

PRESS RELEASE

Wootton Challenge Moves Forward as CEPA Warns: Intentional Deferred School Maintenance Cannot Become a Pathway to a Sudden and Illegal School Closure

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Md. — September 2, 2026 — The Community and Education Policy Alliance (CEPA) announced today that its administrative appeal challenging the Montgomery County Board of Education’s decision regarding Thomas S. Wootton High School is moving forward following the first prehearing conference.

The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) dismissed MCPS’s Motion to Dismiss without prejudice, and the case will now proceed through discovery. Evidentiary hearing dates have been set for December 8, 9, and 10, when CEPA expects to call MCPS, Montgomery County, and other relevant personnel to testify. While no ruling has yet been made on the ultimate merits of the appeal, the case could have implications for school communities throughout Maryland.

Wootton Is a Warning for Communities Across Maryland

CEPA contends that the Board’s decision effectively closes Wootton at its longtime Rockville location, notwithstanding the Board’s characterization of the action as a “relocation.” Students currently assigned to Wootton are slated to be moved to other facilities, including Winston Churchill High School and the new Crown High School several miles away.

The appeal raises an important statewide question: *Can a school system remove an established school from the geographic community it has served for generations without applying Maryland’s school-closing protections simply by calling the action a relocation?* The answer could help shape how Maryland’s school-closing protections are applied to communities across the state facing similar actions.

The controversy also highlights a broader concern about Montgomery County’s aging school infrastructure. For years, major capital improvements at Wootton were postponed as the facility continued to deteriorate. Across MCPS, other aging schools also face significant needs involving HVAC systems, roofs, plumbing, electrical systems, and other major building components. At the same time, Montgomery County recently reallocated \$36 million in capital resources from the FY27–32 Capital Improvements Program to support the MCPS operating budget, raising concerns about the long-term consequences of deferring needed infrastructure investment.

CEPA strongly supports competitive teacher compensation and adequate classroom funding. But maintaining school buildings is also a fundamental responsibility. If communities can see capital improvements repeatedly postponed, only to have the resulting condition of their schools later used to support relocation, consolidation, or closure, then the Wootton dispute should concern families throughout Montgomery County and across Maryland.

CEPA Calls for Greater Accountability

CEPA calls upon Montgomery County, MCPS, the Board of Education, and Maryland policymakers to:

- **Publish a transparent long-range assessment of school infrastructure and capital needs**, including deferred maintenance and major projects that have been postponed, reduced, or removed from prior capital programs.
- **Disclose how deferred maintenance and delayed capital investment affect later facility assessments and major school decisions**, including whether years of underinvestment are subsequently used to support consolidation, relocation, or closure.
- **Protect capital funding for essential school infrastructure** and establish safeguards so communities are not disadvantaged because necessary investments in their schools were deferred for years.
- **Ensure that Maryland's school-closing protections apply based on the practical effect of a decision, not simply the label attached to it**, whenever governmental action removes an established public school from the geographic community it serves.

The question for Montgomery County families is no longer simply, “What happened to Wootton?” It is: “Could this happen to our school?”

For communities across Maryland, the outcome of CEPA's appeal could help determine what protections families have if the answer is yes.

About CEPA

The Community and Education Policy Alliance (CEPA) is a Montgomery County community organization advocating for transparent, accountable, and equitable public decision-making affecting schools and the communities they serve.