



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL MONTGOMERY COUNTY MARYLAND

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MCPS Chromebook Inventory Management

Montgomery County Public Schools

OIG Publication #25-13

May 23, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) first began integrating Chromebooks into the learning environment in 2014. In fiscal year 2024, MCPS spent approximately \$19,533,252 on new Chromebooks and today there are more than 200,000 Chromebooks in MCPS's inventory. We initiated this review to assess MCPS's inventory management practices related to Chromebooks. We determined that MCPS could not account for all devices and their inventory records are often not accurate. We visited nine schools and found inconsistent inventory practices, likely caused by the absence of formal policies and procedures governing the management of Chromebooks. The procedural inconsistencies and inaccuracy of inventory records amongst schools may result in MCPS purchasing more Chromebooks than necessary or not having enough to meet their needs.

OBJECTIVES

Through this review we sought to (1) evaluate MCPS's compliance with applicable policies, procedures, and regulations related to the inventory management of portable computers (i.e., laptops), to include receipt, assignment, and disposal, and (2) assess whether MCPS has effective internal controls over portable computers to mitigate potential loss or theft.

SCOPE AND STANDARDS

Our review was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, in accordance with the Association of Inspectors General, *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, Quality Standards for Inspections, Evaluations, and Reviews* (July 2024).

RESULTS

- Chromebook inventory records are inaccurate, and some devices could not be located.
- MCPS does not have a comprehensive regulation or procedure addressing Chromebook inventory management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend MCPS:

- Conduct periodic inventory reconciliations at all schools and maintain up-to-date records.
- Implement regulations and detailed procedures outlining comprehensive inventory management controls.
- Develop formal guidance regarding the assessment of fines for lost or damaged Chromebooks.
- Require periodic training for all staff involved in inventory management.
- Implement a formal process for investigating reported losses and inventory discrepancies.

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BACKGROUND

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the largest school district in Maryland with approximately 161,580 students and more than 25,000 employees during the 2024-2025 school year. MCPS's fiscal year (FY) 2025 operating budget is \$3.32 billion, approximately 64% of which is provided by the County while the remaining 36% is funded by a combination of state, federal, and other funding sources.

The MCPS Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) is responsible for providing essential technology systems and services that support teaching, learning, and business operations. Within OSI, there are four departments that focus on technology: Business Information Services, Digital Innovation, Infrastructure and Operations, and Student Data Systems. Their collective responsibilities include selecting, integrating, and supporting innovative technologies; managing enterprise-wide systems; repairing devices; and maintaining instructional and information systems that keep staff, students, and parents connected.

In 2014, MCPS began integrating Chromebooks into the learning environment as part of its Strategic Technology Plan. The goal was to enhance educational opportunities by providing students with access to modern technological tools, thereby facilitating digital learning. MCPS Regulation IGT-RA, *User Responsibilities for Computer Systems, Electronic Information, and Network Security*, mandates that all users act responsibly when utilizing MCPS's information technology resources.

In FY2023, MCPS spent \$12,849,178 on new Chromebooks. In FY2024, that amount increased to \$19,533,252, which included the use of approximately \$12 million in grant funds. MCPS has leveraged federal grant funds to strategically build the Chromebook inventory so that when devices inevitably reach their end-of-life, MCPS can replace them on a rolling basis. This has also allowed MCPS to postpone purchasing additional Chromebooks so far in FY2025. As of December 6, 2024, MCPS schools have approximately 202,000 active Chromebooks in their inventory.

MCPS purchases Chromebooks from a vendor who configures the devices and affixes an MCPS barcode (i.e., asset tag) on each. The vendor may deliver new Chromebooks either to a central warehouse or directly to designated schools. If delivered to the central warehouse, MCPS staff will subsequently distribute the devices so that each school has a total inventory representing 120% of the school's enrollment. Once Chromebooks are delivered to a school, an Information Technology Support Specialist (ITSS) or other school staff is responsible for safeguarding, assigning, and maintaining the devices. Each high school has its own ITSS staff member who reports to the principal. Conversely, elementary and middle schools share ITSS staff who are OSI employees.

