

## **Paul Sundell's Testimony on House Bill 1628**

Education is extremely important. I am a retired federal government economist and am grateful that the opportunities that a quality education provided me. I received master's degrees in economics and finance. I am a registered Maryland democrat but I am very disgusted with the continued tax and spend nature of the state democratic party. The reality is that both parties cater to their special interests and the general taxpayer pays for it in higher taxes and lost services in other areas or both. In 2017, four of the six counties in the nation with the highest spending per pupil in the country were in Maryland. None achieved their academic achievement targets and a couple of these had especially poor results.

To fund this nearly \$4 billion increase school spending per year, this sales tax t proposal is estimated by Legislative Services to increase sales tax revenue by FY2022 by 3.051 billion or a 59 percent increase in sales tax revenue. This would be a huge tax increase on lower income individuals and retirees. This would represent a continued pattern of the state democratic party voting for the state to take an ever larger share of state GDP. This is a mammoth unacceptable tax hike. Moreover the burden becomes even larger should the state suffer a recession. Maryland already has a very unfair tax code that does not adequately index its tax code to inflation doing significant harm to lower income Marylanders and retirees.

As a wealthy state, Maryland has the responsibility to provide the finances and opportunity for a good education to all its residents, especially children. I believe for the most part it has, certainly better than most states. After that, the ability to learn and the desire to learn are the two most important determinants of a student's outcome. Help needs to be provided for those English as a second language students and those from especially poor family environments but ultimately it is the student and the families' responsibility to maximize their educational opportunity. Blaming the taxpayers especially those from outside the area for not providing an endless pool of money for its area is wrong.

Education improvement is far more complicated than simple spend more get more educational output. The innate ability, health, and motivation to learn of the student is very important. The educational system cannot impact innate ability and its ability to motivate is only mild to moderate at best in my opinion. Some health advocates state providing nutrient dense food in the morning to students would help learning through health, and mental sharpness. Parents play a key role is how much their children value education and how motivated they are to learn. Without

parents and teachers working together, educational results will likely fall far short of its goals. Implementation the large increases in educational spending of the Thornton plan did not lead to significant increases student test scores. Tests scores in Maryland do not bear a close relationship to the amount spent per student in each county, according to U.S. News and World Report in a May 2019 article <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-05-23/school-spending-on-the-rise-census-shows>.

### **Amount Spent per Pupil by the Nation's Largest School Systems in 2017**

3. Baltimore City Schools, Maryland \$16,184
4. Montgomery County School District, Maryland \$16,109
5. Howard County School District, Maryland \$15,921
6. Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland \$15,560

According to According to the Maryland School Report Card <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/> Maryland scores diverge significantly for all four counties but all failed to meet their academic achievement targets despite spending among the most per pupil in the country.

I view unfortunately a strong likelihood the democratic legislature will likely pass the Kirwan recommendations near verbatim. Where is the over site and the reasonable skepticism of the recommendations from a group that has much to gain financially if its recommendations are adapted? The Kerwan Commission without much logic states that all its proposals must be enacted for its proposals to have a large impact. Count me as very skeptical. In light of the Thornton Commissions large education spending hikes but minimal improvement, legislators should be skeptical of their recommendations and should partly view its recommendations as those of a special interest group like a trade association. Trade associations largely are around to benefit and protect their members. Moreover, they tend to overstate what their trade and professional groups can accomplish. Do the sensible things such as raising teacher pay and reducing class size that should have significant payoffs but be skeptical of most of the rest of the recommendations and fund them partly if at all.

I believe the main points of a Washington Post Editorial Board editorial (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2019 enclosed) are valid and there are cost savings that can be done to the Kirwan bill that would not reduce its effectiveness significantly while generating large cost to the tax payers. Spending more on teacher's salaries, reduces class sizes, and

increasing accountability makes sense to me and likely will increase student success. A lot of the rest of the program has the likelihood of smaller and less certain impact. Finding cost savings in the Kirwan would free up funds for other state needs. In addition, some other existing programs could be reduced to help pay for increased spending on education. The Kirwan Plan as proposed if adopted will lead to administrative bloat, lack of adequate accountability, and apparently not provide opportunities for students to leave failing school system.

I am retired with an income under 100K and the taxathon and noncompetitive tax situation for retirees in Maryland may lead me to the leave the state. Moreover, while I vote democrat for national office, I will very likely vote republican for major state office in the fall and will encourage others to as well if this bill passes and becomes law. Maryland is already one of the worst states for retirees and broadening the sales tax to include services will make it worse.

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# The Washington Post

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*



## Maryland still has no idea how to fix its public schools

By **Editorial Board**

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MARYLAND'S COMMISSION studying public education gets credit for courageously facing the truth about the quality of schools in the state. It punctured the illusion created by deceptive national rankings showing Maryland at or near the top, concluding that “when it comes to actual student learning, Maryland schools perform at a mediocre level in a country that performs at a mediocre level internationally.” Unfortunately, though, the commission was not nearly as daring when it came to remedies. Instead it opted to embrace the same old formula of more school spending, which has proved to be ineffective.

Democratic leaders in the General Assembly this last week introduced legislation that would provide more than \$1 billion in new state education funding over the next two years, a down payment to implement preliminary recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education established by the legislature in 2016. Chaired by the former chancellor of the University System of Maryland, William “Brit” Kirwan, the 25-member commission has mapped out a multipronged plan that includes expanded prekindergarten programs, increased learning standards, raises for teachers and new help for special education and low-income students. It is estimated the plan will cost nearly \$4 billion a year in a decade. But where the money will come from — and the politically charged issue of how it will be apportioned among the state’s jurisdictions — must still be worked out.

There seems to have been a headlong rush to embrace the commission’s recommendations, with most state politicians swearing fealty to them in last year’s elections. That should give serious pause to Maryland taxpayers. It’s not only that they will be footing the bill with higher taxes or cutbacks in other services. The state’s previous experience also demonstrated the shortcomings, if not outright failure, of increased education expenditures to produce better outcomes.

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A previous educational commission, called the Thornton Commission, prompted a historic boost in school spending after 2002. Yet less than 40 percent of Maryland high school graduates can read at a 10th-grade level or pass an Algebra 1 exam. The achievement gap separating African American and Hispanic students from their white peers persists.

An analysis last year by the Maryland Public Policy Institute found that increased spending encouraged administrative bloat. It said there is scant evidence of the efficacy of some of the programs being promoted. Those advocating for the Kirwan initiatives argue the Thornton scheme failed because the formulas were never fully funded; they say this time it will be different because there would be a new state bureaucracy that will ensure accountability.

Color us skeptical. While there certainly are praiseworthy aspects to the commission's findings — notably its reimagining of high school with college and career-ready pathways and its emphasis on supporting teachers — it is disappointing there was no nod to providing choice to students trapped in failing schools or discussion of smarter ways to reward effective teachers. Rather than simply rubber-stamping a push for massive new school spending, lawmakers should be asking the hard questions of whether Maryland families and children will really be helped.

### **Read more:**

[William E. Kirwan: How we can make Maryland schools top-tier](#)

[The Post's View: Maryland's new school report card is on the right track. But it still has shortcomings.](#)

[The Post's View: The University of Maryland's self-inflicted fiasco](#)

[Editorial Board: Don't blame Larry Hogan for Maryland's education woes](#)