



Picture of the “relocatables” or portable classrooms at Towson High School (Courtesy of The Baltimore Sun)

The Overcrowding Cycle

About the ever-growing problem of overcrowding in Baltimore County Public Schools

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In 2010, West Towson Elementary School had finally been built to help reduce the severe overcrowding issue in Towson public schools. Many students and parents rejoiced over the green spaces, the classrooms, and most importantly the space. They had been waiting for a less crowded public school in their district, as many students that would be going to West Towson Elementary School came from Rodgers Forge Elementary School, a school that had a [state-rated capacity](#) of 396 students but had 707 students enrolled for the 2008-2009 school year.

Both the county and parents hoped this would help solve the overcrowding issue for years to come and would lead to improving the overcrowding situation in middle schools such as Dumbarton and in high schools such as Towson High School. However, a decade later, West Towson became overcrowded, having to use four classrooms from the adjacent school called Ridge Ruxton. Rodgers Forge and Riderwood, the two schools that students came from to go to West Towson, continue to be overcrowded to this day.

Overcrowding occurs when the students enrolled exceeds the amount of the state-rated capacity. The school boards and the Baltimore County Board of Education cannot ignore the problem, so many different solutions over the years have been made to adapt to the situation and keep students learning in the classrooms, even if those classrooms are not in the school itself. However, when looking at the data for enrollment in Baltimore County, [in 2019](#), 66 schools in Baltimore County were over-capacity out of [178 schools](#). Out of the 66 schools, 52 of them were elementary schools. Baltimore County has [108 elementary schools](#), which means that 61% of Baltimore County elementary schools are considered overcrowded. However, let us look more specific, and how this relates to Towson High School. Most of the students that will eventually become enrolled at Towson High School [come from](#) Dumbarton Middle School, which has a 109.96% FTE/SRC (Full Time Equivalent Enrollment/State Rated Capacity), meaning that they are almost 10% over capacity. The students that go to Dumbarton Middle School mainly come from Rodgers Forge Elementary, which has a 118.18% FTE/SRC, Stoneleigh Elementary, which has a 106.86% FTC/SRC, and West Towson Elementary, which has a 101.25% FTE/SRC. As time goes on, these students will eventually graduate to Towson High School, which leads us to now, where Towson High School has an FTE/SRC of 128.49%. To make matters even worse, the school system projects that in the fall 2028, Towson High School will be 768 students over capacity, or an [FTC/SRC](#) of 161% if nothing changes.

Many parents have unfortunately been stuck in this overcrowding cycle. For parents such as Phoebe Letocha, a vocal critic of the overcrowding cycle, it has affected her child's education from their kindergarten through 12th grade years. "Overcrowding has been an issue the entire time my children have been in BCPS (Baltimore County Public Schools)" says Letocha, when asked about if overcrowding has been an issue for her and her children. "When my children started at Stoneleigh Elementary School there were trailers on the property and the school was overcrowded. My daughter was in the second year of all-day kindergarten and the school's population grew and got worse as time went on. After West Towson Elementary School was built, my children had what they called an "180-day field trip" to the old George Carver High School while they renovated Stoneleigh. Then they moved to Dumbarton Middle School, and when we had our parents meeting with BCPS we made a point about overcrowding and had an info session. People asked what this meant about middle school and high school and BCPS assured us by saying "There is plenty of space at Dumbarton, and we don't expect any issues in the future with Towson High School." This was around the time where the use of trailers became normalized when dealing with the overcrowding issue at Towson High School. However,

Dumbarton was overcrowded when my kids went there. They solved the air conditioning issue, but the trailers were still there.”

When asked about her experience with trailers or “relocatables” as the Board of Education calls them, Letocha said “Towson High School has had trailers since 2004. Now it is 2021 and they have even more trailers than before. When my daughter started high school in 2016 there were six trailers on site, now there are 12 on site. The enrollment keeps getting higher each year and 12 trailers is the maximum before Towson High School must lose another playing field. These kids have been in trailers for their entire BCPS career. That reflects poor planning and impacts the education. To make things worse, Stoneleigh now has two new trailers which shows the poor planning”

Planning has been an issue for the county when building and renovating public schools. Many questions have been raised on where students from Towson High School would go while renovating the building. Public officials such as Council Member David Marks, who secured the funding to renovate Stoneleigh, echoes the same concerns and has been working on finding a solution. “The Board of Education is working with the county government on a long-term strategy for high school construction.” Marks says when asked about the progress of renovating Towson High School. “Also, in some very positive news, the state legislature passed a funding bill--the Built to Learn Act--which will provide a more reliable source of funding for the state share of all these projects. We are getting closer.” Marks is hopeful about the new act and is continuing to secure funding to renovate Towson High School.

The issue of planning has always been a problem for BCPS, but this is not their first time dealing with the situation. Pete Dixit, the Executive Director for the Department of Facilities Management and Strategic Planning had this to say when asked about overcrowding and the solutions found to help prevent it “Yes, certain pockets of Baltimore County have an overcrowding issue. For example, the northeast part of Baltimore County has a lot of issues. We have already built a school in that area called Honeygo Elementary. It was built near Perry Hall to relieve overcrowding in that area. We have also demolished an old school building in the southern part of Baltimore County and rebuilt it to help reduce the overcrowding issue. We have also been working closely with the southeast part of Baltimore County, and plan on building and renovating two schools in that area.”

Towson High School is one of the more populated schools in Baltimore County, when asked about the plan of where these students would be relocated to, Pete said “There are several ways we handle this situation. When we design and renovate a school, we try and build on one

side and keep the other side of the school operational. Another option is using a vacant building to house students. Our main objective is always to keep the school going”

The Board of Education has been working hard to please the parents of all schools. Both sides recognize the cycle of overcrowding, but both sides do not yet have a complete solution. Pete understands the issues that parents have but realizes that not all problems can be solved at once “Every community wants their school done tomorrow. Every community thinks they matter more than the others.” Pete said. “We always have to prioritize certain areas; it is a complex process. The challenge is to meet the needs, get the funding, design the schools, work with the schools, make sure we do not overburden the market with construction work.” While COVID-19 has given the buildings a brief respite, Towson High School if nothing changes will continue to be overcrowded, with an estimated [FTC/SRC](#) of 147.94% for the 2021-2022 school year.

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