



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL: Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1300
TITLE: Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Implementation
DATE: February 17, 2020
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
House Appropriations Committee
House Ways and Means Committee
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Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1300 establish the implementation of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which is intended to transform Maryland's early childhood, primary, and secondary education system to the levels of the high-performing systems in the world.

On behalf of almost one million students, and 75,000 educators and other professionals who fall under our responsibility, the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) **supports** this legislation that reflects the remarkable work of the Kirwan Commission ('the Commission').

Since 2016, the Kirwan Commission has been analyzing the best public schools and systems both nationally and internationally to provide recommendations for strengthening Maryland public schools in the 21st century. PSSAM was grateful to have two superintendents who actively participated as members on this historic Commission. PSSAM supported the policy recommendations in the Commission's January 2019 Interim Report, and we believe the legislation before you largely reflects the core principles of those recommendations. We are especially supportive of the thoughtful development of a more adequate and equitable funding formula, with unique attention given to students with special needs, schools with high concentrations of poverty, and resources for Maryland's educators to provide a world-class education.

Last year's "Blueprint" legislation provided a "down payment" on the Commission's recommendations and confirmed the Legislature's commitment to the Commission's vision. We look forward to working with the Legislature this session to continue this historic initiative for public education.

Working together with Local Boards and Local Governments

The legislation significantly changes the local and State funding of public education. We support a progressive formula that considers the unique challenges of each jurisdiction. While it is our job to advocate for investment in education, we work alongside our local boards and elected officials as they

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balance education funding with the other services they provide to our communities. In many counties, education funding receives the largest percentage of appropriations; however, others simply provide the local maintenance of effort funding. In addition, many jurisdictions face decreased revenue due to declining enrollment, and the smallest jurisdictions are uniquely challenged due to economies of scale.

PSSAM remains the strongest advocate for additional investments into our educational systems, but we urge you to bring us to the table, along with our local boards and councils, to create a more realistic timeline for both the policy reforms, as well as the infusion of local funding and new mandated reporting. In order for these reforms to work, we will need to be extremely thorough and thoughtful as we put these new systems in place.

Pre-K

As a very diverse group of twenty-four (24) school systems, many of the bill's elements will affect us differently, however, we all recognize the importance of Pre-K to ensure academic success. PSSAM's top priority has been to support State and local funding to provide Pre-Kindergarten for all Maryland's 4-year-old children, including early support and interventions for young children and their families. Some school systems already provide Universal Pre-Kindergarten and a recommendation to implement a fee-based system will be challenging. PSSAM would urge the committees to allow local systems the option of providing Universal full-day Pre-K without mandating fees.

Teacher Career Ladder

The teacher shortage in Maryland and across the nation is very real. Conceptually, we support career ladders or performance pay, provided there is guaranteed long-term funding commitment and performance criteria are carefully defined. A more rigorous teacher education and certification initiative is a shared goal; however, we are living in a very real teacher shortage crisis and hope the final legislation will recognize the need for some flexibility and creativity currently used in school systems to attract and retain teachers. We would like to see less rigidity in the "ladders" themselves, especially with the strong focus only on National Board Certification.

Another significant concern is the impact of this legislation with our labor negotiations. There are many elements of the bill that fall within the purview of "negotiable" items such as professional development, working conditions and career ladders, including salary compensation. In addition, requiring local bargaining units to negotiate the compensation and specific steps for the career ladders could lead to disparity between LEAs.

Post-College and Career Readiness Pathways (including CTE)

In the last few years, PSSAM and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges have worked very closely to establish an annual MOU outlining various pathways for students to obtain a college and career readiness designation in high school. In fact, the number of students who are dually enrolled in high school and college simultaneously has almost tripled with nearly 12,000 high school students dually enrolled in 2019. In 2013, there was 4,537 who were dually enrolled. We strongly support the legislation regarding CCR, as it supports the high priority we have placed on our Career Technology Education (CTE)

programs to provide increase options for our students. We respectfully request that the requirement for jurisdictions to pay 75% of the tuition for students who are dually enrolled in a public school and public institution of higher education is fully funded.

Accountability Implementation Board and Expert Review Teams

The bill creates a seven-member Accountability and Implementation Board to adopt a comprehensive plan to implement the full set of the Commission's recommendations. The Board would be appointed by the Governor, through a nominating committee process and Senate confirmation. The Board would be responsible for withholding at least 25% of the increase in the state share of major education aid contingent on the Board's satisfaction with how a local plan is being implemented. The Board must also establish expert review teams of experts and educators to evaluate and make recommendations as to whether the Blueprint is being implemented. The bill also proposes to require annual school-based budget reporting for an expanded set of funding categories and MSDE must develop a system capable of receiving these reports.

Local school systems and MSDE are held strictly accountable for student performance and growth by federal law under The Every Student Succeeds Act. The Maryland State Department of Education and the State Board of Education monitor, oversee, and enforce strong student accountability measures. We are also held accountable for financial management through multiple annual audits and routine, comprehensive legislative audits. Current law allows the State Superintendent to withhold state funding if a school system is not in compliance with state fiscal requirements. Accountability measures are also in place through our local board meetings, which allow for very public and transparent policy and budget decisions each month. We recognize the need for strong accountability; however, we request language in the bill requiring LEAs and MSDE to jointly review all current reporting requirements to reduce duplication.

We support legislation that further allows for the flexibility to combine or eliminate duplicate reporting. Current accountability and reporting requirements are very time consuming and include complex tasks. In addition, mandated school-based reporting system will be an especially difficult challenge. We know accountability standards and reviews are needed to ensure fidelity to the plan's implementation; however, streamlining reporting will ensure the infusion of new funding will go into the classrooms and not into central offices.

In conclusion, PSSAM **supports** Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1300 and urges a favorable report by all committees. We also welcome the opportunity to work with the committees as the legislative deliberations take place over the next several weeks.