



SAM SHOGE FOR KENT COUNTY EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

A FOUR-VOLUME PLAN FOR KENT COUNTY

VOL. 01

INVESTING IN OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Stronger schools and support for families.



A MESSAGE FROM SAM

The opportunity begins with what we believe our young people should be able to experience.

As a father raising two daughters in Kent County, I think about the opportunities they will have here and the kind of community they will inherit. I want every young person to grow up knowing that this county values their abilities and is willing to invest in their future.

That requires us to look closely at how we serve them. Our schools, recreation programs, and partnerships with employers should help young people discover their strengths, form lasting relationships, and practice the responsibilities they will take on as adults. We should be willing to change our approach when their needs change.

The proposals in this volume describe the opportunities I want Kent County to explore. Together, they offer a more connected approach to school facilities, learning, nutrition, recreation, and work experience. My ambition is for young people to see more possibilities for themselves and a meaningful place in this community.

I am sharing these ideas to begin a public conversation. They have a rationale worth examining, and several draw on experience elsewhere. Before any proposal moves forward, we will need the appropriate studies, financial analysis, consultation, and approvals. Costs, responsibilities, and timing will become clearer through that work.

Questions about affordability and implementation deserve serious answers. I also want us to consider the opportunity before us: what could our children experience if we made these investments thoughtfully and followed through over time?

I invite you to read this platform with that question in mind. Tell me which ideas would make a difference, where they could be improved, and what your family needs us to understand. Our next steps should be informed by the people these proposals are intended to serve.

SAM SHOGE

Candidate for Kent County Commissioner

INVESTING IN OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

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A MORE AMBITIOUS FUTURE FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

We can give young people more responsibility, more ways to discover their abilities, and more reasons to see a future in Kent County.

I want Kent County to be a place where a student can build something the community uses, explore a career through paid work, and receive instruction that challenges their abilities. I want young people to have places where they feel welcome and adults who take their interests seriously. Those experiences should be part of how we prepare children for life here.

This platform proposes a more ambitious approach to that responsibility. It connects the quality of our schools with the opportunities available beyond the classroom. Better facilities, stronger academic programs, nourishing meals, recreation, and work experience should reinforce one another, helping more young people learn well and participate in community life.

Doing things differently can change what a public investment accomplishes. A suitable county purchase could also become a student project with a budget, a deadline, and a real customer. A recreation center could bring young people together around interests they help select. Closer coordination among youth organizations could help existing programs reach more children.

The urgency comes from the time young people have to benefit. Students move through school while adults debate what should change. We should begin the necessary planning, consultation, and financial analysis now so that sound proposals can move forward when the resources are ready.

A COUNTY THAT CONTRIBUTES MORE THAN FUNDING

County government should contribute ideas, coordination, and practical support alongside funding, while respecting the responsibilities and oversight of potential partners such as Kent County Public Schools, the Local Management Board, and other agencies and organizations. These proposals are invitations to collaborate. Consultation would determine appropriate roles and responsibilities, with the aim of strengthening existing work and avoiding unnecessary complication.

WHAT SUCCESS COULD LOOK LIKE

If we implement these proposals well, more students could finish school with completed projects, work experience, stronger relationships, and a clearer sense of their choices. Families could see schools that challenge their children and a community that welcomes their contributions. Those are outcomes worth pursuing and measuring.

AMBITION WITH FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE

The test is what an investment can achieve, what it will cost over time, and whether Kent County can sustain it.

Establish the value before committing funds

These proposals begin a public conversation about the opportunities we should pursue. They are ideas to examine, with a rationale and examples that justify further work. They are not final project budgets or commitments to spend. Before proceeding, we would need the appropriate studies, public input, financial analysis, and approvals.

Account for the full cost

Some initiatives would require substantial capital investment. Buildings, equipment, staffing, maintenance, and future replacement costs must all be considered. An affordable opening day is not enough; we must understand the ongoing obligation and how it fits alongside the county's other responsibilities.

Pursue resources creatively and set a realistic pace

We should actively pursue suitable state and federal support, grants, employer partnerships, and collaboration with community organizations. Each opportunity must be assessed for its conditions and future costs. If the resources are not available, proposals will have to be scaled back, phased, or delayed until they are.

Keep the public purpose clear

Spending more is not the measure of success. We should be able to explain how each investment would improve young people's lives, compare reasonable alternatives, and evaluate results. Financial discipline should help us select and sustain the ideas that offer the strongest value for students, families, and taxpayers.

COUNTY INVESTMENT AND TIMING

These labels describe relative county costs and a proposed sequence. They are not approved budgets or fixed deadlines.

