



Maryland Education Coalition



INSPIRES ACTION & POSITIVE CHANGE SO MARYLAND'S STUDENTS SUCCEED

Rick Tyler, Jr., Chair

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DATE: March 15, 2021

BILL: [SB0965](#)

POSITION: Support w/amendments

TITLE: Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Revisions

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health and

Environmental Committee

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is made up of twenty statewide organizations and several individuals and we have been adequate, equitable funding and policies as well as systematic accountability for over 40-years. For decades, we have been one of the major stakeholder groups at the front door of on a wide range of major public education issues including the work of the Thornton, Knott and Kirwan Commissions and the resulting laws, policies, and regulations. At least one Kirwan Commissioner was also affiliated with MEC and four representatives were members of the Adequacy in Education Funding Study.

MEC thanks the GAM leadership and DLS staff who drafted SB965/HB1372 and although MEC understands the urgency to begin hearings for SB965/HB1372 less than a week from its public introduction, we would look forward to the opportunity to submit additional testimony before and reasonably after the hearing, Monday, March 15th. This would allow us additional time to review the document and compare to MEC's 2021 priorities that center on ensuring adequacy and equity for public education funding and policies throughout Maryland.

We also are disillusioned because we were clearly told by multiple GAM leaders that they would not entertain major program and formula changes even though this was a top priority for MEC. Therefore, we are concerned that the proposed changes may not meet MEC's adequacy and equity priorities.

Below you will find a summary of some of our views of the contents in SB956, pending further study, and consideration or revisions of our recommendations. We again ask for more time past the current deadlines.

- MEC supports the increase in the foundation program to support additional cost for digital tools and related needs but remain concerned that the amount allocated for the foundation program may not cover all basic costs to educate all students that is supposed to be funded by the foundation program.
- MEC ask the GAM to table the proposed amendment of formula cost for the compensatory and ELL programs, especially for those low wealth districts with high numbers or percentages of students eligible for compensatory and ELL funding, so they can more rapidly close funding and performance gaps.
- MEC ask the GAM to also table any decreases of funding for Special Education due to evidence that at least some school districts, such as Baltimore City, are significantly underfunded for Special Education services
- MEC strongly supports the more rapid increases in per pupil funding for the Concentration of Poverty Program but urges the GAM to direct MSDE to more rapidly and implement the new forms so counts are more accurate.
- MEC strongly supports the expansion of summer school and tutoring programs provided the instructional programs are evidence-based - and there is the flexibility to allow some wrap around service options. However, we have members who are experts with these programs and want some sort of assurance that they will be allowed to be part of the decision-making process to ensure that the program offerings have evidence that works.
- MEC also supports the small group limitations for the struggling learners and transitional supplemental instruction programs, especially if they are supported by programs that address learning loss program options proven to work for all students. We are unsure the funding allocations will adequately meet the additional staff costs to implement and maintain the program for all qualified students in small groups.
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- MEC is concerned with the restrictions of the Pre-K provider mix, which “requires” at least “30%” of the eligible providers to be private providers limiting flexibility for our diverse LEAs. MEC believes the requirement should ensure there are an adequate number public or private services to meet all eligible student’s needs.
- MEC also strongly supports that expansion of social-emotional learning with additional training of more staff, that includes but should not be restricted to students with trauma or behavioral issues. MEC also notes that according to data provided by MSDE all school systems are significantly understaffed with qualified student service personnel (school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists) and urges increased funding over time to support the additional roles and responsibilities of these professionals and to lower the staff to student ratios in all school districts closer to the national standards.
- MEC remains concerned with the creation, membership process and authorities of the newly created Accountability and Implementation Board that may create an extra layer of duplication with other bodies or persons with oversight or authorities of public education including MSDE, the State and Local Boards, Joint AELR Committee, other GAM Committees, Board of Public Works, and US Department of Education
- MEC also strongly objects the authority given to the Accountability and Implementation Board that could withhold funds from an LEA except in a few extreme circumstances. This policy was in the Bridge for Excellence Act (Thornton) and used several times with unnecessary harm to several low wealth, high poverty school districts due to the insufficient funding. We also fear that this authority could be used subjectively before considering and implementing other more positive and productive solutions. If there is evidence that withholding funds should be considered, it should be approved of the actual funders.

In conclusion, MEC in general supports SB 965, but urges the committee and the General Assembly to carefully consider all options that could more rapidly, adequately, and equitably provide sufficient resources to meet the needs of all LEA’s, their staff and all 900,000 students, especially those LEAs with low wealth, high poverty, special needs, and ELL students including high numbers of students of color.

MEC also has members that have significant experience or resources that are evidence based, which should be considered during implementation of reading/tutoring, summer programs, after school programs, wrap around services and more. Some of these programs exist and others could be created or expanded.

Finally, we also request the GAM to create a study group to meet during the 2021 Interim to review and update the actual cost for the major funding programs or formulas (i.e., Foundation, Compensatory, CoP, Special Ed, ELL, etc.). In addition to key GAM members, this group should include experienced representatives from the major stakeholder groups (PSSAM, MABE, MSEA, BTU and MEC), LEA Financial Officers with support from relative DLS and MSDE staff.

For these reasons and others not included due to time, MEC supports SB 965 with the recommended amendments or adjustments requested above and look forward to working with the committee members.

Respectfully yours,
Rick Tyler, Jr. Chair

Advocates for Children and Youth, American Civil Liberties Union of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, Arts Every Day, Attendance Works, CASA, Decoding Dyslexia of MD, Disability Rights Maryland, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, Right to Read Maryland, Maryland PTA, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Coalition for Gifted & Talented Ed, Maryland Out of School Time Network, MSC-NAACP, Maryland School Psychologists' Association, Parent Advocacy Consortium, Public Justice Center, School Social Workers of MD, Barbara Dezmon, Kalam Hettleman, David Hornbeck, Rick Tyler, Jr., Shamoyia Gardiner, Sharon Rubinstein