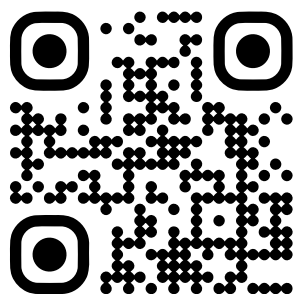




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News

BCPS Faces Challenge Of School Bd.'s New Three R's

by Michael Ruby

The traditional three R's of education are being shoved aside while Baltimore County public school administrators urgently focus on a new set of three R's that may dictate the size and composition of the local school board. That's a big deal because the board members ultimately determine how — and if — reading and writing are taught in classrooms and which books are allowed on library shelves.

Why is the quaint but important process of deciding which revisionist history is espoused in the classroom taking a back seat? Because top Baltimore County Public School (BCPS) officials are wrestling with tawdry political, existential questions concerning redistricting, re-election and re-appointment — the new three R's — of school board membership. And that's a big deal, again, because they are the ones who set budget, curricula and policy issues for Maryland's third-largest local educational system.

However, finding a resolution for the new three R's could get complicated — some critics say unnecessarily — real soon. That's because finding a fix to the new three R's may require a major revamping of the governing body that won't satisfy anyone or everyone involved ranging from the Maryland governor to the BCPS superintendent to local student advocates.

Or maybe not. Local administrators could intentionally fumble any attempts to reach a resolution so no changes occur; thereby, allowing the BCPS superintendent to maintain strict, unfettered control over the \$2.45 billion in taxpayers' money received this budget year without any accountability, debate or criticism.

Unchallenged bidding

In November 2024, Baltimore County voters passed a referendum issue expanding the County Council from seven to nine districts. An unintended consequence of that approval could force BCPS administrators to

abandon their perch high above the usual political fray in their remote Greenwood campus in Towson and get into the rough-and-tumble arena of the Annapolis State House.

All because of the impending expansion of the Baltimore County Council from seven to nine districts starting with the 2026 elections,

which are closer than you think so adding urgency for a resolution. Or maybe not, conveniently letting time run out so nothing is done concerning the new three R's so the superintendent's bidding continues unchallenged.

The increase in the number of councilmanic districts does not effect only the local legislative body but also a slew of county agencies

— from the Department of Recreation and Parks to the Department of Planning — which have boards and commissions composed of a representative from each of the councilmanic districts. Most department heads are simply adding two new chairs to the governing bodies or advisory panels to reflect the increase in the number of council districts.

So, the easy solution to the new three R's conundrum facing BCPS officials would be to continue the existing practice of having one school board member elected from each councilmanic district. That has been the practice since 2018 when the the hybrid board -- of seven members elected by voters serving with four members appointed by the governor -- was put in place. The school board also has one non-voting student member who is elected by secondary students in the system.

Largest in Maryland

But wait. BCPS administrators contend the 11-member panel, which is required to "empower, direct and maintain...a quality education" to the county's 110,000 students in 174 local schools and programs, already is the largest school board in Maryland and would become too unwieldy with

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Maggie Litz Domanowski represents northern Baltimore County on the school board.

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two additional members.

That's why during the 2025 Maryland General Assembly session, BCPS officials did not object when a bill was introduced that would maintain the current school board composition with just seven elected members in their currently drawn councilmanic districts even into the 2026 and 2030 elections.

That measure failed, however, when state lawmakers questioned how fairly and equitably the new lines would be drawn supposedly by BCPS personnel for the still seven districts after the 2030 census in time for the 2034 election, sending BCPS officials searching for another solution to the new three R's problem.

So state legislators don't trust BCPS administrators to simply draw new district lines but taxpayers hand over 52 percent of the county's operating budget each year without any oversight? Isn't that the job of the board of education, making the composition — and control — all the more critical?

Non-partisan candidates

Educational systems in Maryland are governed by state legislators so changes to the make up of any local school board must be ratified by the Maryland House of Delegates and state Senate then signed into law by the governor.

Also, all school board candidates in Baltimore County are considered non-partisan, which means party labels do not appear on the ballot for anyone running for a board of education seat. During the primary, all school board candidates appear on both Democratic and Republican ballots.

