

New program will remove barrier to after-school participation, Weinstein says



County Council member Jon Weinstein announces the launch of the "Driving Student Success" program at Howard High School on Monday morning. (Submitted photo)

Lisa Philip Contact Reporter

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On Monday morning, County Council member Jon Weinstein announced the launch of Driving Student Success, a program that will collect donations from local businesses to provide students participating in after-school activities with a bus ride home.

"There is a direct correlation between a student's academic success and future opportunities and their involvement in activities after school," said Weinstein, a Democrat who represents District 1. "Whether participating in a club, seeking extra help or playing a sport, our students should have the opportunity to stay after school and still have access to transportation home."

Weinstein collaborated with the Howard County school system and the Bright Minds Foundation to create the program. Bright Minds, the county school system's educational foundation, works to

"support education, aspirations and the opportunity to succeed for all students within the Howard County Public School System."

"Howard County is proud of its school system and this program promotes community support that will help maintain its excellence," said Lisa Olivieri, chair of the foundation. She joined Weinstein and Superintendent [Renee Foose](#) at a press conference about the program at Howard High. "We look forward to continuing to work with the business community and the councilman to grow this program."

According to a report by the Harvard Family Research Project, participation in after-school programs positively impacts students' academic success, but also their social and emotional health.

"A decade of research and evaluation studies, as well as large-scale, rigorously conducted syntheses looking across many research and evaluation studies, confirms that children and youth who participate in after school programs can reap a host of positive benefits in a number of interrelated outcome areas — academic, social/emotional, prevention, and health and wellness," wrote the authors of the report, Priscilla Little, Christopher Wimer and Heather Weiss.

However, obstacles exist for participation in after-school programming, especially for low-income students. According to research by the Campaign for Educational Equity, transportation is among the most commonly cited "potential barriers" by disadvantaged families.

The Driving Student Success program will work to remove this barrier in Howard County, according to a press release, by collecting donations from the community and local businesses to pay for bussing following extracurricular activities. The program will focus on schools with the greatest transportation needs first, said Eric Solomon, public information officer for the County Council.

"Some families are telling us they face significant barriers to participation in after-school activities," said Paul Lemle, president of the Howard County Educators Association. "We're happy to see this creative partnership between our schools, our elected officials and our business community."