery Cluster.[1] In less than four years, BRES has outpaced enrollment projections and now has more students than projected for 2026-2027 school year.[2] In Fall 2021 alone, enrollment increased by over 10%. As of February 2022, BRES had 781 students enrolled, even though the expected capacity when built was 740. [1] [3]

Comparably, enrollment in MCPS has decreased the past two school years, and the two closest elementary schools, Beall Elementary School and College Gardens Elementary school, also saw a decrease in enrollment. Those schools are under 80% capacity while BRES close to 100%, if not over. [2]

The increasing enrollment has also caused an uneven distribution of students within BRES; Kindergarten and 3rd grade homeroom class sizes are very large, initially above MCPS class size guidelines [4], necessitating the hiring of additional teachers and conversion of a resource room and compacted math room into classrooms. While other grades are not yet experiencing this issue, it is likely that all classes will see growth in the near future. BRES will continue to see jumps in enrollment when students return to in-person learning from the virtual academy or transfer back to MCPS from local private schools, as well as due to new, large residential developments within the BRES boundaries and influx of new families moving into the existing neighborhoods. [4-7]

BRES families are deeply concerned with this upward trajectory of enrollment that continues to surpass MCPS projections. As we witnessed during the 2021-2022 school year, unanticipated increases in enrollment led to increased class size beyond MCPS guidelines and disruptions in how education was delivered. Given research shows that overcrowding, class sizes, and student-to-teacher ratios impact educational outcomes, this advocacy work plan was developed to enable BRES families to collectively advocate through the BRES PTA to mitigate future unanticipated enrollment spikes leading to class sizes beyond MCPS guidelines.

This concern is evidence-based and an equity issue. As described in the May 2019 MCPS report developed in response to BOE Resolution No. 33-19, "Examination of Class Size Within Montgomery County Public Schools" the benefits of appropriate class sizes for students include improved attentiveness, reduced reports of negative perceptions of classes and teachers, higher performance by economically disadvantaged and minority students, and greater likelihood to enroll in college by age 20. [8][9]

Overcrowded schools are faced with additional challenges when using common spaces such as wait time to use restrooms, cleanliness of restrooms and common areas, appropriate playground space per child, timing of lunch at the cafeteria, and potential loss of music and art rooms, etc. These challenges, including the growing lack of appropriate classroom spaces, collectively impact students' and staff well-being and quality of instruction. Further, future plans to convert specialists' rooms into classrooms, may negatively impact the quality of special programs such as art, ESOL, and music.

BRES has outstanding staff and all student groups have met Maryland academic targets unlike other MCPS elementary schools with wide disparities among student groups. [10] Proactively addressing escalating enrollment and preventing unexpected surges in class sizes beyond MCPS guidelines is key to continued success. In support of this goal, the BRES PTA Advocacy Committee drafted the following advocacy work plan to unite PTA members in confronting overcrowding.

Advocacy Goal & Objectives

The goal of BRES PTA advocacy will be to support all BRES students and staff in achieving success by advocating for adequate classroom spaces and aligning class sizes with MCPS guidelines while maintaining staff talent, limiting disruption to students, and ensuring an inclusive and equitable learning environment. To achieve this goal, the BRES PTA will advocate for two solutions:

- Repurposing current building space for additional staff and classrooms, in the short-term
- Reevaluating student distribution throughout the Richard Montgomery cluster, in the long-term

Advocacy will be directed to achieve the following objectives.

- Raise awareness about the overcrowding concerns during the 2021-2022 school year
- Propose options to MCPS and county leadership to prevent future overcrowding at BRES
- Support principal in the planning of mitigation strategies to prevent mid-year disruption in the event BRES will again surpass the student-teacher ratio beyond MCPS guidelines.

Advocacy Strategies and Actions

BRES PTA will achieve the above-mentioned goals and objectives using the strategies outlined in the tables below. Each of the three objectives are associated with an action for PTA members to take, the tactics for carrying out that action, who within the PTA will lead the tactics (i.e., track), and the timeframe for completing the action. Messaging to use in carrying out these actions are described in the following subheading.

Table 1. Raising Awareness

| OBJECTIVE 1: Raise awareness about overcrowding concerns during 2021-2022 school year | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Action | Tactic | Track | Timeframe |
| Action 1: Expand channels for reaching BRES families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share information via student folders, Class Dojo, BRES administration emails, PTA Facebook page, PTA newsletter, and PTA presentations | BRES PTA AC | Tactic 1: March Tactic 2: March/April |
| Action 2: Raise awareness through non-BRES avenues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write/testify before MCPS leadership and MCPS BOE, County Council, Rockville City Council - Raise at school-related, political or advocacy meetings (e.g., with political candidates) - Publish opinion pieces, secure media interest - Build alliances with like-minded community organizations (e.g., Black and Brown Coalition for Education Equity and Excellence) | BRES PTA AC Individual AC Members | After plan approved (or as individuals) |

