

HEART OF AMERICA AND PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY SCHOOLS LIBRARY TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Heart of America (HOA), which has been transforming learning spaces for underserved students nationwide for 28 years, is leading a multi-million-dollar, year-long initiative to fully modernize the libraries at 46 Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) in Maryland. This marks the first-ever district-wide, simultaneous library transformation effort in the U.S. and one of the most significant public-private partnerships focused exclusively on revitalizing public school libraries.

Project-specific

How many schools are included in this initiative, and can you provide a list of each school involved?

A total of 46 schools will receive a makeover, and you can find a complete list in the media kit landing page.

Are these transformations library-specific?

Yes, all the transformations are focused on the libraries in the school, and many of the schools include additional reading nooks or maker spaces. This initiative also includes a Professional Library that will be used for continuing education and professional development for educators, as well as an outdoor classroom adjacent to one of the elementary libraries.

When does the project start?

The initiative kicked off in mid-April 2025.

Which schools received the first transformations?

The first group of schools includes:

- Andrew Jackson Academy
- Chillum Elementary School
- Highland Park Elementary School
- Indian Queen Elementary School
- J. Frank Dent Elementary School
- James Ryder Randall Elementary School
- Panorama Elementary School
- Rosa L. Parks Elementary School
- Suitland Elementary School
- International High School at Langley Park
- Calverton Elementary School

Are all spaces elementary school-focused?

Many of them, yes. Some spaces, such as those in Andrew Jackson Academy, are kindergarten through 8th grade.

How long does a library transformation typically take?

From kickoff to ribbon cutting, most projects are completed within 12–14 weeks. Larger, more complex transformations may take additional time, depending on the design and scope.

When will all the spaces be completed?

The initiative is divided into phases, with many smaller-scale makeovers completed by mid-July. We anticipate most schools will be completed by the end of 2025, and a handful will extend into early 2026.

Who donated the money to make this project come to life?

Pull Up Fund is funding this initiative. Pull Up Fund supports the youth of Prince George’s County by pulling up to communities around the county and connecting them with the resources they need to thrive.

We are grateful for Pull Up Fund’s dedication to the county, their vision for systemic change through library modernization and access to resources, and for being an exceptional collaborator in bringing this project to life.

How much did Pull Up Fund donate?

Their investment is \$5 million; however, the lasting impact of this work on students, teachers, and the community is immeasurable.

Why did Pull Up Fund choose Prince George’s County?

Heart of America has a 25+ year history with Prince George’s County, with numerous completed projects and strong relationships established over the years. The founder of Pull Up Fund is a Prince George’s County native and centers the majority of the organization’s work in the county. Because of HOA’s successful history in the area, we were called upon to help develop the project, and we are incredibly grateful to have a hand in creating this incredible district-wide transformation.

Why was HOA chosen for this significant transformation of school libraries?

HOA has a 25+ year history in the area, with 84 completed projects in Prince George’s County alone. Because of our strong, deep relationships and our unique capabilities around designing school spaces, we were an obvious fit for this initiative. We are incredibly grateful to have a hand in creating this incredible district-wide transformation.

How many students are expected to use these spaces?

Around 26,000 students will use these spaces, an incredible impact for the district that will continue to grow year after year, for generations to come.

Are there volunteers involved in this project?

We don’t anticipate volunteers throughout the phases of this initiative.

Are the transformations in PGPCS one-size-fits-all?

Each school has unique needs, and HOA employs unique thinking in designing each space, with the educators’ and students’ aspirations at the center of the design. This project has four main categories of makeovers, and each school chooses the one that best suits their needs. We use that as a foundation for our collaborative work.

How does Heart of America manage the design process and network of vendors and partners that are involved in a library transformation project of this size?

HOA brings nearly three decades of experience managing projects of every size. Time and again, we’ve found that collaboration is the key to success. Each makeover is led by a dedicated project manager and a member of our Innovation team, who coordinate contractors, furniture procurement, and vendor partnerships. They

work hand in hand with school stakeholders—including facilities staff and, of course, librarians—to ensure every project meets the community’s needs.

