



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **BCPS and Baltimore County announce efforts to address bus driver shortage**

*Steps include pay increase and addressing pre-employment barriers*

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) Superintendent Dr. Darryl L. Williams, Board of Education Chair Makeda Scott and Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski announced plans to boost recruitment and retention of school bus drivers amid a nationwide shortage of bus drivers.

Under the plan, Baltimore County government will reduce pre-employment barriers for new hires and BCPS will provide recruitment and retention incentives for all American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which, in addition to bus drivers, includes food and nutrition workers, groundskeepers and building services workers.

BCPS is offering cash rewards for perfect attendance each month, a sign-on bonus, an employee referral benefit, a \$1,000 retention bonus and leave conversion during winter and spring break. All bus operators and attendants will also receive a \$2 an hour shift differential to compensate for additional routes staff have covered during the shortage. This shift differential also applies to overtime hours. The \$5.2 million package will result in at least \$3,400 in additional compensation for bus operators and attendants. Additionally, Baltimore County bus drivers, who are guaranteed 40 hours a week and receive full benefits, are scheduled to receive a 2 percent Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) beginning January 1, 2022. BCPS will use funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSR) to help fund the package.

“BCPS is pleased to provide incentives and increased compensation for our staff who engage in the critical work of transporting our students to and from school, providing nutritious meals, and ensuring our facilities are prepared to receive students and staff every day,” said Dr. Williams. “This would not be possible without the support of both our Board of Education and the county government, and we are grateful for their collaboration and commitment to Team BCPS.”

The Board of Education of Baltimore County approved the plan to provide incentives and increase compensation for members of AFSCME during its Nov. 9 business meeting. Leaders stressed the need for continued efforts to address shortages and compensation as part of ongoing negotiations.

“Throughout the pandemic, Team BCPS AFSCME employees have gone above and beyond to support the community and learning,” said Board Chair Scott. “This began with meal deliveries using school buses to the community, food and nutrition staff ensuring that families received needed meals and continues today with reduced staff ensuring that buildings remain safe and clean. The Board is in full support of this plan and will continue to work closely with the Superintendent and system leadership as they identify additional ways to recognize the efforts and contributions of all BCPS staff.”

Work is underway in partnership with the leadership of BCPS’ employee associations to finalize additional compensation, recognition, and opportunities to focus on staff well-being for other members of Team BCPS. This is in addition to a 2 percent increase effective January 1, 2022, for TABCO, CASE, OPE and AFSCME and a 3.5 percent increase that was effective July 1, 2021, for ESPBC staff members.

Baltimore County government will use American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to cover the costs of fingerprinting for bus driver and attendant applicants – a cost that was previously passed on to potential employees and could cost as much as \$100.

“I know Baltimore County families are relieved to have their children back in school buildings full time this year, but they also want to know that there is a safe, reliable way for their kids to travel to and from school,” Olszewski said. “These steps that we’re taking in partnership with the school system will help ensure we can continue to provide this critical service in communities across Baltimore County.”

The County also will cover the costs of physical exams and drug testing required by the Maryland Department of Transportation, as well as the cost of sleep apnea testing for designated candidates. Physical exam and drug testing fees can range from \$160 to \$220, and sleep apnea testing costs an average of \$1,151 per test.

In addition, county officials have facilitated an expansion of the list of eligible medical providers to provide pre-employment physicals. The expansion should reduce a backlog that has caused long wait times for applicants awaiting a physical.

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