Table 2. Attain Optimal Student-Teacher Ratio

| OBJECTIVE 2: Identifying options to prevent future mid-year disruption due to enrollment surpassing projections | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Action | Tactic | Track | Timeframe |
| Action 1: Collate data and ensure accuracy to demonstrate BRES capacity issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collect documents (or associated urls) noting BRES capacity limit, MCPS class size limits, optimal student-teacher ratio, resources being replaced with classrooms, and Determine threshold for Focus school designation - Obtain current number of students attending BRES, assigned to BRES and currently in Montgomery Virtual Academy (MVA), and living in-boundary and participating the Chinese Immersion (CI) & PEP programs - Gather information needed to explore the possibility of transitioning PEP and CI from county-wide programs to local programs with each new PK-3 or Kindergarten class, respectively - Identify how MCPS Crown High School and Woodward High School boundary analyses might impact assignment of elementary schools in the Richard Montgomery Cluster - BRES Leadership/PTA host an information session for new, incoming families to get ahead of 2022-2023 enrollment (i.e., Ashburton Elementary is hosting a virtual meeting in early February) | <p>Tactics 1 - 7: BRES PTA AC</p> <p>Tactic 5: BRES Leadership/PTA</p> | <p>Tactics 1 - 7: February / March</p> <p>Tactic 5: After plan approved</p> |
| Action 2: Advocate for additional classroom space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner with BRES principal, Richard Montgomery (RM) Cluster rep, BRES facilities - Write/testify at meetings of BOE testimony, county council, county council education subcommittee, county planning board, and Rockville city council meeting - Publish opinion pieces and secure media interest | <p>BRES PTA AC BRES PTA Individuals</p> | <p>After plan approved</p> |
| Action 3: Advocate for appropriate distribution of students within cluster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gather data to support the need for boundary analysis (e.g., determine number of portables ordered or other triggers) - Clarify the difference between boundary analysis for school additions vs. school assignment - Engage MCPS Superintendent; Mr. Everett Davis, Acting Associate Superintendent, Student, and Family Support and engagement; Jeanie Dawson, Chief of Operations; Douglas Hollis, Office of the Chief Operating Officer; MCPS Equity Leadership Team; Mrs. Diane D'Ambrosio Morris, Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI); Mrs. Claudette R. Smith, Richard Montgomery Supervisor, Department of Special Education Services; Mr. Philip A. Lynch, Director Department of Special Education Services; and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs | <p>BRES PTA AC BRES PTA Individuals</p> | <p>After plan approved</p> |

Table 3. Propose Options to Decision-Makers

| OBJECTIVE #3: Propose options to MCPS and county leadership to prevent future overcrowding at BRES | | | |
|--|---|-------------|---------------------|
| Action | Tactic | Track | Timeframe |
| Action 1: Advocate for increasing capacity of other elementary schools in RM cluster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify property development plans that would impact capacity at other schools within the cluster using https://www.rockvillemd.gov/621/Development-Watch-Map. - Identify advocates at other elementary schools with whom to partner (e.g., working with other PTAs via MCCPTA) -Engage the Montgomery County Planning Board to curb additional approval for housing/mixed use properties in area or build schools to serve the new housing before the housing projects are completed! - Write/testify at meetings of BOE testimony, county council, county council education subcommittee, county planning board, and Rockville city council meeting | BRES PTA AC | After plan approved |
| Action 2: Advocate for boundary analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share data to support need for boundary analysis (e.g., determine number of portables ordered or other triggers) - MCPS BOE testimony - Write/testify at meetings of county council, county council education subcommittee, and county planning board - Write/testify at Rockville city council meeting - Publish opinion pieces and secure media interest - Build alliances with like-minded community organizations | BRES PTA | After plan approved |
| Action 3: Recommending solutions to address overcrowding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Suggest relocating the PEP program to a school within the cluster with space available - Propose assigning unoccupied neighborhoods under development to different schools -Obtain pre-approval from MCPS for families who elect to submit a COSA to attend another cluster elementary school with space available (e.g. Beall or College Gardens) -Phase out county-wide programs at BRES (either transition to in-boundary program or relocate to low-capacity schools) -Advocate for relocatable classrooms to be installed over the summer, to minimize disruption. | | |

Possible Messages

The committee identified messages that families could utilize and amplify while advocating for decreasing the overcrowding conditions in BRES. These messages are for illustrative purposes and will be refined upon adoption of the plan.

