

# Parents launch effort to get new Towson High School built



Steve Prumo poses with his children outside of Towson High School, including Rosa, 13, Sofia, 10, Rafael, 7 and Olivia, 4. Prumo is among those advocating that Baltimore County build a new Towson High by 2022. (Rachael Pacella / Baltimore Sun Media Group)



By **Rachael Pacella**  
Towson Times

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Future, past Towson High parents lead effort for new school building

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SEPTEMBER 19, 2016, 8:21 AM

**N**ext year, Steve Prumo's daughter, Rosa, 13, will enter her freshman year at Towson High School; three years later his daughter, Sofia, 10, will follow, then Rafael, 7, and finally, Olivia, 4.

Prumo said that's why he's a member of the steering committee for a new Towson High School, which is asking the Baltimore County Public Schools system to replace the existing facility with a new one that would

be ready to open in 2022. This month, the effort gained steam and its members became more vocal with the committee's launching of a Facebook page called "Families for a New Towson High School." The committee also will hold an organizational meeting on Sept. 26 at 7 p.m. at the Towson branch of the Baltimore County Public Library.

The existing school, which was built in 1949, is aging and deteriorating, said Prumo, a 1986 graduate of Towson High.

"I walked around the school recently," he added. "If any parent were to see what that structure looks like from the inside out, [they] would be concerned, too."

Members of the steering committee, which has the support of the school's Parent Teacher Student Association, point to a December 2014 facilities assessment conducted by the school system that illustrates the school's condition. Towson High received the third lowest score of Baltimore County's 24 high schools in that assessment — a 2.36 out of 5. Towson is one of the oldest high schools in the county; Milford Mill Academy was built the same year.

The two high schools that scored lower on the facilities assessment — Patapsco High School, in Dundalk, and Lansdowne High School — are scheduled to be renovated soon.

New schools or recently renovated schools, such as Pikesville High School, received perfect scores in the audit, which looked at prior capital investment in schools, and assessed physical qualities such as the condition of mechanical and electrical systems, floor and ceiling finishes, the amount of space, and on-site traffic circulation, among other factors.

The report states that corrosion "is evident" in Towson's electrical systems, that its floors "show considerable cracking and wear," and that its ceilings are in "poor condition." It also states that the school's mechanical systems are in fair condition.

Site drainage issues quoted in the report were addressed recently, according to Pete Dixit, the executive director of the school system's Office of Physical Facilities. In the summer of 2014, the system spent about \$400,000 to repave and rebuild the drainage system on the Cedar Avenue portion of the property.

Taking into account the school system as a whole, including elementary schools and middle schools, Towson High's building is in average condition, Dixit said.

"That's where most of our schools are," he added.

Baltimore County Executive [Kevin Kamenetz](#) and schools superintendent Dallas Dance announced in April that a team would be created to look at capacity and school construction issues in middle and high schools across the county, said Ellen Kobler, a spokeswoman for Baltimore County.

"The future of Towson High School will be a part of that review," Kobler said.

Additional details about the team were not available.

### **Old and crowded**

Towson High underwent a \$20.8 million renovation in the late 1990s, during which two one-story additions and one four-story addition were added to it, Dixit said. The renovation, which was substantially completed in 1999, also included a new roof, new plumbing, floor and ceiling repairs and the replacement of windows and door frames, among other items.

Baltimore County Councilman [David Marks](#), who is a member of the new school committee, said the renovation didn't go far enough in addressing the school's needs.

"Most people would agree the renovation was not very comprehensive," Marks said, adding that an aging infrastructure and severe overcrowding are the school's biggest problems.

The school system's Students Count 2015 report, which looks at enrollment and school utilization, and was updated in May, found that in 2015 Towson High was at 117.62 percent capacity, making it the most overcrowded high school in the county. The report projects that by 2022 the school will be at 138.81 percent capacity.

"Overcrowding there is going to be severe," Marks said. "We have to start acting now."

Advocacy for a new Towson High began last year, according to Prumo, when he teamed with parent Jennifer Bolster to talk to school and elected officials. Although her daughter graduated from Towson in the spring, Bolster remains a leader of the committee because she's a Towson resident who believes the quality of the school is tied to the quality of the community, she said.

The group's goal is to secure planning money for a new high school in the school system's fiscal 2019 budget, Bolster said. The group isn't trying to diminish the urgent needs of other county high schools, such as Dulaney High School, which also is scheduled for renovation, or Lansdowne High School, she said. Rather, the advocates for Towson High are just trying to secure the school a place in the funding line.

The group would like to secure funding for construction in fiscal 2020 and 2021, to have a new school ready in 2022.

During the 20 years she has lived in Towson, the school's condition has always been a topic of conversation among parents, Bolster said.

"Other parents and I would look at the school and think, 'This school is just so beat and run down,'" she added.

Bolster said she respects the amount of effort the county has put into the overall school system; and she praised Towson High School's staff.

"There's a limited amount of money and a limited number of contractors," she said. "You can't get everything done in a short period of time."

However, the time has come to discuss Towson High, she said, adding that, because discussions regarding the fiscal 2019 budget will begin on October, the advocacy committee is becoming more vocal.

"What happens in the next 12 months determines what happens in six years," Bolster said.

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