Then the top two vote getters in the primary face off in the general election — still without any party affiliation — with the winner claiming the honor of serving on the board.

Alternative remedy

So now BCPS administrators supposedly are scrambling for an alternative remedy to the new three R's problem including possibly resorting to an unusual emergency measure being passed and signed into law before

the end of February 2026, just half-way through the normal 90-day 2026 General Assembly session which doesn't begin until January 14 and ends on April 13, 2026.

Why the rush? Because the current seven elected school board members must decide if — and where — they will run in the 2026 elections for another four-year term. But the filing deadline for candidates is February 24, 2026.

At least three current elected school board members — Baldwin

resident Maggie Litz Domanowski (elected in 2022 for Council District 3 - northern Baltimore County), Essex resident Rod McMillion (elected in 2018 and re-elected (unopposed) in 2022 for Council District 7 - Essex/Dundalk) and Dr. Brenda Savoy (elected in 2022 for Council District 4 - Randallstown) — have stated they are seeking re-election in 2026.

Stay the same

Failure to implement any new state law regarding the new three R's --

including the number of school board members or the areas they represent -- before that candidate filing deadline would result in things staying the same at least until the 2030 elections.

Some student advocates and other elected officials say that inaction would be irresponsible, unrepresentative and could complicate what should be a straight forward process that allows county residents to determine who governs the public school system.

"Each [councilmanic] district should have its counterpart on the school board," said Amy Adams, president and co-founder of the Baltimore County Parent and Student Coalition (PSC). The grassroots group is made up of parents, students and community members dedicated to advocating for transparency, accountability and local control in Baltimore County schools, according to their Facebook page.

Keep it simple, said Adams: voters pick a candidate to represent them on the County Council and, at the same time, one from the same district for the school board.

Also, the expansion in the number of councilmanic districts was approved by voters via referendum to ensure better representation of the county's changing demographics. For BCPS officials to ignore that dictum

"The Board of Education is proceeding normally and as it would were any member of the Board absent from a meeting."

— Charles Herndon

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and remain at seven board members might appear indifferent to voters' wishes.

Cede any power

But wait. The number of school board members and their areas are only two R's — re-election and redistricting. What about the third R — re-appointment?

Currently, the governor appoints four at-large members to serve on the Baltimore County Board of Education, according to state law. The appointees must be county residents but need not be affiliated with, nor do they represent, any particular area like the elected members.

To maintain what they consider a manageable number of members on the school board, BCPS administrators may not oppose a state law during the 2026 General Assembly that calls for nine elected members -- one per new councilmanic district -- but only two or possibly no appointed members, usurping the governor's influence over the county body. Yeah, right, like a governor is going to cede any power or authority he can exert over a county's educational system.

So far, BCPS administrators say they have not settled on how to resolve the new three R's issue or what legislation they may not oppose in the upcoming 2026 General Assembly.

"We do not have anything to add or comment upon at this time," said Charles Herndon, communications specialist with the BCPS Office of Communications, when asked how the administrators are gearing up for the next legislative session in Annapolis.

Intentional neglect

But wait, yet again. That feigned indifference — or intentional neglect — in order to maintain the strangle hold on the public educational system's reins also is reflected in the slow walk administrators take when filling a school board vacancy. Or is it incompetency?

Currently, there is a vacancy on the Baltimore County board of education following the resignation of Tiara Booker-Dwyer, who was an appointed member. In July 2025, Booker-Dwyer was hired to serve as a deputy superintendent for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

But she failed to mention the new position or submit her resignation

even though she was still a member of but marked "absent" from the July 22 and the August 12 meetings of the Baltimore County Board of Education, according to BCPS documents.

Only after the VDOE posted Booker-Dwyer's new job announcement in mid-August, which was discovered by another board member, was she forced to step down from her Baltimore County position, leaving the current vacancy of an appointed member.

Pipeline dried up

Right now, the process for soliciting, interviewing and nominating potential school board candidates has intentionally disappeared with the dissolution of the Baltimore County School Board Nominating Commission, as of September 30, 2025. And not only has the pipeline dried up for providing names of possible appointees to the governor, the same (again, now non-existent) commission is responsible for filling unexpected vacancies that occur on the school board, whether by death or resignation of an elected or appointed member.

