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HB 465 – STATE SUPERINTENDENT

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

I am an independent education analyst and advocate and former member of the Kirwan Commission.

HB 465 commendably seeks to address the lack of accountability of the Maryland State Department of Education. Members of the General Assembly have long criticized the lack of responsiveness and transparency of MSDE. The sharp criticism of MSDE's actions, or lack of actions, during the COVID-19 crisis, is the tip of the iceberg of the dissatisfaction.

Yet, the General Assembly has been stymied in part because the State Superintendent is appointed by the State Board, without the requirement of Senate confirmation, and therefore is shielded from the General Assembly's oversight.

There is no one or easy answer to how to balance the responsibilities of the State Superintendent and the oversight of elected officials. According to the Education Commission of the States' 50-State Review (2017), there are many different options. Maryland's model in which the Governor appoints the State Board which appoints the Superintendent is followed by 12 states. Other prevalent models include the Governor's appointment of the Superintendent subject to legislative confirmation the same as other major department heads. At least three states have no governing state board.

HB 465 seeks to strike a reasonable balance. It will enable the General Assembly to exercise some authority over the appointment of the Superintendent. And equally important, it will enable parents, teachers and other stakeholders to hold the General Assembly more accountable for the overall performance of MSDE.

One possible amendment should be considered. It would require that the qualification provisions under 2-302 (c) be *preferences* rather than absolute requirements. Across the country, some of the best state and local education superintendents were persons who were not lifelong educators but had strong managerial experience and accomplishments.

Strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of MSDE has never been more important than now in the wake of the pandemic. The Blueprint and COVID response funding must be accompanied by more oversight. HB 465 is a step in that direction and a favorable report will serve the best interests of our schoolchildren.

Thank you for your consideration.