Schools distribute Chromebooks based on one of three models: *1:1* (i.e., direct assignment to students and may be taken home); *cart* (i.e., in-classroom use, stored in carts); or *hybrid* (i.e., combination of the two models). If a Chromebook is damaged, ITSS staff are responsible for triaging the device for repair, which may involve bringing the device to the central OSI Chromebook Repair Center. If a Chromebook is beyond repair or is not able to update various security and licensing measures, it is retired and recycled. MCPS uses the web-based software ServiceNow to manage and track Chromebook inventory. Separately, MCPS's Hub+ application is used to track other fixed asset inventory, including non-Chromebook laptops. Per MCPS Regulation EDC-RA, *Control of Furniture and Equipment Inventory*, MCPS staff must perform a physical inventory at least every two years of (1) all items of furniture and equipment valued at \$5,000 or more, and (2) select items, even if valued at less than \$5,000, to include computers and their components (i.e., laptops). As this inventory is reconciled against Hub+ records, Chromebooks are excluded from the biennial physical inventory.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Through this review we sought to (1) evaluate MCPS's compliance with applicable policies, procedures, and regulations related to the inventory management of portable computers (i.e., laptops), to include receipt, assignment, and disposal, and (2) assess whether MCPS has effective internal controls over portable computers to mitigate potential loss or theft. The scope of our review included MCPS's inventory of portable computers from FY2023 to the present, as well as related policies, procedures, and practices.

Our initial scope of work included laptops assigned to MCPS staff in addition to Chromebooks. We found that these laptops are included in the Department of Materials Management (DMM) physical inventory count every two years, per EDC-RA, and are tracked in both ServiceNow and Hub+. As this is a separate inventory process and appears more robust, we excluded non-Chromebook laptops from our current review but may revisit this process in a future engagement.

During this engagement we reviewed MCPS's Chromebook inventory records, applicable law, regulations, policies, and procedures. We conducted interviews with key MCPS staff, including media specialists and IT support personnel, to understand their roles, challenges, and processes related to Chromebook and laptop management.

We conducted site visits at nine randomly selected schools to assess the accuracy of MCPS inventory records. We attempted to verify if specific Chromebooks not assigned to students were physically present at their designated locations. During these visits, school staff provided us with documentation and access to Chromebook storage areas so OIG staff could verify a random sample of Chromebooks in the school's stockroom. In attempting to perform this inventory verification, we were hamstrung by the differing school-level inventory practices which varied by location.

Our review was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, in accordance with the Association of Inspectors General, *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, Quality Standards for Inspections, Evaluations, and Reviews* (July 2024).

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We found that MCPS inventory records related to Chromebooks were often not accurate and numerous devices could not be located. MCPS does not require a reconciliation or cyclical inventory of Chromebooks other than at the end of the school year. Even then, the reconciliation is not complete as it does not require counts of Chromebooks that are assigned to students. Thus, MCPS is missing opportunities to timely identify vulnerabilities in the process that may lead to fraud, waste, and abuse. The lack of reliable and up-to-date information also hinders MCPS from accurately assessing both the quantity and condition of Chromebooks, potentially leading to unnecessary purchases, imprecise budgeting, and reduced operational readiness.

Finding 1: Chromebook inventory records are inaccurate, and some devices could not be located.

During our review, we found that MCPS could not provide accurate records regarding the location of specific Chromebooks. We learned that not only does MCPS not perform cyclical counts of its Chromebook inventory, reconciliation of an individual school's inventory only occurs in conjunction with the restocking of Chromebooks during the summer break, and even then, it does not capture the Chromebooks assigned to students or otherwise not physically present at the school.

We conducted site visits at a random selection of nine schools, representing three high schools, three middle schools, and three elementary schools. During these site visits, we performed a count of a random sample of Chromebooks in the school's stockroom to determine if the digital inventory matched the physical inventory.¹ Of the nine schools we visited, we found two that could account for all the devices in our sample. At the five other schools in which we were able to conduct a count, we located between 9% and 46% of the devices in our samples during our visit. We could not conduct counts at two of the schools in our sample (indicated in grey in Figure 1 below) because one school deployed all but four of its Chromebook inventory to classroom carts and the other had no accurate data indicating which Chromebooks were in classroom carts versus the stockroom. We also observed some devices that had no asset tag or serial number, making them difficult to identify and track.

