



**Testimony in SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of  
House Bill 490: Education – The Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Revisions**

**Appropriations and Ways and Means Committee  
Position: Favorable with Amendment**

February 24th, 2026

Strong Schools Maryland is a statewide network of parents, educators, and advocates committed to full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We support House Bill 490 as a general Blueprint revisions bill. The legislation makes important technical and timeline adjustments across multiple areas of implementation. However, several provisions require guardrails to protect funding stability and equity for students. **We respectfully urge a favorable report with amendments.** Below are the major parts of the bill and our position on each:

**Compensatory Education Methodology (amendment):** HB 490 extends the current time period during which the State uses existing approaches to calculate compensatory education enrollment. We support extending the current approach in the short term to avoid disruption. Our concern is what comes next. The bill pushes out the "hold harmless" timing, but it does not put clear statute around how the Maryland State Department of Education and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) will decide a new Compensatory Education methodology, what data will be used, or how stakeholders will be engaged.

We are proposing an amendment requiring the Department, in collaboration with the AIB, to submit a recommendation to the Maryland General Assembly by October 1st, 2026 on whether and how to update the compensatory education enrollment methodology, and requiring a structured and transparent development process. This amendment does not change the current formula, does not reduce funding, and does not automatically implement a new method. It requires consultation with every local school system and key agencies, meaningful stakeholder engagement, at least one statewide public input opportunity, rolling public posting of the process and materials, and a final recommendation that includes an equity impact analysis disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income, disability status, and language status. If MSDE and the AIB recommend no update, the current methodology continues automatically for the next fiscal year, with a detailed justification required.

This is the right guardrail for a high-stakes funding methodology that affects every county and the students with the greatest needs.

**Prekindergarten Tier I Inclusion (amendment):** In 2023, the AIB recommended expanding the Tier I definition to students with disabilities and multilingual learners, and the General Assembly adopted that expansion for fiscal years 2024 through 2026. As a result, children between 300% and 600% of the federal poverty level who also have disabilities or come from multilingual homes may enroll in full-day prekindergarten and be counted as Tier I for funding purposes through the 2025–2026 school year. That statutory authority is set to expire.

We are seeking an amendment to extend this timeline. If no action is taken this session, the statute will sunset and these students will no longer be counted as Tier I, which could significantly affect access and funding stability in many districts. Extending the timeline maintains continuity for students with disabilities and multilingual learners while giving the State time to evaluate the fiscal and policy implications responsibly.

**Concentration of Poverty Grant Program Flexibility:** HB 490 repeals the termination date limiting the use of Concentration of Poverty grant funds for certain programs required under COMAR. We support maintaining flexibility so high-poverty schools can sustain required programming allowing schools to continuously support staffing and services for students.

**Community Schools and Wraparound Services:** HB 490 expands the definition of wraparound services to include evidence-based academic interventions in addition to tutoring. We support this clarification. Community schools work best when they can address academic and nonacademic barriers together, and schools need flexibility to use evidence-based interventions that match student needs.

**Teacher Certification and Pathways Into Teaching:** HB 490 adjusts qualifications for an initial teacher certificate and recognizes additional pathways into the profession. We support efforts to strengthen recruitment and diversify the teacher pipeline while maintaining high standards, including recognition of apprenticeship completion and documented effective evaluations.

**Post-College and Career Readiness and Dual Enrollment Limits:** HB 490 extends the statutory authority of the State Board and the AIB to require a minimum number and type of dual enrollment courses under the post-college and career readiness pathway. Although intended to ensure baseline access, minimum requirements frequently operate as ceilings in practice. When the State sets a floor, some districts align to that floor and do not expand further. Over time, that dynamic can slow progress and entrench disparities in access across counties. Students in lower-wealth districts, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds may be more likely to be limited to the minimum offering, while students in more resourced districts continue to benefit from broader and more robust dual enrollment opportunities.

If the State continues this authority, it should pair it with strong monitoring and public reporting to ensure dual enrollment access grows beyond the minimum and expands equitably across student groups and jurisdictions.

House Bill 490 includes important Blueprint revisions. With a transparent statutory process for any changes to compensatory education funding, continuity for Tier I prekindergarten students, and safeguards to ensure dual enrollment minimums do not limit opportunity, this bill can strengthen equity and stability during Blueprint implementation.

**For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 490 with amendments.**

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**Additional signatories:**

Blueprint Coalition