County investment

Low: limited county expense.

Medium: a more substantial commitment.

High: major capital or ongoing costs.

Ranges reflect uncertainty. Both startup and continuing costs need analysis.

Timing

Sooner: an early implementation priority.

Later: after preparation and resources are in place.

Long term: sustained planning and investment. Studies may begin earlier; delivery depends on funding, readiness, and approvals.

Make Kent County a customer for student talent.

I propose creating the Kent County Student Contracting Program, directing a portion of county purchasing dollars to our high school’s career and technical education programs so students can work with a real customer and deliver something their community needs.

We ask young people to prepare for adult responsibilities. We should give them more opportunities to practice those responsibilities while they have teachers and mentors beside them. County government can help by purchasing appropriate goods and services from our high school’s career programs. Students would prepare proposals, develop budgets, agree to deadlines, and complete work under their instructors’ supervision. The county would pay the school system for the finished work, supporting programs that help our young people prepare for their futures.

Put the skills they’re learning to work.

Kent County High School already offers programs in construction, engineering, automotive technology, broadcasting, and food service. We can build on that investment by connecting students’ classroom experience with work the county needs done. [1]
A student learning carpentry could help build a bench that families use at a county park. An automotive class could service county vehicles, while broadcasting students could produce announcements that help residents discover local recreation programs.

Student program	Possible county project	Experience students would gain
Construction and engineering	Design and build park benches, picnic tables, or shelving.	Develop a design, estimate materials, and deliver a finished product.
Automotive technology	Perform supervised oil changes and other suitable vehicle maintenance.	Schedule service, order supplies, and document completed work.
Broadcasting	Record announcements about county services and events.	Respond to a customer’s request, develop a script, and revise it based on feedback.
Food service	Prepare meals for county training sessions or events.	Plan a menu, price each serving, and organize food preparation and delivery.

These projects would give students practice explaining their decisions, managing costs, and solving problems. They would also provide completed work students could show a future employer—and a visible contribution to the place they call home.

1. KCHS program offerings. kent.k12.md.us.

Give students responsibility from proposal to delivery.

County departments and teachers would select projects that fit students’ abilities, classroom schedules, and available equipment. Students would respond with a proposal explaining their approach, price, and delivery date, then discuss it with the county staff requesting the work.

Once approved, each project would have a written agreement setting out expectations. Students would provide updates, respond to requested changes, and submit an invoice when the work was accepted. Teachers and county staff would oversee quality, while the county and school system would handle the formal purchasing arrangements.

Local businesses could contribute expertise by reviewing proposals, mentoring students, or helping with specialized work. Those relationships could introduce students to employers who have seen their abilities firsthand.

Build on experience elsewhere in Maryland.

Montgomery County students refurbish cars and computers through their school programs and offer them for public sale. Their work gives them experience preparing products for customers and practicing sales skills. [2]

Kent County can apply that approach to suitable county purchases, giving students a real customer and work with a clear purpose.

Our students should have opportunities to see their community use—and value—what they can do.



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2. Montgomery County’s student sales program. montgomeryschoolsmd.org.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW ADDITIONAL COST
TIMING: SOONER — FIRST 12–18 MONTHS

Initial planning assessment; costs and timing would be refined with the school system.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	The county procurement officer, county department heads, and Kent County High School’s career and technical education teachers.
What drives the cost?	Materials, instructor supervision, coordination, equipment upkeep, delivery, and any student wages included in a project.
How could we pay for it?	Use existing county purchasing budgets and school career-program resources where appropriate. Seek eligible education grants, business sponsorships, and donated materials for additional support.
What continues each year?	Project purchases, coordination, and any added teaching or equipment costs. The number of projects would reflect available funding and classroom capacity.
How would we begin?	Agree on responsibilities and purchasing arrangements with Kent County Public Schools, select suitable projects, and have participating classes prepare the first proposals.
What would success look like?	Students complete useful work, gain experience they can show employers, and deliver projects that meet county expectations.

Some projects could replace purchases the county already planned to make. The program’s financial benefit would depend on actual costs, including the time and support required to teach students well.

Give our students room to excel.

I propose working closely with Kent County Public Schools to expand gifted and talented education and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics academies within our existing elementary and middle schools.

Students who are ready for greater academic challenges need instruction that helps them reach their potential. Providing that opportunity requires dedicated teachers, a demanding curriculum, and time to explore subjects in greater depth.

This investment would also give families a stronger reason to choose our public schools. We should offer an education that competes confidently with private schools and encourages families who homeschool to consider enrolling their children in Kent County Public Schools.

Build academic opportunities families will choose.

