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Wootton School Closure Challenge Moves Forward Before Independent Administrative Law Judge

Case Could Establish Statewide Precedent for Whether School Systems May Avoid Maryland's School Closure Laws by Calling a Closure a "Relocation"

ROCKVILLE, Md. — July 20, 2026 — The Community and Education Policy Alliance (CEPA) today announced that its legal challenge to Montgomery County Public Schools' decision to "relocate" Thomas S. Wootton High School—a decision CEPA contends constitutes a school closure under Maryland law—has advanced to independent review before the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings.

Earlier in the proceedings, MCPS sought to stop this appeal before the evidence could ever be heard. The State Board refused to end the case at this preliminary stage, instead referring it to an independent Administrative Law Judge for further proceedings.

The referral moves the case beyond preliminary motions and into an independent examination of the evidence surrounding MCPS's decision to replace Thomas S. Wootton High School at its historic campus with a new school at the Crown development. The appeal affects thousands of current and future students and families and raises an important question under Maryland education law that could shape future school reorganizations across the state.

A Case That Could Affect Every Maryland Community

Although this appeal concerns Thomas S. Wootton High School, the legal issue extends well beyond Montgomery County.

This case is not about relitigating the past. It is about establishing the legal rules that will govern future school reorganization decisions. At the heart of the appeal is a straightforward question: *Can a school board avoid Maryland's statutory school closure requirements by characterizing a school closure as a "relocation"?*

The State Board's eventual decision could clarify how Maryland law applies whenever local school systems undertake major school reorganizations.

The timing is significant. As MCPS prepares for another major round of elementary and middle school boundary planning, communities deserve clarity regarding when Maryland's statutory school closure protections apply and whether those protections may be avoided simply by changing the terminology used to describe a decision.

"Today it's Wootton. Tomorrow it could be any community in Maryland," said Elisa Sukhobok, Vice President of the Community and Education Policy Alliance (CEPA). "If school systems can sidestep Maryland's school closure laws simply by renaming a closure a 'relocation,' then every

Maryland family has a stake in this case. As MCPS prepares for another round of elementary and middle school boundary decisions, parents deserve to know whether the protections the legislature enacted can be set aside by changing a single word.”

What Happens Next

As the case proceeds, CEPA intends to pursue discovery and other available mechanisms to develop a complete factual record. That includes seeking documents, testimony, internal communications, analyses, memoranda, and other evidence concerning how the challenged decision was made. A complete factual record is essential to ensuring public confidence in major education decisions that affect thousands of Maryland families.

“We welcome discovery,” Sukhobok said. “The public has heard MCPS’s explanations. Discovery is where those explanations are tested against the contemporaneous record. We intend to pursue every discovery mechanism available because the question is no longer what MCPS says happened. The question is whether the evidence drove the decision—or whether the decision came first and the explanations followed.”

About CEPA

The Community and Education Policy Alliance (CEPA) is a nonprofit organization advocating for transparent, lawful, and community-centered public education policy. CEPA seeks accountability in major public education decisions affecting Montgomery County families.

CEPA is represented by Silverman Thompson LLP.

Media Contact

Elisa Sukhobok
Vice President
Community and Education Policy Alliance

Media interviews with CEPA leadership are available upon request.