

Bells Mill Elementary School Parent Teacher Association

Meeting Agenda – March 3, 2026, 6:30 pm, Zoom

Meeting called to order at 6:33 with 31 participants

Welcome - Amanda Klueger, President

Introduced Julie Yang, MCPS Board Rep for BMES district

- Boundary Study Updates
- Amanda- BMES letter to Board to keep us together per guidance of not emailing board as individuals
- Optioning not to provide verbal testimony
- Julie- long process but showed Churchill Community came together
- Board will make decision on March 26

School Updates - Dr. Smith, Principal and Mrs. Tilkens, Assistant Principal

- New Hire, Mrs. Erin Cosgrove - In Person SLP, working with Mr. Fenton and special ed office to come up with Make Up schedule
- PCR Drill- Reminder forms to be updated fo those that will Pick up Child
- Staffing Season- Allocations -
 - Special Education resource position pending approval
 - No teacher losses for 2026-27 school year but some may be adjusted between grade levels
 - Adding K and 1st
 - % grade structure different due to compacted math and departmentalization
 - April/June: Instructional leadership team creates schedules and student articulation
- Staffing timeline:
 - February/March: Principal speaking with staff about position changes
 - March/April: Hiring decisions for 2026-27 school year
 - April/June: Instructional leadership team creates schedules and student articulation

Treasurer Report- Lis Patterson

- February balance: \$21,781 beginning, \$23,565 ending
- Tracking well to budget despite major expenses ahead (International Festival, STEM Night, Bell's Mill Bash)

Upcoming Events & Activities

- STEM Night/Science Fair moved to Sunday this year
- Bell's Mill Bash June 4th
- Teacher Appreciation Week May 4-8
- Breakfast with Bears May 12th
- Yearbook sales starting this month, ending first week of May
- Next PTA meeting May 5th, 6:30pm (voting on 2026-27 board and budg

Membership and Fundraising - Shara Reiter and Danielle Somers

- Readathon (biggest fundraiser, \$20,000 goal):
 - Runs through March 13th
 - 351 readers signed up, 19,000+ minutes logged
 - Spirit week during first week
- PTA membership: 269 families, 43 teachers (ahead of last year)
- Ledo fundraiser March 10-11
- Vocabulary parade Friday 9:45am (Readathon celebration)

MCCPTA Delegate Report - Nathalie Babou and Adam D'Angelo, MCCPTA Delegates

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Community - Zina Segal and Natalie Malloy

- Developmental Disabilities Awareness assembly March 9th
- International Festival registration open (tables/performances needed)

Communications and Family Engagement - John Sorrenti and Lauren Koubek

- Breakfast with Bears- May 12

School Community Events- Jenna Cooper and Claire Andrews

- STEM Night/Science Fair moved to Sunday this year
- Bell's Mill Bash June 4th

After School Enrichment

Upcoming Activities & Updates

- Submit yearbook photos
- Need volunteers for nominating committee
- Teacher & Staff Appreciation Week- May 4-8
- NAACP Parents Council Representative needed (work with Dr. Smith)

Next Meeting: May 5, 2026 at 6:30pm in the APR

Adjourn 7:34pm

Q & A

PTA Meeting #3- March 3, 2026

Questions	Feedback
<p>What does school administration and the PTA suggest would be the most effective approach to voicing our concern about how snow days are decided across the county?</p> <p>Specifically, we would like to put forth a proposal that decisions on snow days are done either at each school level or breaking up the county into smaller school districts so that those decisions reflect the conditions in our neighborhood and area, rather than across our large county.</p>	<p>I know many families feel frustrated when weather-related school closure decisions seem to be made for the whole county even when conditions vary a lot from one neighborhood to another — it's a fair and real concern. Here's the situation right now in Montgomery County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision-making authority for snow days sits with the MCPS central office and is guided by safety as the top priority. They review forecasts, road conditions, bus access, sidewalks, and other safety factors countywide before deciding whether to close or delay school. Conditions can vary across the county — but the district bases decisions on the broad picture because buses and students travel across many areas. - At the state level, there is current legislation (House Bill 1084) moving through the Maryland Senate aimed at giving the board more flexibility on calendar extensions when there are multiple snow days (e.g., meeting required instructional hours rather than fixed days). That's an example of parents and lawmakers responding to community concerns about how snow decisions affect the school year. <p>A few avenues you can take as an individual or group include...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requesting an opportunity to speak formally at a Board of Education meeting about your recommendations or ideas THEN follow-up written letter or presentation. - Engage with your elected representatives in Annapolis — particularly those on education or local government committees — to share your concerns and encourage them to vote to allow flexibility with hours of learning vs. calendar days of learning. Remember, snow day decision authority and calendar policy are shaped by state law and can require legislative action to change. <p>One important factor that often isn't visible is the operational side. MCPS employees are contracted to work a specific number of duty days based on their job classification. If one school were closed while another remained open, it would create significant payroll and contractual complications — including how staff are paid, how leave is applied, and how required duty days are met. That complexity is one of the reasons the district has historically not implemented school-by-school closures.</p>
<p>Can you discuss class size concerns? Particularly in kindergarten. Why do some older grades have smaller class sizes? For example, kindergarten has class sizes of 27 and Grade 4 has classes of 21.</p>	<p>I understand why you might notice the difference between our current kindergarten class sizes and some of the upper grades, and I'm happy to provide some context.</p> <p>Our school received its staffing allocation from the district in March of 2025. Based on those allocations and the enrollment numbers at that time, we carefully monitored enrollment throughout the spring and summer and determined the number of classrooms for each grade level.</p> <p>During the summer, our kindergarten classes were projected to have approximately 23–24 students per class, which was well within the district's 2025–2026 class size guidelines. As the school year progressed, however, enrollment changed. Some students moved away in upper grades, while many new students enrolled, which increased the size of our kindergarten classes.</p>