Do students, educators, and school administrators participate in the design process?

Absolutely! We can’t do what we do without the community at the core of the work. We encourage all stakeholders to participate in the design process, which means that teachers, school administrators, custodians, district leaders, students, and parents have a say in the space. It is, after all, their space.

Who has access to the libraries?

While external groups may meet in the spaces, they are ultimately built for the students and teachers.

What is the estimated number of books included in the project?

HOA will provide over 25,000 books to the district. Because we believe students should be able to see themselves in the books they read, we provide culturally relevant, diverse books for each library.

Please explain what “system-level change” means in this scenario?

Meaningful change starts in communities, but lasting progress demands a bigger vision. By addressing these libraries at a district-level and creating a district professional library, we are supporting more than isolated issues — we’re able to see the big picture challenges the schools face and tackle them in a way that makes for a lasting, long-term impact.

About libraries

Are libraries still important in a digital world?

- Absolutely. Libraries are far from antiquated! As community hubs, they are places for students to connect, imagine, and create. These are active spaces, designed for engagement, movement, and interaction, with books strategically mixed with technology.
- Investing in libraries increases access to vital resources such as free information, learning opportunities, technology, including maker spaces with 3D printers, and, of course, books.
- Researching topics in a library with the support of a librarian, teachers, or your peers helps develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. Students learn to evaluate data, recognize trends, and analyze what is relevant to their work.
- Libraries feed curiosity. More than ever, facts are important, and libraries serve as information hubs, serving students a wealth of information yearning to be analyzed and understood. Exploring ideas and evaluating what’s relevant creates lifelong critical thinkers, a soft skill that is important in our workforce.

People sometimes say libraries are more than books. What does that mean?

As community hubs, libraries are places for students to connect, imagine, and create. This collaboration increases access to vital resources like free information, learning opportunities, maker spaces with tech such as 3D printers, and, of course, books. A modern library is a well-designed, inspirational, and safe place for all!

How will newly renovated libraries benefit the community?

- There are so many ways these projects benefit the community: The impact resonates well past the physical space! Parents notice their kids coming home with stories about the new space and how

others care about their school. Educators have a little more spring in their step when they have modern resources and beautiful, functional spaces in which to work.

- It's not uncommon that parents and families use the spaces for activities such as job research and search.
- Community partners better understand what the school needs and can see a tangible difference in the behaviors of those around them, those who are using the new spaces.
- Most of all, however, it's all for the students. When someone lends a hand, kids notice in a big way! Having more pride in their school has a big impact. Knowing they are more productive, feel more confident, and have better access to resources is the icing on the cake.

About Heart of America

Who is Heart of America?

- We are a national nonprofit based in Washington, DC, and work in all 50 states. Our work centers on the idea that every student should have an inspiring place to learn. We work with historically marginalized communities to co-create solutions that help bridge the resource gap, giving all students a place to learn, discover, and thrive. Our work is highly collaborative: We always say we work with our communities, not for, meaning we listen to understand each space's unique needs.
- We work largely with private organizations such as 3M, NBA/WNBA, PPG, Verizon, Under Armour, and other funders to bring these projects to life. In many projects, the funder provides staff to volunteer to help us complete them. Some projects include up to 800 volunteers!
- We provide much-needed resources to communities, from pens and pencils to tech like tablets and 3D printers. Our resource distribution projects are a vital component of our work.

Do you have metrics that showcase your impact?

Since 1997, we have transformed nearly 1,400 spaces and impacted the lives of more than 2.5 million students in historically marginalized communities by providing over 4.4 million books and more than \$14.3 million in technology.

What type of spaces do you transform?

There isn't a challenge too small or a dream too big for Heart of America! We design spaces in our four focus areas: STEM/STEAM, Health and Wellness, Career and College, and Libraries and Literature.