The debate over our school buildings also raised concerns about academic performance. Addressing those concerns requires a sustained investment in what happens inside our classrooms, including how we challenge students who are ready for more advanced work.

Expanded academies could give those students opportunities to move ahead in mathematics, investigate scientific questions, develop engineering projects, and strengthen their reading and writing. Students would have teachers prepared to recognize their abilities and guide their progress.

Opportunity	What it could look like
More advanced instruction	Students move into more challenging material as they demonstrate readiness.
Deeper exploration	Students investigate a scientific question, develop an engineering design, or complete an extended research project.
Dedicated teaching and support	Teachers and instructional assistants have the training, time, and resources to support advanced learning.

A clear progression through school	Elementary opportunities prepare students for continued challenge in middle school and beyond.
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Identifying students should include both demonstrated achievement and potential, giving children whose strengths have not yet been recognized an opportunity to participate. Maryland’s gifted and talented guidance supports screening all students and using several measures to identify their abilities. [3]

Design the program together.

This proposal would take close collaboration with Kent County Public Schools, its teachers, school leaders, and Board of Education. The school system would lead the educational design, while county government would work with it to establish an affordable, lasting funding commitment.

3. Maryland guidance. marylandpublicschools.org.

Together, we would determine the teachers and instructional assistants needed, develop the curriculum, and assess classroom, laboratory, and equipment needs. That planning would begin sooner, allowing us to understand the full investment before committing to implementation.

The initial focus would be academies within existing elementary and middle schools. A standalone academy could be considered later if enrollment and demand justify it.

Stronger programs could strengthen enrollment and results.

A compelling advanced academic program could help retain current students and attract high-achieving students from homeschool and private-school settings. Increased enrollment could bring additional state education funding, with the amount and timing determined by Maryland’s funding formulas. [4]

Theoretically, these programs could also improve Kent County’s results on statewide assessments by helping current students excel and attracting additional high-achieving students. Those are potential benefits to test and measure. We would need to track individual students’ progress alongside district scores to understand how much improvement comes from learning and how much reflects changes in enrollment.

Our public schools should give families a compelling reason to enroll and students a compelling reason to stay engaged.

Enrollment growth and additional state funding would be potential benefits. The initial financial plan would need to support the program before those benefits materialize.



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4. Maryland school funding. marylandpublicschools.org.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: HIGH
TIMING: PLAN SOONER · FULL IMPLEMENTATION LONG-TERM

Initial planning assessment; costs and the implementation schedule would be developed with Kent County Public Schools.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	Kent County Public Schools’ instructional leaders, principals, and teachers, with Board of Education oversight and close county collaboration on funding.
What drives the cost?	Hiring teachers and instructional assistants, staff training, curriculum development, classroom and laboratory improvements, equipment, and learning materials.
How could we pay for it?	A sustained county and school-system budget commitment, supplemented by eligible education grants, foundation support, and business or college partnerships. Additional state aid could help if enrollment grows.
What continues each year?	Salaries and benefits, instructional support, professional development, materials, and equipment replacement.
How would we begin?	During the first 12–18 months, work with KCPS to assess current offerings and design the staffing, curriculum, space, and funding plan.
When would the full program be implemented?	Long-term—year five and beyond—as recurring funding, staffing, and facilities become available. Planning would establish the sequence for introducing individual components.
What would success look like?	Greater academic growth and engagement, stronger student retention, new enrollment from homeschool and private-school families, and improved assessment results over time.

Recreation is changing. We should change with it.

I propose creating a youth gaming and creative center where young people can spend time with friends, explore their interests, and learn new skills—with clear limits on screen time.

The way young people find entertainment and connect with friends has changed. Gaming, online communities, and digital creativity are part of everyday life for many teenagers. In a 2024 national survey, 85% of teens reported playing video games. [5]

County government has a responsibility to recognize that change and respond. Through our Parks and Recreation Department, we can expand recreation to reflect the interests of today’s young people and give them more reasons to spend time together in person.

Give young people a place to belong.

Young people need welcoming places beyond home and school where they can gather, be themselves, and develop friendships. Often called “third spaces,” these places give them room to enjoy each other’s company without every minute becoming a scheduled activity. The proposed center would offer a comfortable, supervised setting with gaming stations, creative equipment, and tables for shared activities. A young person could come with friends, meet others with similar interests, or discover something they had never tried.

Students would help shape the space from the beginning. We would bring them proposed locations, layouts, and renderings, then refine the design and programming around their feedback. Choosing a location young people can actually reach would be central to that process.

Make time for gaming—and time to turn it off.