Coincidentally, there currently are only three instead of four appointed members on the Baltimore County Board of Education since Booker-Dwyer's resignation in August 2025 after taking a job in Virginia.

So far, the lack of a full contingency on the local school board hasn't resulted in any snags in the performance of the governing body, contend observers of the process.

"It hasn't been noticed," said PSC's Adams. "But that doesn't mean it won't."

At least seven affirmative votes are needed to pass any issue before the school board so a minority of four could render impassable changes in disciplinary policies, establishing policies on interacting with ICE agents in schools, even the adoption of a proposed budget.

In the meantime, what's one less school board member on a panel that borders on being too unwieldy?

"The Board of Education is proceeding normally and as it would were any member of the Board absent from a meeting," said BCPS communications specialist Herndon.

"[BCPS] believed it would be prudent for the incoming Nominating Commission to make the recommendation."

— Miriam L Brewster

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'It would be prudent'

But wait, one last time. There is little likelihood that a fourth appointed school board member will be installed in time to deliberate and vote on a proposed budget for the county executive's fiscal year 2027 budget. (Fiscal year 2027 starts July 1, 2026, and runs until June 30, 2027.) Or to deliberate and vote on the future size and composition of a possibly expanded school board. Or to deliberate and vote on whether school start times should be changed for high school students (a report on the policy change is expected to go before the local board later this calendar year).

That's because the average time for a school board vacancy to be filled is six months, based on the two most recent efforts. And that was when the School Board Nominating Committee was in place.

Even though the commission was still in place when Booker-Dwyer resigned in August, the local school board did not initiate the process to find a replacement.

"Since the current members of the Nominating Commission were so close to their official term concluding, it is our understanding that [BCPS] believed it would be prudent for the incoming Nominating Commission to make the recommendation," said Miriam L Brewster, placement director for the Governor's Office of Appointments.

Appointed by Oct. 22

Officially, the current members of the Nominating Commission "remain in holdover status until they are either reappointed or replaced," added Brewster.

Per statute, the Baltimore County Executive submits names of eight nominees — one from each state legislative district in the subdivision — plus an at-large nominee for the 19-member commission to the governor's office.

"County Executive [Katherine] Klausmeier has sent her appointee and recommendations for the legislative districts to the governor," said Dkarai Turner, press secretary for the Baltimore County Office of Communications, in an email dated October 9. "County Executive Klausmeier has

made an at-large appointment. That person's name is Scott Jenkins."

Ten other organizations, designated in the state law creating the commission, also must appoint one member each. The organizations range from Towson University to the Baltimore County League of Women Voters to the Baltimore County Student Councils to the Baltimore County Branch of the NAACP. The Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce, one of the organizations tasked with appointing a commission member, is defunct so the commission will contain only 18 members when it convenes again.

"Once these individuals have submitted their applications and have been vetted, the official appointment will take place. The goal is to have the individuals appointed by October 22," said Brewster.

No timeline or deadline

Following the reconstitution of the Nominating Commission, the group must announce a vacancy has occurred and that candidates are

being sought to fill the unoccupied school board seat. Once the filing period is over, the commission must publish on its web site a list of all the candidates being considered.

The commission then is required to hold at least one public meeting on the selection of multiple nominees before voting on and recommending at least two names that will be forwarded to the governor, continues the statute.

The governor is not mandated to appoint someone from the commission's list, however. The governor can "return the list" and request the commission submit "the names of additional qualified candidates," from which he can make a selection, states the law.

There is no timeline or deadlines for when any of these steps must be fulfilled, when the commission must submit names to the governor or how long the governor may take before finalizing an appointment within the statute.