- a. MESSAGE: We need to act now to prevent over enrollment from getting worse and impacting students and staff
 - i. BRES enrollment has outpaced every MCPS forecast to date.
 - 1. We currently have more students than projected for the 2026-2027 school year, 5 years from now.
 - 2. Since Fall 2021, enrollment has increased by over 10%, or over 75 students.
 - 3. The 2017 Boundary Study projection was off by +25% students for this school year.
 - ii. Taking into account students in virtual learning, we have reached the CIP capacity for this year at 790 students. Given the school was built to hold 740 students, it is highly likely we will exceed capacity in future years.
 - iii. BRES is the only school in the cluster that had an increase in enrollment in 2021.
 - iv. Factors that are driving increased enrollment at BRES:
 - 1. Students who are in the virtual academy or are in private schooling and will return to BRES after the pandemic
 - 2. Turnover of existing homes with new families with elementary aged children and some homes with multiple families living in them
 - 3. A major new housing development at Tower Oaks currently opening with 375 condos, townhomes, and single-family homes.
 - 4. A pre-application for another new housing community at 22 West Jefferson St., which will result in another new multi-family residential building consisting of 12 condos and 17 new townhouses opening in the future.
- b. MESSAGE: Children deserve a strong elementary education to be set up for success
 - i. It is imperative to follow MCPS class size guidelines since studies show that children who learn in appropriate class size have better educational outcomes throughout their educational tenure
 - ii. Overcrowding leads to safety concerns. Crowded spaces lead to more spread of illness. There also aren't enough staff to monitor students at lunch and recess.
 - iii. Overcrowded schools are faced with additional challenges when using common spaces such as wait time to use restrooms, cleanliness of restrooms and common areas, appropriate playground space, timing of lunch at the cafeteria, and potential loss of music and art spaces. These challenges collectively impact students' and staff well-being and quality of instruction
 - iv. New families looking to move into a community are guided by elementary education and the experience their child will have.

- c. MESSAGE: Equitable learning environment
 - i. The imbalance enrollment within our cluster creates an inequitable distribution of resources within the cluster.
 - ii. BRES has more students at risk of educational failure than Beall and College Gardens. It is inequitable and a disservice to students that they are not afforded the same optimal learning environment as neighboring schools.
 - iii. Overcrowding and disruptions to classes and learning can create an environment that may jeopardize the gains made by BRES students, especially those at risk.
 - iv. Allowing unnecessary overcrowding jeopardizes students' success and wellbeing and could lead to an achievement gap.
 - v. Large class size widens achievement gaps as students have to rely on parental support

- d. MESSAGE: Teachers deserve the best possible environment in which to focus on their students
 - i. Teachers cannot easily provide individualized attention to the students who need it most when the size of the class is larger than the MCPS guidelines
 - ii. Teachers and staff have lost and will continue to lose spaces within the school if they are converted to learning spaces
 - iii. There is a critical shortage of teachers, meaning that finding applicants will take a lot of time, and good applicants will have their pick of schools. Removing teacher collaboration spaces and adding portables make BRES a less attractive option for potential applicants
 - iv. Current educators and staff at BRES can easily find employment elsewhere in this hiring environment.

- e. MESSAGE: The community benefits when schools have optimal learning environments
 - i. Schools in the same cluster are under-utilized and saw a decrease in enrollment this school year, particularly in Kindergarten
 - ii. Repurposing spaces in a brand-new school means that the school is not utilized as intended. BRES is running out of adequate learning spaces. *Example:* One of the small group math pullouts is now taking place in a stairwell. While these students may be getting more individualized attention from their teacher, this is not an appropriate learning environment, and could cause a potential hazard or unsafe environment in the case of an emergency.

REFERENCES

- [1] https://gis.mcpsmd.org/boundarystudypdfs/RMES5_AdoptedBoundaries.pdf (Accessed 2/3/2022)
- [2] https://gis.mcpsmd.org/cipmasterpdfs/CIP23_Chapter4MontgomeryR.pdf (Chapter 4; Accessed 2/3/2022)
- [3] Per Mrs. West presentation at the February 3rd PTA meeting
- [4] [Enrollment - Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, MD \(montgomeryschoolsmd.org\)](https://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/enrollment)
- [5] EYA Tower Oaks development site plan <https://www.eya.com/hubfs/Site%20Plan%20PI.pdf> (Accessed 2/3/2022)
- [6] Twinbrook Quarter plan for up to 1,865 apartments. <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/development/twinbrook-quarter-development-with-wegmans-approved-in-rockville/> (Accessed 2/3/2022).
- [7] Twinbrook Quarter site plan includes buildings to be built within the BRES boundary. <https://www.rockvillemd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20329/1592-Rockville-Pike---PAM2018-00107---Site-Plan?bidId=> (Accessed 2/3/2022)
- [8] [https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BD2LZK550882/\\$file/Resource%20Study%20Part%20II%20Class%20Size%20Comm%20190611%20.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BD2LZK550882/$file/Resource%20Study%20Part%20II%20Class%20Size%20Comm%20190611%20.pdf). (Accessed 2/4/2022)
- [9] Montgomery County Public Schools Office of Shared Accountability. (May 2019) Literature Review: Class Size for Use in Examining Montgomery County Public Schools Class Size Practices.
- [10] 2021 Maryland School Report Card. <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov> (Accessed 2/22/2022)