¹ So that we did not disrupt classroom instruction, we did not count Chromebooks located in carts or those assigned to students.

Figure 1. Results of Count of Random Sample of Chromebooks at MCPS Schools

School	Model	Random Sample	OIG Located	% Located
HS 1	1:1	45	4	9%
HS 2	1:1	42	11	26%
HS 3	1:1	43	7	16%
MS 1	Cart	0	0	0
MS 2	Cart	43	17	40%
MS 3	1:1	41	19	46%
ES 1	Hybrid	37	37	100%
ES 2	Cart	0	0	0
ES 3	Cart	39	38	97%

Following our site visits, we allowed schools the opportunity to search for the remaining devices. While we did not independently verify the information provided, the schools reportedly located approximately 51% of the remaining Chromebooks. Some schools said that devices had been provided to students without being checked out in ServiceNow, indicating that the system is not updated in real-time to reflect assignment. This presents a vulnerability in the process that could allow stolen or lost devices to go undetected for an extended period of time.

Recommendation 1

We recommend MCPS conduct periodic Chromebook inventory reconciliations at all schools and maintain up-to-date inventory records.

Finding 2: MCPS does not have a comprehensive regulation or procedure addressing Chromebook inventory management.

The lack of formal policies and procedures has led to inconsistencies related to Chromebook assignment, safeguarding, collection, or maintenance of inventory across schools. Some schools we visited allowed staff to take Chromebooks to their classrooms as “loaners” (i.e., devices that students could use if they forgot their device at home) without checking them out in ServiceNow. For schools following a cart model, some did not assign Chromebooks to specific classrooms, while others assigned all Chromebooks in a cart to individual teachers.

Further, we found that MCPS leaves it to each school to determine the information and level of specificity captured in their inventory records. Some staff maintained a comprehensive index of each cart, allowing them to identify specific Chromebooks in each cart. However, other staff told us they only knew the contents of each cart at the beginning of the school year but had no insight as to what may have been removed or reassigned throughout the school year.

Using ServiceNow, OSI staff updates Chromebook location, status, and user assignments through data uploaded or otherwise received from each school. Due to the absence of formal guidance on how these devices should be tracked, MCPS depends on individual staff members' motivation and organizational skills to maintain accurate records of where Chromebooks are located. The varied methods used by staff often do not provide all the information required to maintain complete inventory records and ensure proper accountability. Detailed records are "necessary to help provide for the physical accountability of inventory and the efficiency and effectiveness of operations."²

Limitations of Digital Inventory

The ServiceNow system does not currently have the ability to notate a device's specific location, leaving this level of detail up to an individual ITSS or school staff to track separately if they choose to do so. Those that take this extra step typically create their own spreadsheet for tracking. In addition to being more efficient, having a field in ServiceNow that notates the specific cart or storage area where a Chromebook is located would increase the accuracy of the digital inventory and potentially help prevent waste and loss.

Real-Time Data

We found that information contained in ServiceNow was not current. MCPS staff explained that adjustments to inventory are not always made in real-time. MCPS primarily relies on the collection of devices at the end of the year to check inventory and the deterrent effect of assessing fines for loss or damage to ensure devices are returned. At the end of the school year, MCPS collects all Chromebooks issued to students they know will not be returning, as well as students in the 5th, 8th, and 12th grades. During this process MCPS staff do not consistently verify if the device being turned in was the specific device assigned to the student in ServiceNow. The end-of-year collection does not include students with assigned Chromebooks who are allowed to keep the device for use when they return the following school year. Therefore, a Chromebook assigned to a freshman student may not be verified or inspected until the student graduates four years later. Additionally, each year some students that are expected to return may not, further complicating efforts to collect devices and maintain an accurate inventory. We were also told that due to time constraints, many schools collect Chromebooks in batches and do not immediately update ServiceNow to reflect the specific

² Government Accountability Office (GAO)-02-447G Best Practices in Inventory Counts, March 2002, p.5

devices collected. The process of collecting Chromebooks in batches means the digital inventory may not be updated for an extended period of time, potentially leading to inaccurate inventory records and an increased risk of theft or loss going undetected.

