



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

**SB 785 - State Board of Education Membership and Terms - Capability and Capacity Study of
Education Agencies**

Testimony of Senate President Bill Ferguson

On March 31, 2021

Before the Ways and Means Committee

Why This Bill Matters:

The COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to our education system have caused an immeasurable impact on Maryland students throughout the State. Since the beginning of school building closures in March of 2020, Maryland students, parents, teachers and staff, and school district leaders have looked to the Maryland State Board of Education for clear guidance and a cohesive strategy. The State Board of Education has failed to provide that leadership.

A report authored by the Teaching Systems Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology released in April of 2020 ranked Maryland last in the country when examining guidance to local school districts from state departments of education. The impacts of the lack of leadership from the State Board of Education and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) have been felt ever since.

Although these disruptions to our education system and student outcomes were unavoidable given the circumstances, they could have been mitigated with a more effective State Board of Education composed of members possessing varied expertise in running a thorough and efficient system of free public education. Right now, the qualification requirements for nominees to serve on the State Board of Education is largely silent on that expertise. The Maryland General Assembly must fix that.

Further, as Maryland begins the hard work of implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future with accountability and fidelity, it is time to examine MSDE to determine if its current structure is sufficient to meet the task that the Maryland General Assembly has presented. True implementation of the Blueprint will require cross-agency coordination with strong guidance given to local school districts as they begin implementation.

If the last few months were any indication, a comprehensive study to determine necessary reforms is a vital next step.

What This Bill Does:

State Board of Education Reform

Senate Bill 785 is an emergency bill that adds a number of qualifications to membership of the State Board of Education to ensure that members have a wide range of expertise including, but not limited to: successful management of a large organization; support for students with disabilities; instructional support for multilingual students; and innovation in public education. Additionally, it mandates that the Governor make his appointments before January 1 of the year in which a member's term expires to ensure sufficient time for Senate confirmation prior to the new term beginning.

As amended, Senate Bill 785 includes standard language to ensure that the State Board of Education reflects Maryland's racial, ethnic, cultural and gender diversity. Further, experience implementing successful digital learning programs was included in the list of potential criteria for new members.

Blueprint for Maryland's Future Agency Study

Senate Bill 785 also tasks the Accountability and Implementation Board, in consultation with the Department of Legislative Services, to contract with a consultant to examine the capability and capacity of the Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and Maryland Department of Labor to successfully do their part to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. State agencies have a critical role to play in ensuring the Blueprint is applied with accountability, and we must do our part to ensure they have the structure and resources to succeed in that task.

Why You Should Vote For This Bill:

Maryland students, parents, and teachers deserve better and more consistent leadership from the State in the best of times, and certainly in the middle of a once-in-a-generation pandemic. The challenges faced by the Maryland State Board of Education and Department of Education underscore the importance of leadership with true expertise in the systems they are supposed to be running.

For our local school districts to successfully serve their student populations, our statewide education entity must have a focused vision based on experience and proficiency. The road ahead will only become more challenging as we set out to transform public education in Maryland and the General Assembly must ensure the membership, skills, and support necessary to achieve that goal.

Fundamentally, Senate Bill 785 puts the State Board of Education, MSDE, and all other related state agencies on a path to meeting and exceeding those expectations.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 785 and I urge the committee to move this bill with a favorable report.