



TO: House Appropriations Committee and House Committee on Ways and Means

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 161 – Community Schools – Alterations

DATE: March 26, 2024

POSITION: Support with Amendments

Chair Barnes, Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the House Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees,

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board), Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) would like to express our support for **SB 161**, with amendments. Overall, we support the bill's intent to provide a more robust framework and accountability around the Community Schools Model that is embedded in the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We continue to have discussions with stakeholders and the bill sponsors on amendments to SB 161 focused on two key provisions of the Third Reader version of the bill.

This bill proposes that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with 1 to 39 Community Schools may expend, on behalf of community schools, up to 15% of the funds received through the Concentration of Poverty grant program. The proposed change enables LEAs with fewer than 40 schools eligible for the Concentration of Poverty grant, to centrally manage a portion of the funds. LEAs with fewer than 40 community schools have explained the need for some funding at the central office level to better support community schools.

We support utilizing a portion of the Concentration of Poverty grant at the central office level to help ensure that funds are being managed effectively and efficiently, especially as the number of schools and amount of grant funds will continue to grow, and to reduce the administrative burden on individual schools. However, we believe it is important to clarify that only a portion - up to 10 to 15% - of total grant funds in *any* LEA should be expended on central office administrative costs. LEAs with 40 or more community schools already have the option to manage up to 50% of the Concentration of Poverty grant funds centrally on behalf of eligible schools. We are proposing to clarify this provision to limit the use of funds on *administrative costs* to 10-15% of the total grant funds for all LEAs while retaining the authority for LEAs with 40 or more community schools to manage up to 50% of total grant funds centrally.

SB 161 requires the creation and mandatory use of a common needs assessment tool for community schools. A standardized, mandatory format for these assessments will yield uniform and comprehensive data for MSDE, streamlining the review process. The original version of SB 161 required MSDE approval on both the needs assessment and the implementation plans.

MSDE agrees with the change to remove approval of the needs assessment but requests that the committee consider reinstating MSDE approval of the implementation plans to ensure cohesive implementation strategies across community schools.

SB 161 requires community schools to revisit their needs assessments and update their implementation plans every three years. This cycle of continuous evaluation and improvement is essential for the responsive growth of the Community School Model and impact on student outcomes. The bill also requires every community school to submit a report by August 15 annually to MSDE and AIB. MSDE and AIB support requiring community schools to complete an evaluation of the impact of the implementation plan and services provided to students and their families *once every three years*, instead of an annual report. This would complement the continuous improvement cycle already included in the bill while making the number of schools submitting their evaluations manageable for MSDE and AIB collaboratively to review and provide feedback to the schools. The data requested in the annual report is critical to evaluate the impact of the use of funds; however, they have already been identified by either AIB or MSDE for ongoing monitoring and are either currently reported to MSDE or will be a new data collection.

In FY 2024, there are 454 community schools in 22 LEAs receiving Concentration of Poverty grants. There are three LEAs with 40 or more community schools. MSDE projects that there will be approximately 600 community schools in FY 2025.

MSDE and the AIB request that the committees consider this information as they deliberate on **SB 161**. Please contact Rachel Hise, Executive Director of the AIB, at rachel.hise@maryland.gov or at 410-991-7525, or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.