Recognizing the appeal of gaming also means setting boundaries. The center would have clear session limits and a scheduled daily transition when screens turn off and activities shift to conversation, collaboration, and creativity.

Tabletop games such as Pokémon, Dungeons & Dragons, and Magic: The Gathering would give young people reasons to stay, interact, and solve problems together. Art, storytelling, and other group activities would offer additional ways to participate.

Experience	What young people could do
Game together	Play alongside friends in a supervised setting with clear screen limits.
Connect without screens	Join tabletop games, create stories, make art, and spend time talking with others.
Explore creative skills	Attend workshops in game design, coding, audio production, and digital arts during scheduled screen hours.
Help shape the center	Suggest activities, help organize events, and provide ongoing feedback about the space.

5. Pew Research Center. [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org).

Gaming could introduce young people to the center, while its workshops and other activities give them reasons to explore further. Someone who enjoys video games might discover an interest in designing one; someone drawn to storytelling might try writing an adventure or recording a podcast.

Create a place young people help make their own.

The center would combine time to relax with opportunities to learn, supported by staff and visiting instructors who take young people’s interests seriously. Participation in workshops would sit alongside opportunities to simply spend time with friends.

Our responsibility is to create a place young people want to go, where they feel welcome and have opportunities to grow.



Stock photograph: Alena Darmel / Pexels

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: MEDIUM STARTUP · MEDIUM ONGOING COST
TIMING: CONSULT STUDENTS SOONER · OPEN THE FULL CENTER LATER

Initial planning assessment; costs and timing would be refined through student consultation, site selection, and budgeting.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	Kent County Parks and Recreation, supported by county facilities and purchasing staff, with students helping shape the design and programming. Schools and community partners could contribute instruction and activities.
What drives the cost?	Leasing approximately 1,500–2,000 square feet, preparing the space, purchasing equipment and furnishings, staffing, utilities, insurance, and transportation support.
How could we pay for it?	County funding supplemented by grants for eligible activities, private donations, business sponsorships, equipment contributions, and potential landlord assistance with improvements.
What continues each year?	Rent, staffing, programming, utilities, maintenance, and equipment replacement. The operating plan would account for these costs before opening.
How would we begin?	During the first 12–18 months, consult students, develop renderings, assess accessible locations, establish screen limits, and assemble the funding plan.
When would the center open?	Target years 2–4 to complete the buildout and open the full center once startup funding and a sustainable operating budget are in place.
What would success look like?	Young people return regularly, develop friendships, participate in activities beyond gaming, learn new skills, and help guide the center’s future.

Better nutrition belongs in our plan for better schools.

I propose working with Kent County Public Schools to improve school meals through more cooking from basic ingredients, less reliance on highly processed foods and added sugars, and stronger purchasing relationships with local and regional farms.

When residents raise concerns about academic performance, nutrition deserves a place in that conversation. Students need dependable, nourishing meals to help them concentrate, participate, and learn, especially when their families rely on school breakfast and lunch.

We have a responsibility to support the people preparing those meals with the training, equipment, ingredients, and time needed to do that work well.

Help students arrive in class ready to learn.

Research connects healthy eating with stronger academic performance. A study of California schools found that healthier school lunch providers were associated with improvements in test scores. Better meals can support our academic goals, even though the size of any improvement in Kent County would need to be measured. [6]

The health concerns also deserve attention. National data show that childhood obesity has increased over time, from approximately 14% of children ages 2–19 in 1999–2000 to 21% in 2021–2023. Research also documents rising youth diabetes diagnoses, including a roughly doubling rate of new type 2 diabetes cases between 2002 and 2018. These are national trends, rather than measurements of Kent County students. [7], [8]

School meals give us a daily opportunity to make healthy choices accessible and appealing. We should use that opportunity deliberately.

Give our kitchens the capacity to prepare better meals.

Working closely with the school system’s food-service team, we would assess current menus, kitchen conditions, staffing, and purchasing practices, then develop a practical improvement plan.

Priority	What it would mean
More cooking from basic ingredients	Equip and train staff to prepare more meals in school kitchens.
Less added sugar	Review meals, snacks, and drinks, reducing added sugars and highly processed products with poor nutritional value.
More local and regional food	Increase purchases from nearby farms and food suppliers through dependable agreements and adequate seasonal storage.
Meals students enjoy	Use student taste tests and feedback to develop appealing menus and reduce waste.

6. School lunch quality and academic performance. nber.org.
7. Federal obesity data. cdc.gov.
8. CDC diabetes research. cdc.gov.

Preparing more meals ourselves would give staff greater control over ingredients. Nutrition standards and student acceptance would guide the choices, including the use of nutritious frozen and canned foods.