Assessment of Fines

As of the 2024-2025 school year, schools are permitted to charge students for “avoidable damage” or loss of a Chromebook. The assessment of any financial obligation for damage or loss is discretionary, possibly resulting in students from some schools being charged while others are not.

Although MCPS has issued some guidance to schools, it allows each school to decide whether to assess a financial obligation, creating inequities and potentially minimizing the deterrence effect for repeat offenders.

Inventory Management Responsibilities

Guidance from OSI notes that “Chromebook management is a shared responsibility across a team of staff at the school level.” However, we observed that the bulk of Chromebook inventory management duties were typically assigned to a school’s Media Specialist in addition to their regular duties. During our site visits, we observed that Media Specialists’ level of participation in Chromebook inventory management is largely dependent on their availability, own initiative, organizational skills, and willingness to take on additional duties that are not expressly included in their job description. Some Media Specialists shared that even though it is not a part of their job description, and they received no formal training, a significant amount of their day is dedicated to Chromebook inventory management. These additional duties may lead to an instructional disruption or a risk that the inventory is not adequately maintained due to overwhelming workload and competing priorities.

Staff Training

We found that formal training on Chromebook inventory management was inconsistent, causing some staff to “learn on the fly.” ITSS staff have access to monthly presentations by the ServiceNow Administrator, typically consisting of a demonstration of various functionalities and system updates. However, this training is not mandated, nor is it accessible to Media Specialists, who often play an important role in Chromebook management at schools.

Investigating Inventory Discrepancies

There is no formal process for investigating missing Chromebooks or inventory discrepancies. When a school notifies OSI of a shortage, OSI staff query the student enrollment system and ServiceNow to determine if the school has been assigned enough devices. If OSI determines the school has the appropriate number of devices but the school continues to report a

shortage, OSI staff may conduct a physical inspection to ascertain if there are unidentified devices at the school that could fill the shortage. This physical inspection is done on an ad hoc basis with no formal procedures or thresholds that trigger an inspection. Ultimately, there is no penalty for schools that routinely have inventory discrepancies, as OSI has historically fully replenished a school's Chromebook inventory to cover 120% of their enrollment. By not fully investigating reported inventory discrepancies, MCPS cannot identify and address the root cause which may mitigate future losses.

Investigating a discrepancy may reveal an issue with the inventory system or staff operations that affect inventory balances. To reduce the potential for future errors, it is advisable to identify and correct the causes of any variances. When an investigation is properly conducted, it can provide management with support for adjustment to the inventory and information with which to implement corrective actions.³

Implementing formal policies and procedures governing Chromebook inventory management would address the inconsistent and disparate practices we observed and help reduce the risk of theft and loss. Creating uniformity in the process would add efficiencies, while defining specific roles would clarify responsibilities and expectations. Additionally, outlining the conditions and criteria to be considered when assessing fines would add transparency and impartiality across schools.

Recommendation 2

We recommend MCPS

- a) Design and implement regulations and detailed procedures outlining comprehensive inventory management controls for Chromebooks.**
- b) Evaluate and implement formal guidance regarding the assessment of fines for lost or damaged Chromebooks.**
- c) Require periodic training for all staff involved in inventory management.**
- d) Implement a formal process for investigating reported losses and discrepancies with Chromebook inventory.**

³ GAO-02-447G Best Practices in Inventory Counts, March 2002, p.51

OIG COMMENTS TO SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSE

The Superintendent's response to our report is included in its entirety in Appendix A. The response indicates concurrence with the OIG's recommendation. Appendix B summarizes the Superintendent's response to our recommendation and the OIG's assessment of MCPS's progress towards fully implementing the stated action.

APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSE

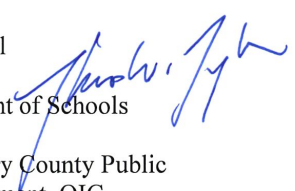
The Superintendent provided the following response to our report:

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

May 23, 2025

MEMORANDUM

To: Megan Davey Limarzi, Esquire, Inspector General

From: Thomas W. Taylor, Ed.D., M.B.A., Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: Follow-up Response to OIG Report—Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Chromebook Inventory Management, OIG Publication # OIG-25-13

We appreciate the work of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to thoroughly review MCPS' Chromebook inventory management, and the recommendations provided for improving processes moving forward. MCPS shares the concerns regarding Chromebook inventory processes, training and communication, and internal controls, and we concur with the recommendations presented.

The reconciliation of our Chromebook inventory has been an ongoing task for our staff in the Division of Technology Services since students and their Chromebooks returned to our schools for in-person instruction in September 2021. The action plan details the key steps we propose to implement in response to the recommendations in the OIG report as important first steps in improving processes and procedures around Chromebook inventory management.

The following information details the MCPS response to the OIG's findings and planned actions to address associated recommendations.

Finding 1: Chromebook inventory records are inaccurate, and some devices could not be located.

Recommendation 1: We recommend MCPS conduct periodic Chromebook inventory reconciliations at all schools and maintain up-to-date inventory records.

Response: (Note Concur/Do not concur): MCPS concurs with this recommendation.

Corrective Action: (Detail what actions will be taken to address finding and implement recommendation(s), to include date when action will be fully implemented)

By October 2025, MCPS will develop comprehensive inventory processes for record-keeping and review. To improve accuracy and accountability in Chromebook tracking, MCPS will implement a process for conducting quarterly inventory reviews at all schools. These reviews will focus on identifying and reconciling discrepancies related to missing or lost Chromebooks. The Division of Technology Services will lead this effort, with a goal of full implementation by October 2025.

Megan Davey Limarzi, Esquire

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Finding 2: MCPS does not have a comprehensive regulation or procedure addressing Chromebook inventory management.

Recommendation 2a: We recommend MCPS design and implement regulations and detailed procedures outlining comprehensive inventory management controls for Chromebooks.

Response: (Note Concur/Do not concur): MCPS concurs with this recommendation.

Corrective Action: (Detail what actions will be taken to address finding and implement recommendation(s), to include date when action will be fully implemented)

MCPS will enhance its inventory control procedures by improving communications to schools and reviewing relevant regulations. Expanded end-of-year and beginning-of-year guidance will provide schools with clear expectations for Chromebook management, including device collection and reconciliation obligations. Centralized resources for staff also will be created to ensure consistent access to inventory management information by October 2025. Additionally, MCPS will update existing regulations to formally include Chromebook accountability. Updates will be completed by June 2026.

Recommendation 2b: We recommend MCPS evaluate and implement formal guidance regarding the assessment of fines for lost or damaged Chromebooks.

Response: (Note Concur/Do not concur): MCPS concurs with this recommendation.

Corrective Action: (Detail what actions will be taken to address finding and implement recommendation(s), to include date when action will be fully implemented)

To support consistent and fair implementation of obligations, MCPS will develop and distribute clear guidance on Chromebook use and care expectations for students and staff. The district also will review its obligation process and refine the tiered structure for repair costs. These updates aim to ensure equity, clarity, and consistency throughout the district. This formal guidance will be in place by September 2025.

Recommendation 2c: We recommend MCPS require periodic training for all staff involved in inventory management.

Response: (Note Concur/Do not concur): MCPS concurs with this recommendation.

Corrective Action: (Detail what actions will be taken to address finding and implement recommendation(s), to include date when action will be fully implemented)

Recognizing the need for improved staff training, MCPS will establish regular training opportunities for all personnel involved in Chromebook inventory management. This includes developing formal training for media specialists, IT systems specialists (ITSS), and school staff on procedures such as checking devices in and out and reporting losses. Office hours will be made

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available quarterly beginning in October 2025, and ongoing communication will keep staff informed of process updates. Training also will be expanded for all ITSSs to ensure they are equipped to implement new procedures effectively.

