

ERIC EBERSOLE
Legislative District 12
Baltimore and Howard Counties

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Ways and Means Committee

Chair
Early Childhood Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 305
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3328 · 301-858-3328
800-492-7122 Ext. 3328
Eric.Ebersole@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 3, 2021

Sponsor Testimony on

House Bill 1278 - Department of Legislative Services - Study - Capacity and Accountability of State Department of Education

Madame Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and Distinguished Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. The past year has been one of many unique challenges and characteristics. The COVID pandemic has forced the closure of schools and then school buildings. Child care has been simultaneously challenged to keep their existing populations while struggling to find capacity for new categories and ages of children from families in need of their services. Technology and access to the internet and WiFi are badly needed and in demand, while not uniformly or equitably available. Protecting students and staff, and even the community, from contracting the COVID virus is a new expense and must be done effectively. Add to this the new charges that come with both Blueprint bills, along with the already existing responsibilities, and MSDE is looking at a table set with much more on each plate. MSDE must address all of these, both directly and in terms of guidance to local systems.

Information about the plans to address these has, at times, been difficult to ascertain. For example, we do not have a clear accounting of the use, or lack thereof, of CARES money from the federal government. There has not been clear communication, with lawmakers or local systems, regarding the status of devices and hotspots for connectivity and now plans for school re-openings.. There are more, but it is clear it is time for evaluation of management capacity and accountability. Furthermore, while the pandemic has exposed these and other gaps, the need for a management capacity and accountability audit is not new. This was clear several years ago, long before the wave of responsibilities associated with COVID. Legislation was enacted that required a workgroup to study the management capacity and organizational structure of the Department. The Superintendent was assigned to chair this work group. The group rarely met and few, if any recommendations were made. However, a management capacity evaluation was needed, and it is now past time for an outside look at the accountability, capacity and even perhaps structure of the Department. For a work group to take a clear look at and evaluation of an organization, it needs a makeup of individuals who are not enmeshed in the process and can be objective. It is time for an outside look at the accountability, capacity and even perhaps structure of the Department. This legislation will create a vehicle to do just that.

In the face of the new and existing challenges cited here, the time is right. If one adds to this that a new leader of the Department will be put in place in July, it becomes an even more opportune moment. I urge a favorable report.

Eric D. Ebersole

Delegate Eric Ebersole