Support healthy meals and jobs closer to home.

Caroline County offers a useful local model. Its public schools have partnered with the Chesapeake Culinary Center and Shore Gourmet on a “farm to freezer” approach: purchasing local produce during the summer, preparing and freezing it, and using it to feed students during the school year. [9]

Kent County could adapt that approach to our kitchens, farms, and students. Directing more school food purchases to local and regional producers would also put those dollars into nearby businesses, helping support jobs in farming, food preparation, and distribution.

Where the budget allows, a modestly higher purchase price may be worth paying for dependable quality and the opportunity to support employment closer to home. We would weigh those benefits alongside nutrition, availability, and overall meal costs.

Invest in health beyond graduation.

Repeated opportunities to enjoy nourishing meals can help children develop habits they carry into adulthood. Healthy eating patterns reduce the risk of serious conditions, including heart disease and type 2 diabetes. [10]

The potential long-term benefits include healthier lives and lower healthcare costs. Those benefits strengthen the case for investment, while any savings would take time and would not automatically return to the county budget.



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9. Regional council report. dlslibrary.state.md.us.

10. CDC healthy-eating guidance. cdc.gov.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: HIGH

TIMING: ASSESS LATER · EXPAND CAPACITY LONG-TERM

Initial planning assessment; costs and timing would be developed with Kent County Public Schools. This initiative would follow more immediate county and school priorities.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	KCPS food-service leadership and staff, supported by school facilities and finance teams, with county collaboration on funding and regional partners providing expertise.
What drives the cost?	Kitchen improvements, cooking equipment, refrigeration and storage, staff training, preparation time, ingredients, and delivery.
How could we pay for it?	Existing food-service resources and meal reimbursements, county and school capital funding, and potential farm-to-school grants, equipment grants, and philanthropic support.
What continues each year?	Food purchases, staffing, training, equipment maintenance, and supplier coordination.
How would we begin?	Begin the assessment 18–24 months into the plan, reviewing kitchens, food-service finances, staffing, and opportunities to purchase more local and regional food.
When would capacity expand?	Target year four and beyond for funded kitchen improvements, expanded meal preparation, and supplier agreements, based on available resources and other priorities.
What would success look like?	More nutritious meals that students choose and enjoy, less food waste, increased purchasing from local and regional businesses, and improved readiness to learn.

Replacing aging schools is a responsibility we should plan for.

I propose that the Kent County Commissioners work with Kent County Public Schools to reaffirm a shared, financially grounded plan for improving and eventually replacing our aging school buildings.

Building and replacing schools is a basic responsibility of county government. Families should be able to expect that their elected leaders will anticipate those needs, prepare for the expense, and follow through. The school system has already done substantial planning. The commissioners' responsibility is to participate directly in that work and connect the identified needs to a credible county funding commitment.

Build on the planning already underway.

Kent County Public Schools has established a facilities planning process that identifies building needs and priorities. Its Six-Year Facilities Strategic Plan helped guide subsequent facilities plans and annual requests for major improvements. [11]

We should use that work to establish a shared understanding between the school system and the commissioners: which buildings need attention, what improvements are necessary, when replacement will become appropriate, and how the county will prepare to pay its share.

The new middle school is a major investment in our children. We should also prepare for the needs of the schools that will follow, giving families, educators, and taxpayers a clearer picture of what to expect.

Agree on the needs, the sequence, and the funding.

A long-range replacement schedule should connect directly to KCPS's six-year facilities and capital planning. The long-range schedule would help guide near-term decisions, while updated building assessments and cost estimates would inform the replacement schedule each year.

Planning priority	What the county and school system would establish
Understand each building	Use existing studies and commission additional engineering assessments where needed to evaluate building systems, condition, and suitability for teaching.
Set a realistic sequence	Identify when major repairs, renovations, or replacement should occur, considering building needs and projected enrollment.
Prepare for the county's share	Estimate future costs, potential state support, available county funds, and affordable borrowing.
Keep the plans aligned	Review the long-range schedule alongside KCPS's six-year plan and annual funding requests.

11. KCPS facilities planning. kent.k12.md.us.

Detailed assessments would help us understand which repairs can extend a building's useful life and when further spending would be better directed toward replacement. That information would allow the county to prepare financially before a project becomes urgent.

Make school investment a predictable commitment.

The goal is to make school funding as uncontroversial as possible by establishing expectations early. Residents should be able to see the evidence behind a project, understand its place in the schedule, and know how the county intends to fund it.

Public discussion would remain essential, and individual projects would still require approvals. A shared plan would give those discussions a clear starting point, reducing the need for families and educators to repeatedly establish that aging buildings require investment.