	<p>While it may seem like adding another classroom would be a simple solution, there are several logistical challenges once the school year has begun. It is not as straightforward as hiring an additional teacher. We first have to examine staffing within the building. In some cases, this could mean collapsing a classroom at another grade level, which would likely impact programming, and significantly increase class sizes for students in that grade.</p> <p>Additionally, teacher assignments must follow certification requirements and the terms of the collective bargaining agreement. Teachers can only move up to two grade levels. For example, if a grade five classroom were collapsed, we might need to shift teachers across several grade levels (such as grades three and one) in order to place a teacher in kindergarten. This type of change would require reassigning many students across multiple grade levels and would be very disruptive for students and staff.</p> <p><u>Note: Please refer to the kindergarten communication, January 9, 2026 at 3:50 p.m. from Dr. Smith</u></p> <p>Hiring mid-year can also be challenging. Even if we were allocated an additional teaching position beyond our current staffing, it is often difficult to hire a fully certified teacher mid-year. In many cases, the available option would be a long-term substitute rather than a permanent certified teacher, which may not provide the stability we want for students.</p> <p>Because of these factors, our focus has been on increasing support within kindergarten classrooms rather than restructuring the entire school. We have added additional staffing supports so students receive instruction in smaller groups during key parts of the day, particularly during reading and math instruction.</p> <p>Please know that we did request additional staffing through the formal process; however, we have not yet received an additional allocation for kindergarten. At this point in the year, we are in Marking Period 3, making significant structural changes would likely be more disruptive than beneficial for students. We will continue to monitor enrollment and ensure students receive the academic and social-emotional support they need.</p>
<p>What is HSM? (paraeducator HSM). I think you said Home School Model? What does this mean?</p> <p>(thanks - really helpful to understand!)</p>	<p>The Home-School Model is identified as special education. These are students who are in our K-5 classrooms and have an IEP that is supported by Ms. Jackson or Ms. Romain (or one of the paraeducators). It is called this because students' IEPs are served in their home school (based on their address) and they are not bussed from out-of-bounds addresses for special, discrete programming.</p>
<p>What happens if grade sizes are above the numbers shared? For example, 1st grade currently has 3 classes with circa 26 students. When those students are in 2nd grade and have to be at ratio of 1:24 (assuming the number of students stays the same), how do you get to 1:24?</p>	<p>The numbers shared are staffing ratios used by MCPS to determine how many teachers are allocated to a school, not strict class-size caps. When MCPS calculates staffing, they look at the total number of students in a grade level and divide by the staffing ratio to determine how many teachers should be allocated.</p> <p>For example, if there are 78 students in a grade level and the staffing ratio is 1 teacher per 24 students, MCPS would calculate: $78 \div 24 = 3.25$ teachers</p> <p>Since schools cannot be allocated a fraction of a teacher, the allocation</p>

	<p>would historically (like this year!) remain 3 teachers, and classes would be balanced as evenly as possible. In that example, classes might look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 26 students ● 26 students ● 26 students <p>However, one of the goals of the new staffing standards is to make staffing allocations more predictable and more responsive to enrollment. Under the new system, schools are more likely to receive an additional teacher when enrollment pushes class sizes beyond the target ratios, rather than waiting until class sizes grow significantly larger. For example, if enrollment in a grade level grows to around 96 students, the calculation would look like this: $96 \div 24 = 4$ teachers</p> <p>In that case, the school would receive 4 teachers, allowing classes to be much closer to the intended ratio. Schools also continue to monitor enrollment throughout the year, and staffing adjustments can occur if enrollment increases significantly.</p> <p>Overall, the goal of the new staffing standards is to create more consistent class sizes and clearer guidelines for when additional teachers are allocated.</p>
<p>In addition the above question, I'd add that current 1st grade is above the guidelines this year as well as last year after Miss Wolfe passing away. We have advocated again and again for smaller classes for this group without success. Many of the kids are in FIT cohorts since Mrs. Gordon's hours were cut this year and the amazing 1st grade team has done a great job but it is particularly important that current 1st graders do not continue to draw the short straw with teacher allocations.</p>	<p>Looking ahead, our 2026–2027 staffing allocation is very likely to address these concerns. Under the new MCPS staffing standards, the Grade 2 ratio next year is projected to be 1:24, and the new system is designed to make it more likely that schools receive additional teachers when enrollment exceeds the target ratios.</p> <p>We will continue to monitor enrollment and advocate for appropriate staffing to support this cohort of students.</p> <p>Note, FIT is and was not created due to someone having less hours. The plan is to have all students part of a FIT team. FIT is part of MCPS to assist with enrichment, intervention and acceleration.</p>
<p>Thinking about promoting K registration and playdates, did we get anywhere with our request for a new/fixed school sign?</p>	<p>No. The rationale Mrs. Tilkens received is that it would be too costly to repair. The "solution" would be to tear down the old sign and put in a new wood sign. Mrs. Tilkens will continue to advocate for a better solution so that we can have a beautiful and interactive school sign. The software cost alone begins at 45K.</p>