



NORTH CARROLL RECREATION COUNCIL

IN COOPERATION WITH CARROLL COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION



The Impact of Carroll Public School Closures on Recreation Councils

As concerned citizens, taxpayers, loyal voters, loyal volunteers, and residents of Manchester and Hampstead, Carroll County, Maryland, this message is written on behalf of the North Carroll Recreation Council (NCRC). The NCRC is in a unique position because it primarily services thousands of participants that eventually attend North Carroll High School or Manchester Valley High School and some beyond those boundaries. Most recreation councils in Carroll County already operate from a position of inadequacy in consideration of facility and field space. The councils count on guidance from some wonderful, hardworking representatives from Carroll County Recreation and Parks to sustain and coordinate facility usage of public schools for many of its programs. All recreation council leadership in Carroll County will tell you that facility and field space is so tight for current program coordination that any change in schedule wreaks immediate havoc on program events in general, and volunteerism availability specifically.

Public schools play a significant role in communities around Carroll County. Our public schools have a positive and direct impact on local recreation councils and their abilities to provide their services to its community's families. By having use of these public school facilities, the recreation councils can offer their variety of respective programs, host events to build social connections and provide a hub for many facets of community life. Our schools are key in developing community connections and pride in the accomplishments of its community members. The loss of the public space and social connections formerly provided by the school closures present a significant deterrent to families staying in the community or moving to it. School closures affect property values, businesses, and community viability overall.

Politicians often align school closures simply with economic savings, although it should not be taken for granted that this is so. Any examination of the cost of keeping schools open should be balanced against the broader costs to children, families, and the communities of closing schools. When affected students are displaced because of a school closure, they often face longer days, travelling by bus or family vehicle to a school outside the community rather than the neighborhood school. The transportation schedules for these students present obstacles to both extra-curricular activities at their new schools and to programs in their home communities. Even after-school play with classmates becomes more difficult to arrange. Something as simple as walking to school as a form of healthy exercise and a responsible choice is removed as an option for many children when a community school closes. When children attend school away from their home community or neighborhood, it is often more difficult for parents to volunteer at school, attend events, deal with any medical issues their child may experience, and connect with their child's teachers.

The loss of North Carroll High School has significant negative implications for the broader community and the NCRC. In specific to the NCRC, the closing of North Carroll High School represents a crushing blow to its ability to offer recreational access and services to the community. For many years the NCRC has leveraged the NCHS facilities to provide recreational services to the Carroll County community for youth and adults, spanning 27 programs and camps. The chart below shows the most recent volunteer report of NCRC services negatively impacted by the closure of NCHS.

Description	Participants	Attendance	Volunteer	Volunteer Hours
Grand Total - NCRC Programs	4,374	66,940	1,004	73,705
% of NCRC Programs using NCHS	89%	92%	85%	90%

North Carroll Recreation Council
 P.O. Box 546 Manchester Maryland 21102
www.NorthCarrollRec.org

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As you can see, of the 73,000 plus hours of volunteerism sponsored by the NCRC during the last reporting cycle (2014 - 2015), 89% of its participants and 78% of its programs will be directly and negatively impacted by the closure of the North Carroll High School facility. In lieu of this prospect to close NCHS, what is the Carroll County Government's plan to diminish the detrimental impact of this school's closure on its recreation council base in general, the NCRC in specific? What are the specific plans to repurpose the NCHS facility and how does it relate to the NCRC and its future operations?

From a business perspective, the members of the NCRC understand Carroll County's decision to close a number of schools is anguishing because it has profound effects on students, parents, neighborhoods, communities, and personnel. It can negatively impact routines, relationships, traditions, and lives. We at the NCRC, not unlike the impacted communities, require definitive answers, transparency and access to information regarding the proposed closures, and ask for a real part in the process to ensure the communities it serves are still able to be served with quality and uplifting commitment. It would be prudent of our Carroll County Government leadership to ensure that its constituents receive the necessary "3C's (Communication, Collaboration, and Coordination)" to ensure they are in lock step with the elected officials' strategy. It's also time that Carroll County Government realizes it has well-educated constituents that require definitive, hardcore facts when rendering these tough decisions to close schools or any other tough choice. Amidst circumstances of declining enrollment and economic necessity, its constituents understand the imprudence of not closing schools. However, haphazard choices for school closures will threaten the viability of many recreation councils in Carroll County.

More importantly, it would be imprudent of Carroll County's elected officials to proceed with school closings without more effective communication of future school board and education strategy along with budget forecasts that show positive sustainable prospects. Carroll County Government cannot afford to create a scenario where it significantly impacts its constituent's with school closures and then officials are back next year and the year after with the same conversation of budget shortfalls for education.

A very important question for Carroll County Government and Board of Education officials is this: "If we were in a perfect world scenario where all Carroll schools were effectively populated, would the BOE still be promoting education budget shortfalls year after year? If not, please elaborate why this wouldn't be the case. If so, closing schools is not the first answer required, but an immediate strategy to fix the budget crisis is necessary to alleviate a perpetual cycle of budget cuts even after schools are closed. Are these immediate cost savings from closing schools worth the overall damage to the community and county population base?"

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