



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: SB 161
TITLE: Community Schools - Alterations
DATE: March 26, 2024
POSITION: Favorable with Amendments
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports Senate Bill 161 with amendments.**

The establishment and expansion of community schools has been one of the most impactful and successful initiatives in the implementation of Blueprint for Maryland's Future. PSSAM is pleased to see the exponential growth in community schools and the corresponding academic improvements and positive community impact.

Allowing districts with less than 40 schools to use some of their grant funding to manage the program will yield tremendous economies of scale and enhance best practices and cooperation among these smaller cohorts. Federal Title programs have long acknowledged the need to set aside funding for administrative tasks, such as budgeting, contracts and grant writing, to support the hands-on work. Centralizing and supporting these tasks at the district office will allow school coordinators to concentrate on engaging families, supporting students, and collaborating with community partners.

We strongly support the bill's authorization for use of the Concentration of Poverty Grant (CPG) to expend up to 15% of personnel grant and per pupil grant funds on behalf of eligible schools, provided that a plan to meet specified current law requirements is submitted to the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). Again, this set aside will ensure the totality of the CPG funds are used with fidelity, and that the appropriate staff are managing these essential funding and procurement functions, not putting these management burdens on the local community schools coordinators.

The following example from Harford County Public Schools illustrates the importance of allowing funding to be used for centralized support. Currently, their ten community schools have a combined budget of \$3,957,841 with no dedicated coordination or support. In the near future, their community schools budget is expected to exceed their Title 1 budget, which currently has 6 district-support professionals. Making this much needed adjustment is extremely important to ensure funding is used efficiently and effectively.

We also support appropriate oversight and evaluation of the community schools with a standard needs assessment developed by the State Director of Community Schools, in consultation with local school systems and members of the community schools' leadership team, but do not support, but do not support any expanded authority given to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to modify or approve the needs assessment. We support the current law's requirement of the creation and approval of an implementation plan for a community school, but believe the expanded annual evaluation is overly onerous. ***We would request and support a triennial evaluation instead;*** it is important to note that these schools also undergo periodic audits to ensure that the funds are being spent appropriately and in accordance with their implementation plans, as well as their participation in the annual local budget processes so there is continual oversight from the districts as well.

We request that any new statutory language regarding new spending plans for the 15% funding and the evaluation criteria be developed in consultation with the LEAs, AIB and the MSDE. Further, we request that this is not prescribed in statute to most accurately reflect the goals and objectives of the philosophy of the community schools model. Additionally, ultimately these plans and evaluations will be public documents that need to be carefully crafted to remove student and family identifiers; these criteria should be vetted and established in regulations, not statute.

For these reasons, PSSAM requests a **favorable with amendments** committee report for Senate Bill 161.