Given that it took six months to fill the most recent vacancies when the Nominating Commission was in place, it's a good bet no one will be named to fill the Baltimore County school board seat in time to look over the proposed BCPS FY 27 budget, to debate what cooperation should be

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[councilmanic]
district should
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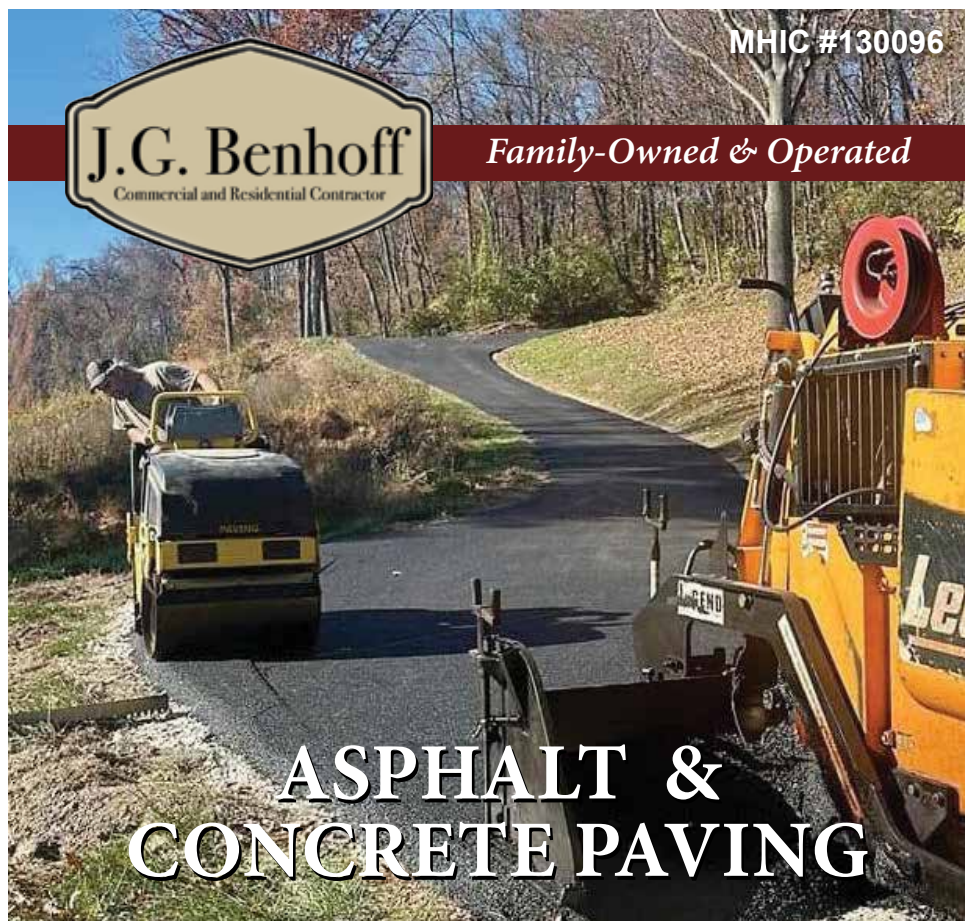
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given ICE agents or to decide how to resolve the new three R's problem.

Fragile system

C'mon. Is the Baltimore County public school system so fragile that it can't handle two more board members? Or that administrators would deliberately sabotage through inaction efforts to reflect the spirit of the approved voters referendum that expanded the number of council district for better representation of the area's changing demographics?

The board's own recent history may answer those questions.

Last January during deliberation of the FY 26 budget proposal, school board member Maggie Litz Domanowski asked for further clarification regarding Superintendent Miriam Rogers's cutting by 50 percent of funding earmarked for the Career and College Readiness program. An unremarkable exchange occurred concerning the recommendation that was later approved in the proposed budget and forwarded to the county executive.

However, later in March, the school board voted 7-4 to censure

Domanowski, alleging she used "a tone and manner that was perceived as uncivil and aggressive" and showed a "lack of courtesy and decorum" towards the superintendent. The resolution, sponsored by board member Tiara Booker-Dwyer, stated Domanowski's actions "did not align with the board's standards or expectations" and could "undermine the integrity and credibility" of the board.

There are no legal consequences that come with censure, which is more akin to a reprimand. However, the action is intentionally designed to stifle any further or future dissent by setting an example as to what may happen — such as a public shaming — if any board member steps out of line.

Domanowski appealed the censure and in August 2026, the Maryland State Board of Education vindicated the Baldwin resident by reversing the earlier decision, calling it "an egregious abuse of discretion."

Since then, Domanowski said the censure action only steeled her resolve to seek re-election for the northern Baltimore County school board seat and continue representing the best interests of all students.



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