



Maryland Education Coalition

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TO: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair

RE: Senate Bill 275 - Education - Community and Local Accountability for Struggling Schools
(CLASS) Act of 2020 - Innovation Schools

POSITION: Oppose

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) opposes Senate Bill 275 - Education - Community and Local Accountability for Struggling Schools (CLASS) Act of 2020 - Innovation Schools. We believe that this bill as written fails to take into account a number of concerns held by MEC and many others in the public education community.

MEC is concerned with several sections of Senate Bill 275. This includes the knowledge that the majority of the Maryland Public Schools with a One Star Rating are also located in school districts that are significantly underfunded, with relatively few local options to close the funding gap without additional assistance. In addition, these school districts' enrollment also has the largest numbers or percentages of students identified as Special Needs, Limited English, or Lower income with a majority-minority enrollment and less wealth measured by jurisdiction or student. Therefore, additional funding and other supports are required to ensure each student has adequate, equitable access to a high-quality education that will allow each to graduate college or career-ready.

Some members of the committee, general assembly or administration may also be surprised to know that the only One Star schools in one of these districts – Prince George's – are schools for students not enrolled in a normal school setting. They are:

- [Croom High](#) (Vocational)
- [Tall Oaks High](#) (Vocational)
- [Northwestern Evening/Saturday High](#)
- [Crossland Evening/Saturday High](#)
- [Community Based Classrooms](#) 16-21 years old

There are numerous reasons why students are enrolled in these schools and we believe recently approved policies or recommendations will allow these students and schools to improve with additional or new resources.

Senate Bill 275 appears to take into account several critical issues including:

- What is already required in federal law under federal law or regulations including the [Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 \(ESSA\)](#)
- The [Maryland State ESSA State Plan](#) approved by the U. S. Department of Education including the Star Program
- Several related laws or regulations approved in recent years by the General Assembly or the Maryland State Board of Education related to the [Maryland Report Card](#) and the [Star System](#)
- The technical support and professional development provided to each school systems to address the current star system including those schools with one star
- The ongoing implementation of the assessments and other indicators used to rate schools using the star system
- The years of work found in the [Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State Of Maryland](#), which included significant input of dozens of local, state and national administrators and experts statewide leading to the three years of work by the [Kirwan Commission](#) and the ongoing implementation of their recommendations that we hope to complete this year.

In addition, for over a decade it has been well known that several of Maryland's Public School systems have been significantly underfunded including those with the least wealth, highest numbers of students of color, disabilities and lower income know to cost more funding to educate with few opportunities to have high quality access to a quality education within their communities without additional supports and although additional funding is not the only solution, we know that if we are truly committed to adequacy and equity, we must provide every school community what their students truly need that is evidence-based.

SB 275 also appears to assume that many school systems do not already have evidence-based programs and other tools in place to address low performing schools, students and even staff, when in fact they exist, but often lack adequate resources to fully implement them more successfully. The bill also appears to take critical stakeholders out of the decision-making process with real experience and expertise on school improvement, program development, implementation and maintenance. It also assumes that the Maryland State Department of Education which is also underfunded and understaffed can provide oversight or technical support without new or additional resources.

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) has been in existence for over 40 years. We have been advocating for adequate, equitable funding and systematic accountability in and for Maryland's public schools. Our representatives have extensive experiences at all levels throughout the local, state and national public education system and the meanings and values evidence programs and practices as well as their evaluation and maintenance using meaningful stakeholder participation in the decision-making process defined in law.

Finally, MEC in general supports local control, but we also believe that some policies, guidelines and resources must be standardized statewide to ensure adequacy and equity.

Therefore, and without more clarification or explanation, we urge the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to find SB 275 unfavorable.

Respectfully yours,

Rick Tyler, Chair
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