



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: SB 161
TITLE: Community Schools - Alterations
DATE: January 24, 2024
POSITION: Support with Amendments
COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation 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.**

This bill authorizes a local school board for a school system with fewer than 40 eligible schools under the Concentration of Poverty Grant (CPG) program to expend up to 10% 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). The State Director of Community Schools must, in consultation with local school systems and members of the community schools' leadership team, create a common needs assessment tool that each community school shall use. Programs and services provided to CPG-eligible schools must prioritize areas of greatest needs according to the most recent needs assessment plan. The definitions of "community school" and of "wraparound services" are altered.

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.

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.

While we appreciate the increased flexibility provided by the bill for community school grant funding, we do not support the expanded authority given to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to modify the needs assessment and implementation plan for a community school before granting approval. Granting MSDE this authority to assess the merit of the broad and extensive collaborative and community-driven approach undermines the spirit of developing plans to meet the individual needs of each school. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for these schools and developing the plans and outreach with all the stakeholders can take two or more years to accomplish. Allowing the Department to approve and make changes without being part of that intimate process runs afoul of the spirit of community schools. We support continuing the successful approach used to date where MSDE provides feedback but allows districts to make revisions aligned with their overall strategic and performance plans.

Lastly, we oppose the requirement for districts to use an implementation plan template provided by MSDE. There should be flexibility in the creation of these local plans, recognizing and incorporating existing district and state-required plans such as Title I and School Performance. Adding yet another template for the schools to complete creates one more barrier to getting successful plans and initiatives in action.

Therefore, we respectfully request the removal of the language granting MSDE the ability to alter local plans and requiring final approval by the Department; and, we request the mandated template be removed in support of the existing collaborative process currently in place.

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