Recommendation 2d: We recommend MCPS implement a formal process for investigating reported losses and discrepancies with Chromebook inventory.

Response: (Note Concur/Do not concur): MCPS concurs with this recommendation.

Corrective Action: (Detail what actions will be taken to address finding and implement recommendation(s), to include date when action will be fully implemented)

MCPS will introduce a structured protocol for investigating inventory discrepancies to a set percentage for the school locations. This formalized process will promote transparency and accountability, and will be implemented by October 2025. Furthermore, the updated regulations will include specific language regarding staff accountability in the event of inventory inconsistencies, with regulatory revisions expected by June 2026.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

TWT:KRF:EM:sln

Copy to:

Ms. Fields

Ms. McGuire

APPENDIX B: RECOMMENDATION STATUS AND FOLLOW UP

This Appendix provides a summary of the findings and recommendations presented in this report along with the OIG's assessment of the county's progress towards addressing the recommendations. The OIG categorizes progress towards implementation into the following 4 status groups:

- Open Unresolved: No management response, inadequate response, or no agreement on corrective action plan.
- Open In Progress: Agreed on planned action, auditee is in the process of implementing stated actions, but no evidence of implementation has yet been provided to the OIG.
- Open Resolved: Auditee provided support to OIG indicating implementation was complete, OIG testing to ensure implementation.
- Closed: Recommendation has been implemented.

Finding #	Finding	Recommendation	Superintendent's Response	Status
1	Chromebook inventory records are inaccurate, and some devices could not be located.	1) We recommend MCPS conduct periodic Chromebook inventory reconciliations at all schools and maintain up-to-date inventory records.	By October 2025, MCPS will develop comprehensive inventory processes for record-keeping and review. To improve accuracy and accountability in Chromebook tracking, MCPS will implement a process for conducting quarterly inventory reviews at all schools. These reviews will focus on identifying and reconciling discrepancies related to missing or lost Chromebooks. The Division of Technology Services will lead this effort, with a goal of full implementation by October 2025.	Open – In Progress

2	MCPS does not have a comprehensive regulation or procedure addressing Chromebook inventory management.	2a) We recommend MCPS design and implement regulations and detailed procedures outlining comprehensive inventory management controls for Chromebooks.	MCPS will enhance its inventory control procedures by improving communications to schools and reviewing relevant regulations. Expanded end-of-year and beginning-of-year guidance will provide schools with clear expectations for Chromebook management, including device collection and reconciliation obligations. Centralized resources for staff also will be created to ensure consistent access to inventory management information by October 2025. Additionally, MCPS will update existing regulations to formally include Chromebook accountability. Updates will be completed by June 2026.	Open – In Progress
		2b) We recommend MCPS evaluate and implement formal guidance regarding the assessment of fines for lost or damaged Chromebooks.	To support consistent and fair implementation of obligations, MCPS will develop and distribute clear guidance on Chromebook use and care expectations for students and staff. The district also will review its obligation process and refine the tiered structure for repair costs. These updates aim to ensure equity, clarity, and consistency throughout the district. This formal guidance will be in place by September 2025.	Open – In Progress

	2c) We recommend MCPS require periodic training for all staff involved in inventory management.	Recognizing the need for improved staff training, MCPS will establish regular training opportunities for all personnel involved in Chromebook inventory management. This includes developing formal training for media specialists, IT systems specialists (ITSS), and school staff on procedures such as checking devices in and out and reporting losses. Office hours will be made available quarterly beginning in October 2025, and ongoing communication will keep staff informed of process updates. Training also will be expanded for all ITSSs to ensure they are equipped to implement new procedures effectively.	Open – In Progress
	2d) We recommend MCPS implement a formal process for investigating reported losses and discrepancies with Chromebook inventory.	MCPS will introduce a structured protocol for investigating inventory discrepancies to a set percentage for the school locations. This formalized process will promote transparency and accountability, and will be implemented by October 2025. Furthermore, the updated regulations will include specific language regarding staff accountability in the event of inventory inconsistencies, with regulatory revisions expected by June 2026.	Open – In Progress