



SB161 – COMMUNITY SCHOOLS – ALTERATIONS

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APPROPRIATIONS

SUPPORT

Grace Wilson, Legislative & Policy Specialist (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **SB1610 – Community Schools - Alterations**. As amended by the Senate, this bill alters the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program that benefits community schools established by the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future legislation to permit a local school system that has fewer than 40 eligible community schools to expend no more than 15% of the funds distributed by the personnel or the per pupil grant at the school system level, rather than the school level. Additionally, the bill has been amended to require that each community school coordinator annually submit a report to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) on community schools funding and outcomes. MSDE and the AIB are required to jointly submit a report to the General Assembly annually ensuring that funding was used appropriately and effectively. The bill also requires that each community school coordinator utilize the common needs assessment tool developed by MSDE and removes the authority granted to MSDE in the bill as introduced to modify the needs assessment. Rather, as amended, the bill permits the Department to provide comments to the community school coordinator on the implementation plan.

Finally, as introduced the bill expands the definition of community school and alters the definition of wraparound services to permit student transportation to and from off-site learning opportunities, in addition to apprenticeship programs. The bill also alters the requirements for a community school to permit more than one community school coordinator to serve a community school.

AACPS has a growing community schools program and is starting to see the impact of the community school strategy on student engagement and achievement. Research is clear that when families and students have access to crucial wraparound services, students excel personally and academically. In fact, this year we had 12 AACPS schools that improved by at least one star on the Maryland State Report Card. Of these 12 schools, nine were Blueprint Community Schools.

We strongly support the provision of this bill that would allow for local school systems to use up to 15% of the concentration of poverty grant funding to support the administration of community schools. Community school coordinators are overwhelmed with managing grants for the community schools program, including working on budget, payroll, and contracts. Allowing local school systems to use a limited amount of grant funding to support schools in grant management will allow coordinators to focus on engaging families, supporting students, and working with community partners to grow the community school strategy to best meet the needs of their school community. Given this increased flexibility in how funding may be spent, AACPS supports the provision of this bill as amended to require annually reporting on the use of this funding.

AACPS also supports the opportunity to add additional community school coordinators to best meet the needs of schools. Under the current law, a school with 200 students and a school with 2,000 students are both allowed only one community school coordinator.

Finally, AACPS appreciates the amendments to this bill that address the concerns raised regarding authorizing MSDE to approve implementation plans for community schools. AACPS appreciates the opportunity provided by the bill as amended for MSDE to provide feedback on community school implementation plans, without detracting from the collaboration, family, community voice, and local control inherent to the community schools strategy.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on SB161.