



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Budget and Taxation Committee
February 28, 2024



Board of Education
of Howard County

SB0545: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees – Salaries

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0545 Primary and Secondary Education - Public School Employees – Salaries** with amendments to guarantee adequate local and state funding.

Jennifer Swickard Mallo, *Chair*

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SB0545 adds identification of “qualified educators” defined as a public school employee who provides direct instruction or services to students in a public school. Furthermore, the bill defines “alternative high-quality educator credential” as a non-National Board Certification (NBC) or credential that is awarded to an educator for meeting high-quality standards on an assessment in a professional field or specialty that does not have NBC standards and that has been approved jointly by the Maryland State Board of Education (MSDE) and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB). Qualified educators must be eligible for salary increases similar to those provided to teachers under the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future when obtaining an alternative high-quality educator credential and when working in a low-performing school. Beginning July 1, 2026, the minimum salary for all public school employees shall be \$60,000.

For purposes of understanding the impact and scope of SB0545, staff interprets the inclusion of existing Education Article § 6-401 at the opening of the bill as a means to further define “qualified educators” and the application of minimum salary, both of which reference public school employees. Education Article § 6-401 defines a “public school employee” as those who are certificated professional individuals employed by a public school employer, except for a county superintendent or an individual designated by the public school employer to act in a negotiating capacity.

As a measure aimed at elevating the importance of school employees not included in the definition and salary increases called for under the Blueprint, staff supports the intent of SB0545. Since its implementation in 2021, several categories of employees have pointed out the inconsistency in raising the minimum starting salary of teachers as well as offering increases in salary for working in low-performing schools and gaining NBC certification. These employees provide a different, yet valuable contribution to the Blueprint goal of improving the quality and equity of Maryland’s education system so that every Maryland student, regardless of where they live, family income, race, ethnicity, gender, language spoken at home, special needs, and any other unique characteristic, receives a world-class education that prepares them for success in college and career.

The [Fiscal and Policy note](#) indicates “MSDE advises there are currently 8,076 ‘qualified employees’ that may be eligible to receive one or more salary increases under the bill, which includes 1,082 pupil personnel and social workers, 2,153 therapists, 2,821 school

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counselors, 859 psychological personnel, and 1,161 school librarians.” The local
Howard County breakdown is as follows:

MSDE Position Code	Filled Positions
18 – Therapist	1
19 – Media Specialist	112
20 – School Counselor	202
21 - Psychologist	83
22 – Pupil Personnel Worker	24
23 – Social Worker	31

All of these positions in Howard County are currently above a \$60,000 minimum starting salary on the Howard County Education Association (HCEA) or HCEA-ESP scale. While staff cannot estimate an exact amount because the “alternative high-quality educator credential” qualifications are to be approved by MSDE and the PSTEB under the bill, up to 453 positions would be eligible to receive the \$10,000 initial salary increase if they qualify for an alternative credential, and for a \$7,000 increase if working at a low-performing school.

The Board supports legislation that includes sufficient and sustainable funding to provide appropriate instructional programming and operational services, including mandated programs and priorities under the Blueprint. Should the legislature decide to include compensation for qualified educators in the manner called for under SB0545/HB0789, adequate funding from both state and local authorities must also be met. While the addition of the definition should prompt additional state funding, as a county where local Maintenance of Effort (MOE) is above the local share of Foundation Aid, HCPSS may be faced with a continuous dilemma of requesting above MOE funding that may not be approved and/or cutting service levels in other areas of the budget to afford the unfunded increases. Guaranteed local funding to meet the intent of the bill is recommended by the Board.

With these amendments, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0545 from this Committee.