

Home / News / Local
http://www.stardem.com/news/local_news/franchot-tours-greensboro-elementary/article_b0593cf1-796f-5263-a560-feaf58163693.html

FEATURED

Franchot tours Greensboro Elementary

By ABBY ANDREWS aandrews@carolinetimesrecord.com Mar 13, 2018



Comptroller Peter Franchot, left, visits Greensboro Elementary School fifth grade teacher Kelly Higgins, middle, and her class during a school tour Monday, March 12. Local officials also joined the tour, including Greensboro Town Manager Jeannette DeLude, right.

PHOTO BY DUSTIN HOLT

GREENSBORO — Maryland Comptroller Peter Franchot visited Greensboro Elementary School on Monday, March 12, to see firsthand how critical a proposed new school is to relieving overcrowding.

Caroline County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Patricia Saelens and Principal Dawn Swann hosted the tour along with Caroline County Commissioners Wilbur Levensood, Dan Franklin and Larry Porter.

Design of the new school, to be built near the existing one on land already owned by Caroline County Public Schools, needs to start soon, in order to stay on track for a targeted summer 2021 completion, Milton Nagel, assistant superintendent of administrative services, said.

However, the Interagency Committee on School Construction, which administers state school construction money, has not yet said which projects are on the list for planning funding in the upcoming fiscal year; that announcement is expected later this spring.

Franchot, one of the members of the Board of Public Works, which must approve the Interagency Committee's recommendations, has already said he strongly supports the proposed new school.

The visit Monday — during which Franchot saw the creative uses of space inside the school and 10 portable “learning cottages” parked behind it to make enough classrooms to house 830 students in a school rated to hold about 650 — should only bolster that support, Nagel said.

“It can't hurt,” he said.

Before the tour began, Franchot said he and Gov. Larry Hogan are committed, if re-elected, to giving school construction money to jurisdictions that prove they take care of their buildings.

Caroline County is at the top of that list, Franchot said, tied with Frederick County and “some other rich county.”

“I applaud Caroline for being so well-run and good with a dollar,” Franchot said. “It's partly because of frugality out of necessity here, but I wish every county in the state was this good.”

Nagel said the “bones” of the existing school are still solid, but a feasibility study proved a two-story building on a smaller footprint will be cheaper to build and more efficient to run than trying to renovate and add on to the 44-year-old school, which was built with an “open” classroom design.

Schools' longevity in Caroline County is thanks to the efforts of the maintenance staff, Nagel said, as well as that of the teaching staff who use the school every day.

“People here care about the buildings,” Nagel said. “They treat them like their own homes.”

Nagel introduced Charles Petrick, supervisor of school construction and maintenance; Franchot gave Petrick a comptroller's medallion, presented to Marylanders who make a difference.

“School systems like Caroline should get money from the state just for doing what you’re doing,” Franchot said. “That’s the coming way, because we can’t afford to keep building all these new schools.”

Franchot noted some schools in other jurisdictions have fallen into disrepair in as little as 15 years.

Nagel also thanked the Caroline County commissioners, all three of whom attended the tour, for their support of the new school project. In October, they voted to raise the income tax rate from 2.73 to 3.2 percent, the rate required to get maximum state funding for the \$46 million project.

“They’ve taken it on the chin (for the tax increase),” Nagel said.

Swann then led the group on a tour of the school, starting with one of the 10 portable “learning cottages” behind it, in which Kelly Higgins was teaching fifth grade.

After asking the students about what they were learning, Franchot presented Higgins with a comptroller’s medallion.

The tour continued through the school’s boiler room, then into the rest of the building.

Swann showed Franchot one classroom in what used to be a closet, and how many classrooms are packed into the open areas, separated only by curtain dividers.

Along the way, Franchot presented another comptroller’s medallion to Kayla Holecheck, a third-grade teacher.

After the tour, Franchot said the state should look approvingly on building a new school in Greensboro that not only serves the needs of the students, but the community as a whole.

“Caroline should be rewarded, not penny-pinched, as far as the state goes,” Franchot said.