Commissioners and school leaders should review progress together annually and explain any changes to the public. If costs rise, enrollment changes, or state funding shifts, the plan should show how we will respond.

Our children’s school buildings should be part of the county’s regular financial planning, with clear commitments and public accountability.



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Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW-MEDIUM FOR PLANNING AND ASSESSMENTS

TIMING: SOONER · UPDATE ANNUALLY

This rating covers planning and building studies. School construction would require separate, high-cost funding commitments.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	The Kent County Commissioners and KCPS leadership, working with the Board of Education, school facilities staff, county finance staff, and qualified engineering firms.
What drives the cost?	Detailed building assessments, engineering studies, cost estimates, and financial analysis, using existing work wherever it remains useful.
How could we pay for it?	County and school-system planning funds, with specific appropriations for necessary studies and eligible outside support where available.
What continues each year?	Joint review of building conditions, project costs, funding prospects, and the replacement schedule, with further studies as needed.
How would we begin?	During the first 12–18 months, review existing KCPS plans together, identify missing assessments, and establish a shared long-range schedule connected directly to KCPS’s rolling six-year capital plan.
When would construction occur?	According to the agreed sequence, building needs, state participation, and county affordability. Each project would advance through its own design and funding approvals.
What would success look like?	County and school leaders working from aligned plans, taxpayers understanding future commitments, and necessary projects advancing with fewer surprises and delays.

Follow through on replacing our aging elementary schools.

I propose that Kent County commit to carrying out future elementary school replacements and major upgrades, following the schedule and funding commitments developed jointly by the county commissioners and Kent County Public Schools.

Committing to replace the middle school is a tremendous first step in modernizing our school facilities. But it is one of the five schools we operate. Our responsibility extends to the children attending every one of them.

Kent County Public Schools' facilities overview lists the middle school and all three elementary schools—Galena, H.H. Garnet, and Rock Hall—as originally built in 1949. Although additions and renovations have improved these buildings over time, our elementary schools share the same age and deserve the same attention to their future. [12]

The commitment must continue after the middle school.

Replacing the middle school should establish an expectation that Kent County will continue investing in its schools as their buildings age and their needs change. Families should know that we are preparing for the next necessary replacement or major renovation, with a clear understanding of how we will pay for it.

The school system has already done substantial work to identify its facility needs. Through the shared school replacement plan outlined in this platform, the commissioners and school system would agree on priorities, timing, and financial responsibilities. This initiative is the commitment to carry out that work.

That means preparing projects for construction, securing state support, budgeting the county's share, and completing the improvements in an orderly sequence. Annual reviews should keep the schedule realistic and explain any changes to the public.

Build schools that support the education we want.

Each project should reflect the needs of the children and teachers who will use the building for decades. Assessments would help determine where replacement is warranted and where substantial modernization can provide a sound, lasting result.

12. Kent County Public Schools facilities overview. kchs.kent.k12.md.us.

Priority	What it means for students and teachers
Reliable, comfortable buildings	Heating, cooling, roofs, and other essential systems that support a consistent school day.
Spaces designed for learning	Classrooms and shared spaces that accommodate science, technology, small-group instruction, and student support.
Access for every student	Buildings that allow students with disabilities to participate fully in school life.
Long-term value	Durable materials and efficient systems, with maintenance and operating costs considered before construction.

We should involve teachers, families, and school staff in these decisions while keeping each project within an affordable scope. The goal is to provide schools that serve our children well and make responsible use of public dollars.

Building, maintaining, and replacing schools is a basic responsibility of county government. We should follow the plan and make the investments that responsibility requires.



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13. Maryland Capital Improvement Program. iac.mdschoolconstruction.org.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: HIGH

TIMING: LONG TERM

Projects would proceed in phases, based on building needs, state funding, and the county's ability to meet its share.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	Kent County Public Schools and the Board of Education would lead school design and construction, working closely with the county commissioners, county finance staff, and state school construction officials.
What drives the cost?	Design, engineering, construction, site work, furnishings, technology, and any temporary space needed to keep students learning during construction.
How could we pay for it?	Pursue Maryland school construction funding alongside county capital funds, designated reserves, and affordable borrowing. The county must budget for its local share and costs that state funding does not cover. [13]
What continues after construction?	Building operations, preventive maintenance, and repayment of any borrowing. These costs should be included in the decision to proceed.
When would projects move forward?	Long term, following the agreed replacement schedule and connecting each project to KCPS's rolling six-year capital plan. Update costs, funding, and timing annually.
What would success look like?	Elementary schools replaced or modernized in a predictable sequence, with funding prepared in advance and families able to see steady progress.

