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For Immediate Release

'BUDGETS MUST BE BUILT ON REALITY': SUPERINTENDENT DR. MARK BEDELL PROPOSES SMALLEST RECOMMENDED SPENDING PLAN INCREASE IN 9 YEARS

With a sharp eye to the fiscal realities of revenue constraints and the end of federal and state COVID-related grant funding, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Bedell today presented to the Board of Education a proposed operating budget for Fiscal Year 2025 that contains the smallest recommended increase in nine years.

Dr. Bedell's \$1.71 billion recommended budget for Fiscal Year 2025, which begins in July, is 3.7 percent more than the school system's current budget allocation. Nearly 61.5 percent of that increase would go toward compensation and benefits enhancements for employees. The budget contains just \$18.3 million in programmatic and departmental enhancements – 14 percent of what was requested by department heads – while shifting \$7.6 million in programs from grant funding to the operating budget to ensure their continuation and funding \$5.8 million in mandates under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

"The days of school systems being flush with funds are over," Dr. Bedell told the Board in his budget address. "We can no longer just think or even work outside the proverbial box. We must build new boxes as we innovatively confront the difficult challenges of increasing academic achievement, retaining quality employees, and addressing issues such as rising health-care costs. None of this is easy, and as I have said to our union leadership and elsewhere: Everybody can't get everything they want."

Subject to negotiations with employee bargaining units, the compensation funding in Dr. Bedell's recommendation would be sufficient for a step increase or step

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equivalent for all eligible employees and a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment for all employees.

Dr. Bedell's recommendation also continues to place a strong emphasis on social-emotional resources for students. It includes \$3.2 million for 24.5 positions – 8.5 school counselors, eight school psychologists, six social workers, and two pupil personnel workers – over and above the 35.9 positions and \$4.5 million that have been invested in the last three years.

The recommendation also includes \$682,000 to begin a middle school athletics program that would eventually offer nine sports over three seasons. The program “would provide students with meaningful opportunities to build relationships, develop skills, and further that sense of belonging that we talk about often,” Dr. Bedell said.

“There is also a direct community benefit to this program because it will provide students with productive ways to spend their time after school,” he told the Board.

Addressing what he called a “dire need,” Dr. Bedell also included \$4.7 million in his recommendation for 56.4 special education teachers, assistants, and occupational and physical therapists. Included among those are 12.5 positions as part of a new regional program to be located at Old Mill West High School when it opens in the fall.

CAPITAL BUDGET RECOMMENDATION

Dr. Bedell's \$234.5 million FY2025 capital budget recommendation contains nearly \$167 million in major capital projects for the final three schools in the Old Mill Master Plan:

- Center of Applied Technology – North, \$52.0 million
- Old Mill High School, \$69.8 million
- Old Mill Middle School – North, \$45.1 million

A new Old Mill High School is planned for the property where the current school is located. That property will also be home to the new Center of Applied



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Technology – North, with the new Old Mill Middle School North being constructed on the current CAT-North property.

Dr. Bedell's capital budget recommendation also includes:

- \$32.3 million for building systems renovations.
- \$7 million to continue to reduce the maintenance backlog.
- \$1.3 million to design a new school bus facility and lot, a project recommended by the Prismatic audit commissioned by the Board.
- \$4 million for roof replacement projects.
- \$4 million for additions to existing buildings.
- \$3.5 million for athletic stadium improvements.
- \$2 million for security-related upgrades.

The Board has scheduled a public workshop and two public hearings on Dr. Bedell's budget recommendation.

Public hearings will be held on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at Old Mill High School, and Thursday, January 11, 2024, in the Board Room at the Parham Building in Annapolis. Both hearings begin at 6 p.m. The workshop will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, in the Board Room at the Parham Building.

Testimony at the hearings will be limited to two minutes per person. No budget-related public testimony will be taken at the workshop or at the February 21, 2024, meeting at which the Board is scheduled to adopt its budget request. Should the Board offer amendments at the February 21 meeting, testimony will be taken on the amendments only. The Board has also scheduled time to meet on February 22, 2024, if it is necessary to complete work on its budget request.

The January 11 public hearing and the January 16 workshop will be broadcast live on [AACPS-TV](#) and on [AACPS' YouTube channel](#).



Dr. Bedell's full Fiscal Year 2025 operating and capital budget recommendations, as well as a text of his budget address and a Budget in Brief document, [will be posted online here](#) no later than December 21.