



## **SB161 – COMMUNITY SCHOOLS – ALTERATIONS**

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BUDGET AND TAXATION

### **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports with amendments **SB161 – Community Schools – Alterations**. This bill alters the Concentration of School Poverty Grants that benefit community schools to permit a local school system that has fewer than 40 eligible community schools to expend no more than 10% of funds distributed by the State or the per pupil grant at the school system level, rather than the school level. Next, the bill requires eligible community schools to prioritize funding for wraparound services based on the areas of greatest need identified in the most recent needs assessment plan.

Additionally, 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 requirement for a community school to permit more than one community school coordinator to serve a community school.

Furthermore, the bill requires the Director of Community Schools at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop, in consultation with local school systems, a common needs assessment tool that each community school coordinator may use in order to complete the needs assessment required by existing law. Finally, this bill authorizes MSDE to modify the needs assessment or implementation plan of a community school before granting approval.

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 10% of the per pupil allocation (PPA) grant funding to support 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 PPA grant funding to support schools in grant management will allow school 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.

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.

While Anne Arundel County Public Schools is supportive of the provision of this bill that would provide increased flexibility to local school system for the use of community school grant funding, we oppose the provision of this bill that grants MSDE the authority to modify the needs assessment and implementation plan for a community school before granting approval. Community schools can spend over a year developing both the needs assessment and implementation plans. The work to develop these documents involves hundreds of hours of working with families, students, staff, government agencies, and community partners. This provision gives MSDE the authority to decide the merit of whether the work of these individuals and schools truly meets the needs of the school and community. AACPS believes granting such authority to MSDE detracts from the collaboration, family, community voice, and local control inherent in the community schools strategy, and respectfully requests this language be removed from the bill.

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