

BILL: House Bill 1245

TITLE: Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Alterations

SPONSOR: Delegate Wims

HEARING DATE: March 5, 2025

COMMITTEE: Appropriations (Ways and Means)

POSITION: Information

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), the Maryland State Board of Education (State Board), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are providing information regarding **House Bill 1245 - Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Alterations**. This legislation proposes substantial changes to multiple components of the Blueprint law, including the distribution and reporting of minimum school funding, the definition of Tier I students, the Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students, access to post-college & career readiness pathways, and the career ladder.

The AIB, the State Board, and MSDE have jointly discussed these issues in our collaborative efforts to implement the Blueprint and would like to offer our perspectives.

Distribution of Program Funds and Minimum School Funding

HB 1245 **changes the minimum school funding reporting requirements**, as set out in the Blueprint law (Education Article, Section 5-234), **allowing reporting in the aggregate for each school, rather than by category**. The Blueprint law defines “minimum school funding” as 75% of the per pupil amount applicable to the foundation program, the weighted amounts in Compensatory Education Aid, Prekindergarten Aid (for public providers), Multilingual Learner Aid, Special Education Aid, Transitional Supplemental Instruction Aid, College and Career Readiness. For Prek private providers and Concentration of Poverty grants, the requirement is 100% of the per pupil amount.

Providing flexibility within the statute, the AIB and State Board issued a joint policy in May 2024, giving LEAs up to three years to meet the minimum school funding requirement. If modifications to the policy are warranted, both boards will consider making adjustments to the extent they have the authority to do so. We believe the transparency and accountability of the minimum school funding requirement is a critical component of the Blueprint to provide equitable funding at the school level. We do not believe legislative alterations to the structure are necessary at this time as the inaugural data becomes available later this year and LEAs continue work to meet the three-year timeline outlined by both boards in the joint policy.

The bill also **adds a waiver provision for the minimum school funding distribution requirement for schools with enrollments of 350 or less students.** The Blueprint legislation requires AIB to adopt a waiver process for county boards, including specifically for significant shifts in total school-level enrollment, in school-level enrollment of at-promise students, and a significant difference in the amount of funding provided through the formula and the amount of expenditures necessary for a category or at-promise students. The AIB released a draft waiver policy at its February 20, 2025 Board meeting and shared recommendations received from the LEA CFOs, which included a waiver for small schools. An AIB workgroup will review these recommendations and others that are received and develop a revised draft policy to be discussed at the AIB's March 20 Board meeting, with an intent to finalize the policy in Spring 2025. The State Board and MSDE have committed to embedding potential regulatory processes based on the waiver developed by the AIB.

Early Childhood Education/Prekindergarten

HB 1245 **proposes to alter the definition of a “Tier I child” to include students who have a disability or from a home in which English is not the primary spoken language.**

The AIB and State Board support this policy provision in principle and agree that clarity is needed around which groups of students are considered Tier I for funding purposes. Both boards also understand the fiscal implications of expanding Tier I eligibility and that they must be considered by the General Assembly. We encourage the General Assembly to explore the impacts of this alteration in the definition of Tier I child.

Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students

HB 1245 **eliminates the Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students,** the purpose of which is to provide each middle and high school student with individualized career counseling services to support the selection of a post-College & Career Readiness (CCR) Pathway. Further, it would eliminate the funding mechanism for the program in FY 25, one year earlier than established in the Blueprint law (Education Article, Section 5-213).

The AIB, the State Board, and MSDE believe that implementing an effective career counseling program for students beginning in middle school is critical to motivating and supporting students to achieve the College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard by the end of 10th grade and no later than high school graduation. As we approach the 2nd year of implementation of the career counseling program, there has been progress but it has not been consistent across the 24 jurisdictions. The AIB and the State Board are working with the CTE Committee and our local partners to discuss and investigate the challenges to implementing this program, as well as consider the benefits of adopting a joint policy to support best practices in career counseling programs. The CTE Committee is also scheduled to provide a report by December 1, 2025, on best practices that are being implemented by the programs. These developments should assist the General Assembly in developing policy in the 2026 session and going forward.

Post-College & Career Readiness (Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement, IB, CTE)

The bill **authorizes county boards to develop and establish income eligibility guidelines for post-CCR Pathways while requiring access at no cost to students with family incomes that meet eligibility requirements for Federal free and reduced price meals.**

Both boards are committed to working with the Dual Enrollment Workgroup that the AIB is convening in collaboration with MSDE to explore this issue with LEAs and institutions of higher education. At this time, while we recognize the fiscal constraints that LEAs are facing, neither board supports efforts to constrain access to post-CCR pathways for students who have met the CCR standard. Joint policy adopted by the State Board and AIB in Spring 2024 specified that every student who has met the CCR standard should have the opportunity to take at least four dual enrollment courses in high school, which maintains equitable access for all students across the State while at the same time addresses the fiscal constraints that LEAs are facing by allowing them to set a maximum at or above 4 courses.

Career Ladder

HB 1245 removes Assistant Principals and Principals from career ladder provisions, eliminates the Administrator Track of the career ladder, and reduces the State's contribution to teacher salary increases related to the maintenance of National Board Certification.

Both boards have been clear on the need to develop and execute a clear vision with regard to administrators on the career ladder. Generally, there is agreement that current administrators should be grandfathered into the National Board Certification (NBC) requirements (i.e., only new principals on or after July 1, 2029, would be required to hold NBC), and both the AIB and State Board are considering the issue of the principal pipeline, particularly as it impacts high-poverty schools. The boards plan to further discuss the issue at a future joint meeting.

The AIB and State Board affirm that the maximum State and local contribution amount is subject to collective bargaining between LEAs and local teachers' associations.

Required Studies

Effect of National Board Certification on Instruction

HB 1245 requires the AIB to study and analyze the effect of teachers with National Board Certification on student achievement and the feasibility of using additional, comparable teacher credentials associated with student outcomes. The study also requires the collection of demographic data of NBC teachers and how the data compares to the total population of teachers. The bill sets the completion date for the study as January 1, 2026.

Both boards note that, while this report is feasible in the future, data collection to support this analysis only began in October 2024. It will take several years of data before a meaningful analysis can be conducted. Therefore, the current six-month timeline in the bill is not feasible. The earliest that such an analysis may be possible is January 1, 2028. Additionally, there is an estimated fiscal impact to the AIB of between \$150,000 - \$200,000 to engage researchers to complete the study.

Special Education Adequacy Study

Both boards are supportive of reviewing facets of the outlined adequacy study in the bill. The existing Special Education Workgroup is considering recommendations on legislative language that would outline potential approaches for incorporating what may need further study in its final report to the AIB.

Respectfully, the AIB, State Board, and MSDE request the Committee consider this information as you deliberate **HB 1245**. Please contact Joy Schaefer, Government Relations Director, AIB, at joy.schaefer@maryland.gov or 410-991-7326; or Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, MSDE, at akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or 410-767-0504, if you would like more information.