Give young people the chance to explore careers—and get paid to learn.

I propose establishing a youth workforce development coordinator to expand career exploration, mentorship, paid internships, and apprenticeships in close partnership with our schools and local employers.

Young people should be able to explore a profession before being asked to choose one. Spending time in a workplace, learning from an experienced professional, and taking responsibility for meaningful work can help students understand their interests and make more informed decisions about their future.

Those opportunities take someone who has the time to organize them. Employers need help getting involved, students need support finding the right experience, and schools need a dependable partner who can maintain those relationships throughout the year.

Make connecting students and employers someone's responsibility.

The coordinator would complement the work of school counselors, career coaches, and teachers by focusing on the employer relationships that make work experiences possible. That means recruiting participating businesses, helping them understand program requirements and available funding, and working with school staff to turn interest into actual placements.

Kent County already has experience to build on. The school system joined Maryland's youth apprenticeship program in 2019. This proposal would expand the county's capacity to help more employers and students participate. [14]

Opportunity	What students would experience
Career exploration	Workplace visits and conversations that introduce students to occupations they may never have considered.
Job shadowing and mentorship	Time alongside a professional to understand the work, ask questions, and receive guidance.
Paid internships	Meaningful assignments that build skills, provide income, and help students explore a field.
Youth apprenticeships	Paid work connected to classroom learning, with an employer helping students develop specific job skills.

Paid opportunities should be a central goal. A student who needs to earn money should be able to gain useful career experience while doing so. The coordinator would also help address practical barriers, including transportation, scheduling, and required work clothing or equipment.

14. Maryland Department of Labor. labor.maryland.gov.

Build on experience close to home.

Queen Anne’s County offers a useful example. Its career liaison works with schools, Chesapeake College, and businesses to develop career exploration and apprenticeship opportunities. That approach demonstrates how dedicated coordination can help schools and employers create more opportunities for young people. [15]

We should build on the work with the Upper Shore Regional Council and its Project Bright Future initiative, which supports connections to career education, internships, and employment. These partnerships can help us reach more employers and pursue outside funding. [16]

Our goal should be for more young people to leave school with work experience, professional relationships, and a clearer understanding of the opportunities available to them—including here in Kent County.



Stock photograph: Vanessa Loring / Pexels

15. Queen Anne’s County program overview. choosequeenannes.com.
16. Upper Shore Regional Council impact report. usrcmd.org.
17. Maryland youth workforce programs. labor.maryland.gov.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW STARTUP · MEDIUM RECURRING

TIMING: LATER

The principal commitment is sustained staffing, with program costs depending on participation and outside support.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	The dedicated coordinator, working with county economic development staff, Kent County Public Schools, local employers, Chesapeake College, and regional workforce partners. Final responsibilities would be established through consultation with those partners.
What drives the cost?	Salary and benefits, employer outreach, program coordination, transportation assistance, and any county-supported student wages or equipment.
How could we pay for it?	County funding for dependable staffing; participating employers for wages; business sponsorships and grants for additional opportunities. Work with the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board to access federal youth employment support for eligible participants. [17]
How would we begin?	Within the first 12–18 months, review existing services, establish clear responsibilities, recruit employers, and organize an initial group of placements.
What continues each year?	Employer recruitment, student matching, grant applications, and follow-up with students and supervisors to improve the experience.
What would success look like?	More students completing paid work experiences, more employers returning to participate, and students progressing into further education, training, or employment.

Invest in the organizations that invest in our children.

I propose convening a Kent County Youth Organizations Council to help the organizations serving our young people strengthen their programs, reach more children, and pursue funding together.

When residents say there is nothing for young people to do, we should take that concern seriously. We should also ask what would help our existing youth organizations reach the children who are missing out. Creating more opportunities requires supporting the people who organize activities, mentor students, lead clubs, and provide places where young people feel welcome.

Government alone cannot improve young people’s lives, and parents should not have to carry that responsibility alone. Youth organizations give children trusted adults, shared responsibilities, and opportunities to develop character. County government can help these organizations expand their impact through professional development, technical assistance, and better coordination.

Give organizations the support to reach more young people.

The council would bring together youth organizations, community groups, volunteers, and young people themselves. Its work would focus on sharing what works, identifying strategies that should evolve, and helping organizations reach more young people. Professional development and technical assistance would help participating groups strengthen their programs, support staff and volunteers, and grow sustainably.

Participating organizations would use shared information about local youth needs alongside direct feedback from students and families. That would help them understand who is participating, who is being missed, and what changes could make their programs more useful and accessible.

