

**J.H. Snider's Testimony for the
Maryland Senate's Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee on
SB1000, Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Implementation**

February 17, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Jim Snider. I am a former school board member and have published many articles in the Washington Post, Education Week, and The Hechinger Report on education policy and politics. I am testifying neither for nor against SB1000 but calling your attention to a missing definition.

Please review the sentence on page 6 of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which reads:

“The Blueprint for Maryland's Future for education will require... Elevation of the teaching profession to a profession comparable to other fields, with comparable compensation...” Note that last term “compensation.”

The problem is that nowhere in this bill is “compensation” clearly defined. Nor is it clearly defined by the Maryland State Department of Education or most local Maryland school boards. Moreover, when both salary and the more general concept of compensation are used, they are often used inconsistently and with no explanation of their methodology, let alone of their inconsistencies.

The disclosure of this information has been excessively politicized in Maryland. While every public official in Maryland agrees that the teacher salary portion of teacher compensation paid for by a particular district is public information, even that information, in practice, has not been made public in a meaningful way.

For example, my local newspaper ran a high profile story on teacher salaries in Title I schools in Anne Arundel County. But the salaries used were based only on the portion of salaries determined by the salary schedule, not the total salary received by teachers. When I have asked for total salary information from my local school system under Maryland's Public Information Act, it has repeatedly refused to let me know which of its 72 pay codes in its payroll system it is including as part of its definition of salary, let alone what exemptions it is using not to disclose the claimed exempt pay codes.

I have also requested salary data from the Maryland State Board of Education and been told that this information is exempt under Maryland's licensing laws—that is, licensed professions, including K12 public school staff, are exempt from salary disclosure under Maryland Public Information Act. Thus, if I want this information, I have to make requests for it to individual school boards. The Maryland State Board of Education does collect average salary information from local school districts but neither audits it nor provides a publicly available detailed methodology to explain how such statistics should be calculated.

And all of this doesn't even begin to cover benefits and deferred compensation, which all of you know are critical parts of a total compensation package.

I would be surprised if even a single member of Maryland's General Assembly, including even a single member of this committee, would dispute that the component of teacher compensation labeled "salary" is exempt from public disclosure. But the Public Information Act and other legal mechanisms have proven to be highly deficient in providing this information to the public in an efficient and effective manner. And as for total compensation, which is endlessly mentioned but never clearly specified in Maryland—as in this Blueprint—the public disclosure system is a complete farce.

The area in particular I have written about in a series of op-eds in the Washington Post and Hechinger Report concerns the growing discrepancy in total compensation between starting and senior teachers in Maryland. I suspect that even most members of this committee have very little idea about the size and history of this discrepancy; moreover, despite your educational policy credentials, I'd bet most of you have very little idea about how you'd calculate such a discrepancy in a way that most compensation experts would find satisfactory.

I believe that all of you should view this situation as intollerable. And though legislators from both political parties have widely viewed this situation as a political third rail that is too dangerous to even raise, let alone discuss, I hope you will revisit that assumption and amend this report to include at least a clear definition of teacher compensation and--I understnd this might sound utopian--a genuinely meaningful way for the public to access ompensation data specified under that definition.

The articles I have referred to regarding the junior-senior teacher pay gap are:

- Snider, J.H., The growing and hidden pay gap between junior and senior teachers is a disgrace, Washington Post, July 19, 2019, p. C4.
- Snider, J.H., Seek equal pay for equal work? Don't become a K-12 teacher, Hechinger Report, June 29, 2017.

See also:

- Snider, J.H., Maryland should be truthful in reporting teacher pay, Washington Post, February 17, 2017.
- Snider, J.H., Maryland's fake open government, Washington Post, April 18, 2010.
- Snider, J.H., Democratize School Budget Data, Education Week, May 20, 2009.

My Maryland Public Information Act correspondence on this issue can be found at:
<http://k12transparency.isolon.org/>