

Testimony Paul Sundell on Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1300

Paul Sundell is a retired federal government economist and a registered democrat.

The goals of an improved school system are admirable. I was fortunate enough to earn master's degrees in both economics and finance and am grateful for the opportunities that they provided me. However, major spending plans including education should be efficient, equitable, and affordable, with a clear map of how the program will be paid for. To embark on a \$4 billion spending plan without providing tax payers a clear budget plan as to how it will be paid for is an affront to tax payers and common sense. While the democratic party is hoarding money for the early years there is little explanation as to how the remaining 7-8 years will be paid for. What will very likely happen is in a few years is Maryland tax payers will get huge tax bill from both state and local government. I am registered democrat that is very tired of the approach. A recession would make the future tax rates rise further. To pass a bill of this financial magnitude spend and find the money later approach leading to large tax hikes in future years is wrong. The voters should have the facts in terms of spending and the revenue to pay for it

I believe the main points of a Washington Post Editorial Board editorial (March 9th 2019 enclosed) are valid and there are cost savings that can be done to the Kirwan bill that would not reduce its effectiveness significantly while generating large cost to the tax payers. Spending more on teacher's salaries, reduces class sizes, and increasing accountability makes sense to me and likely will increase student success. A lot of the rest of the program has the likelihood of smaller and less certain impact. Finding cost savings in the Kirwan would free up funds for other state needs. In addition, some other existing programs could be reduced to help pay for increased spending on education. The Kirwan Plan as proposed if adopted will lead to administrative bloat, lack of adequate accountability, and apparently not provide opportunities for students to leave failing school system.

Education improvement is far more complicated than simple spend more get more educational output. The innate ability and motivation to learn of the student is very important. The educational system cannot impact innate ability and its ability to motivate is only mild to moderate at best in my opinion. Parents play a key role is how much their children value education and how motivated they are to learn. Without parents and teachers working together, educational results will likely fall far short of its goals.

Implementation the large increases in educational spending of the Thornton plan did not lead to significant increases student test scores. Tests scores in Maryland do not bear a close relationship to the amount spent per student in each county. According to U.S. News and World Report in a May 2019 article <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-05-23/school-spending-on-the-rise-census-shows>. Maryland had four of the top six counties in the nation according to spending per pupil.

Amount Spent per Pupil by the Nation's Largest School Systems in 2017

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 3. Baltimore City Schools, Maryland | \$16,184 |
| 4. Montgomery County School District, Maryland | \$16,109 |
| 5. Howard County School District, Maryland | \$15,921 |
| 6. Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland | \$15,560 |

However, according to According to the Maryland School Report Card

<https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/> Maryland scores diverge significantly for all four counties but all failed to meet their academic achievement targets despite spending among the most per pupil in the country.

If the Kirwan bill is enacted in its entirety, taxes on all Marylanders will rise substantially. Taxes have already risen significantly as Marylander non-itemizers on their federal returns are forced to take the standard deduction on their Maryland state returns. The standard deduction was not increased in over 30 years before it was raised a paltry \$250 for singles and \$500 for singles and couples. Maryland personal exemptions and tax brackets are not indexed to inflation either causing taxpayers real tax burdens to rise. Maryland taxes will become even a more oppressive for retirees to fund the Kirwan plan. A recession will push taxes rates even higher as revenues fall in a recession. In conclusion, if the Kirwan bill passes intact with its huge tax hikes coming I and other

retirees will consider leaving the state and its apparent never ending rising oppressive taxes and its inefficient tax and spending system.

Sincerely,

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The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness



Maryland still has no idea how to fix its public schools

By **Editorial Board**

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MARYLAND'S COMMISSION studying public education gets credit for courageously facing the truth about the quality of schools in the state. It punctured the illusion created by deceptive national rankings showing Maryland at or near the top, concluding that “when it comes to actual student learning, Maryland schools perform at a mediocre level in a country that performs at a mediocre level internationally.” Unfortunately, though, the commission was not nearly as daring when it came to remedies. Instead it opted to embrace the same old formula of more school spending, which has proved to be ineffective.

Democratic leaders in the General Assembly this last week introduced legislation that would provide more than \$1 billion in new state education funding over the next two years, a down payment to implement preliminary recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education established by the legislature in 2016. Chaired by the former chancellor of the University System of Maryland, William “Brit” Kirwan, the 25-member commission has mapped out a multipronged plan that includes expanded prekindergarten programs, increased learning standards, raises for teachers and new help for special education and low-income students. It is estimated the plan will cost nearly \$4 billion a year in a decade. But where the money will come from — and the politically charged issue of how it will be apportioned among the state’s jurisdictions — must still be worked out.

There seems to have been a headlong rush to embrace the commission’s recommendations, with most state politicians swearing fealty to them in last year’s elections. That should give serious pause to Maryland taxpayers. It’s not only that they will be footing the bill with higher taxes or cutbacks in other services. The state’s previous experience also demonstrated the shortcomings, if not outright failure, of increased education expenditures to produce better outcomes.

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A previous educational commission, called the Thornton Commission, prompted a historic boost in school spending after 2002. Yet less than 40 percent of Maryland high school graduates can read at a 10th-grade level or pass an Algebra 1 exam. The achievement gap separating African American and Hispanic students from their white peers persists.

An analysis last year by the Maryland Public Policy Institute found that increased spending encouraged administrative bloat. It said there is scant evidence of the efficacy of some of the programs being promoted. Those advocating for the Kirwan initiatives argue the Thornton scheme failed because the formulas were never fully funded; they say this time it will be different because there would be a new state bureaucracy that will ensure accountability.

Color us skeptical. While there certainly are praiseworthy aspects to the commission's findings — notably its reimagining of high school with college and career-ready pathways and its emphasis on supporting teachers — it is disappointing there was no nod to providing choice to students trapped in failing schools or discussion of smarter ways to reward effective teachers. Rather than simply rubber-stamping a push for massive new school spending, lawmakers should be asking the hard questions of whether Maryland families and children will really be helped.

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