



**Barbara Noveau, Executive Director, DoTheMostGood—Montgomery County**

**Committees:** Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, and Budget and Taxation Committees; House Appropriations, and Ways and Means Committees

**Testimony on** SB1000 and HB1300--Blueprint for Maryland's Future—Implementation

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** March 17, 2020

**To:** The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair, Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, and Committee Members

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee, and Committee Members

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chair, Appropriations Committee, and Committee Members

The Honorable Ann R. Kaiser, Ways and Means Committee, and Committee Members

I am testifying on behalf of DoTheMostGood Montgomery County (DTMG), a progressive organization with more than 1600 members who live in all areas of Montgomery County. DTMG supports legislation and actions that strengthen the underpinnings of a healthy, thriving community. Providing a world class education to every Maryland student in their own community is the best way to invest in the future of our students, our communities, our state and our nation. Educating our children is the state's most important task. That is why DoTheMostGood firmly asserts that enactment and full funding of SB1000 and HB1300, which would implement the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission, is imperative.

DoTheMostGood organized the first Strong Schools Maryland Team in Montgomery County in the fall of 2017 because we understood the once-in-a-generation opportunity we have to address the disturbing decline in the performance of our schools and the abilities of our students to compete on par with the increasingly more skilled and better educated workforce in an increasingly global marketplace. Most of the members of our Strong School team are either retired teachers or volunteers in the public schools.

The finding by the Kirwan Commission that less than 40 percent of Maryland high school graduates can read at a 10th-grade level or higher and pass a standardized Algebra 1 exam is jaw-dropping. Maryland is falling behind other states at the same time our country as a whole is losing ground internationally. Our historical commitment to education demonstrates that we have the potential to be the best system in the country, but the indicators are moving in the wrong direction. In the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test, Maryland students fell to

23rd in reading and math and 29th in science. Even more shocking, when we compare students with similar backgrounds across the nation, Maryland falls from 23rd to 37th. More disheartening is that Maryland is the only state to see 4th and 8th grade test scores drop in reading and math.

The widely reported underfunding of Maryland public schools to the tune of at least \$2.9 billion annually, comes out to an average of \$2 million per school. Students and families have seen classes cut, teacher positions eliminated, and proven programs including pre-kindergarten or career and technical education classes have been put on the back burner. We are finally beginning to see conversations and limited action on these programs, but unless the Kirwan policy and funding recommendations are fully implemented by the General Assembly, we will keep talking and occasionally making small investments that do not begin to address the magnitude of the shortfall.

Consider the following:

- In 2002, when the Maryland school funding formula was last updated, 22% of Maryland public schools students lived in poverty. In 2017, that number was 44%.
- Over 60% of all Maryland schools (822 out of 1412) now meet the standard of concentrated poverty (per the US Census Bureau, any tract with 40% or more in poverty).

Maryland is facing a shortage of high quality teachers and principals. Not enough students are choosing to become teachers, and too many leave the profession early. We must create the conditions and incentives to attract and retain top quality teachers. The required improvement in public school education is dependent on high quality teaching.

SB1000 and HB1300 would set the right priorities. Solving these problems and building a world-class education system for ALL of Maryland is no small task. There is no magic bullet. It means shifting our priorities to make education the #1 priority of State Government for the long term. It means starting now to make incremental changes, in the proper sequence so the building blocks go in before the trim goes on.

Our members who have worked in the classrooms are not surprised by the declining numbers stated above. They have concluded that many elementary school students would have benefited from pre-kindergarten schooling and additional resources for them and their poverty-stricken families. Many have an interest in dinosaurs or animals but have never been to the museums on the National Mall or the zoo. Some come to school hungry on Monday. At many homes no English is spoken. Others come to school concerned that they or members of their family will be deported and are unable to fully focus. The failure of these students to reach their full potential is pre-ordained.

The holistic approach recommended in the Blueprint is essential for the personal development of every student. When every student is given the opportunity and the skills to succeed, the future of Maryland's economy will be bright. This begins with funding expanded pre-kindergarten for all students at age four and at-risk students at

age 3. Better pay and training for teachers will attract and help retain even better teachers who will instill a life-long thirst for learning in more students. Without diminishing our focus on college preparatory education, a significant increase in trade and career education is critical for the growing segment of students for whom college is not the ideal or preferred path.

More resources must be provided to schools in areas of concentrated poverty and more services and resources must be provided to poverty-stricken families. Students with special needs or students who struggle to learn when they are weighed down by fears of family separation or worried if there will be food on the table all require additional resources. Students and families need access to guidance counselors and social workers at every school. At many schools there are far too few of them. Aspiring to successfully address these critical needs, and even passing legislation that prescribes a world-class education for all students, is meaningless without fully funding the recommendations.

The large number of individuals and organizations supporting enactment of SB1000 and HB1300 demonstrates the strong support across Maryland for increasing funding for our schools and our teachers and addressing the disparities that are currently accentuated by funding formulas that do not address these disparities.

Investing in a world class education for every student is not only the right thing to do for our children, it is also the only way to systemically address long-term challenges such as enhancing economic growth, reducing health care costs and crises like the opioid epidemic, and shutting down the school to prison pipeline.

It is our obligation to reverse the decline in the value of a Maryland education. Implementing the recommendations contained in The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is our once-in-a-generation chance to do that. Every year we fail to act, more children fail to reach their potential, more families struggle, and the situation becomes more dire. Now is the time for prompt, comprehensive action.

Therefore, DoTheMostGood recommends **FAVORABLE** reports on SB1000 and HB1300.

Respectfully Submitted,

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