Shared priority	What the council would help organizations do
Understand young people’s needs	Use local data and student feedback to shape activities and identify gaps in participation.
Give youth a meaningful role	Involve young people in choosing activities, planning programs, and evaluating their experience.
Strengthen staff and volunteers	Offer practical training in youth engagement, mentoring, welcoming different needs, and running effective organizations.
Expand access and resources	Coordinate outreach, share resources, and pursue larger grants together to reach more young people.

For example, several organizations could share the cost of training their volunteers or work together on a grant that supports transportation to their programs. Smaller groups could receive help developing a budget, explaining their results, and preparing a stronger funding application.

The purpose is to give organizations practical support they can use with the young people they serve.

Work together to improve opportunities across the county.

The Local Management Board’s mission emphasizes support for vulnerable children, youth, and families. This proposed council would focus on the capacity and impact of organizations that directly serve youth, helping them learn from one another and strengthen their work. We should consult potential partners, including the Local Management Board, to complement existing efforts and avoid adding unnecessary complexity. [18]

A board appointed by the County Commissioners and led by a chair would run the council. Working with participating organizations and young people, it would set priorities for training and technical assistance, coordinate opportunities to pursue larger grants, and follow up on agreed actions. Consultation would shape its responsibilities and how it works with potential partners.

Making a generational investment in our children means helping the entire community serve them well—and giving young people a meaningful say in what that looks like.



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18. Kent County Local Management Board bylaws, 2019. cms2.revize.com.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW–MEDIUM

TIMING: SOONER

Costs would depend on coordination, training, and the assistance offered to participating organizations.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who would lead implementation?	A board appointed by the County Commissioners and led by a chair, working with participating youth organizations and young people. Relationships with potential partners would be established through consultation.
What drives the cost?	Coordination time, trainers, grant-writing assistance, shared resources, and support that enables young people and smaller organizations to participate.
How could we pay for it?	Modest county support, foundation grants, charitable contributions, sponsorships, and joint applications for eligible youth development funding. Each application would identify an organization responsible for managing the award.
How would we begin?	Within the first 12–18 months, consult organizations and young people, review existing partnerships, identify common needs, and establish an initial training and collaboration schedule.
What continues each year?	Practical workshops, shared review of youth needs, funding applications, and follow-up on improvements made by participating organizations.
What would success look like?	More young people participating consistently, stronger staff and volunteer support, additional outside funding, and programs that improve in response to youth feedback.

WHAT THIS INVESTMENT COULD MAKE POSSIBLE

A stronger experience for students, from their first school years to their first responsibilities at work.

More ways to learn and succeed

If we implement these initiatives well, a student's experience in Kent County could be substantially different. Students could learn in facilities designed for their needs, receive instruction that challenges their abilities, and eat meals that support their readiness to learn. Beyond the classroom, they could find welcoming programs, trusted adults, and opportunities that make their interests part of community life.

Experience that builds ability and confidence

A student could complete a project for a real customer, explain a budget, solve a problem with classmates, and see the community use the result. Another could explore a career through paid work and discover an ability they had not recognized. These experiences could help young people become more capable, confident, and engaged workers, with a clearer understanding of what employers expect and what they can contribute.

Support that reaches beyond the school day

Stronger youth organizations could reach children who have not found a program that fits them. Staff and volunteers could learn from one another, improve their approach, and secure resources together. Parents would have more people and places to turn to as they help their children develop judgment, responsibility, and healthy relationships.

A STRONGER FUTURE FOR KENT COUNTY

The ambition is higher achievement, greater opportunity, and a community where more families choose to build their lives.

Schools that families choose with confidence

Our goal should be stronger performance in the classroom and greater participation beyond it. Families should be able to see challenging instruction, useful experiences, and sustained support for their children. If these investments deliver those results, they could give families compelling reasons to choose Kent County Public Schools and remain in the system. They could also make Kent County more attractive to families considering a move.

The opportunity to lead in Maryland

I want our public schools to offer an experience that compares favorably with any school choice available to families. Thoughtful investment, strong teaching, and meaningful opportunities beyond the classroom could help Kent County Public Schools become a leader in Maryland. A county that prepares young people well can also strengthen its workforce, support employers, and give more residents reasons to see a future here.

A commitment measured by results

That future will depend on careful choices and sustained work. We would need to test these ideas, consult potential partners, establish costs, secure resources, and measure whether students are benefiting. Some proposals may need to change, proceed in stages, or wait. My purpose in presenting this plan is to make the opportunity clear: Kent County can pursue a more ambitious future for its children while making responsible decisions about how to achieve it.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES



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