Can you provide a complete list of funders?

Not all our funders wish to be public, so we cannot. Organizations we work with include 3M, NBA, PPG, Verizon, and Under Armour.

How do I sign up to become an HOA volunteer?

You may email info@heartofamerica.org to learn more about volunteering. Thanks for your interest!

How can I donate to support HOA's mission?

You may donate via our website's donate section or email Zeb Carlson directly, and we'll work with you to process your donation. His email address is zeb.carlson@heartofamerica.org. Thanks in advance for supporting this much-needed work in the community!

What can I do to help transform libraries at my school?

Please contact us via info@heartofamerica.org with a short description of what's on your mind. We will connect with you to discuss more.

The importance of modern, well-maintained, and inspiring school spaces

What impact does the physical space have on students' school experience?

- Think about the most inspiring, calmest space in your home, maybe in your bedroom or den. You eliminate clutter, distractions, and anything that makes the room feel cluttered or distracting. The same intentionality is true for a schoolroom. Kids should feel focused and inspired by the spaces in which they learn, explore, and discover.
- The spaces in which students learn have a proven impact on mental and physical health, not to mention learning outcomes. The more the space caters to students, the more their opportunity to thrive increases, as does the teacher's ability to educate optimally.
- Sometimes thought of as the third teacher, the connection between the physical environment of a school and how children learn has a significant impact on a student's school experience. It is all about creating a space that actively participates in the education process—one that is well-designed and organized, fosters interaction and exploration, and is responsive to the needs of those who cohabitate in it.
- Schools must support young people's social, developmental, and emotional growth: After all, children are not small adults, having the same needs as those older than them. Investing in facilities that support early and adolescent learning, career and technical education, student support services, and community use goes a long way in addressing the specific needs of students throughout their education.
- Schools are also community hubs, serving as the heart of a community. They provide meeting spaces, places to vote, and outdoor play spaces that families depend on year after year.

How does equity play into the school modernization, maintenance, and design?

- Underserved populations, such as those in inner cities and with a majority non-white student population, are in communities where available local funding is often insufficient to provide even adequate facilities.
- Each space needs unique design requirements, which are based largely on the content being taught there, the student population, and their cultural backgrounds.
- Outcomes in schools in vulnerable communities are typically lower than average. Substantial research demonstrates that students and teachers thrive in a healthy environment that optimizes their potential.

Why does Heart of America focus on schools and other facilities?

- Schools should be places that inspire students and teachers alike. However, with an average age of 49 years old, our nation's schools are aging, and with only 10% of total school spending directed to facilities, these buildings are in dire need of updates.
- The funding gap to reach a state of good repair for our public schools has grown from \$60 billion in 2016 to \$85 billion in 2021 and will only continue to rise. New building codes, for example, mean districts must plan extensively for updates, but the funding simply is not there.
- The space where children learn has a direct impact on their success. Making sure there is ample natural light, appropriate colors on the walls, and furniture that is safe to use are all factors. Think about it: if you can't sit comfortably at a desk in an operable chair, how can you focus on learning?

Why is the design of a space important?

- Human-centric design makes spaces easier to work in. We prioritize the needs of those using the space, understanding what is essential to ensure that the space doesn't impede their behaviors or overall experience. Heart of America's approach to transformation is also grounded in biophilic design, which integrates nature into the built environment to enhance human well-being. This design approach leverages natural elements like light, air, plants, and natural materials to create spaces that promote health, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being.
- Color, for example, significantly impacts learning. By understanding the psychology behind color, we can sync spaces with colors that promote focus and creativity. Studies show that color affects a student's attention and academic performance, and color can also be really practical, such as creating different zones within a big room or color-coding items to make them visually easier to organize.
- Modern schools require spaces designed for collaboration. Our designs center on inviting teamwork and conversation because when people collaborate, they are more apt to be innovative and inclusive by learning from each other's unique backgrounds and points of view. Collaboration also helps students stay engaged.