



STATE OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
**Wes Moore**

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY**

***Senate Bill 429 and House Bill 504 – Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act***

Dear Chairs Guzzone, Barnes, Feldman, and Atterbeary, Vice Chairs Rosapepe, Chang, Kagan, and Wilkins, and members of the Budget & Taxation, Appropriations, Education, Energy, and Environment, and Ways and Means Committees,

Our administration believes that investments in our public education system will ultimately grow our economy and assist in the elimination of child poverty across the state. Working with the General Assembly, together we have increased education funding by 21%, nearly \$2 billion additional dollars, since our administration’s first budget. This year, despite our state’s fiscal challenges, we are continuing our commitment, proposing to increase education spending by half a billion dollars.

Since we came into office:

- We have invested in early education and care, expanding access to pre-K and high-quality child care.
- We introduced and passed the Educator Shortage Act to improve the teacher pipeline, and to date, we have seen a 25 percent reduction in teacher vacancies since the law went into effect.
- We have invested in wrap-around supports for children, including tutoring, summer programs, mental health services and more.
- And we have built more robust pathways at the high school level to college and careers. The number of students participating in apprenticeship programs has quadrupled since the start of our administration.

**Blueprint Evolution, Not Deviation**

Our work is never finished and must continue. More is needed to be done to help ensure that every child in Maryland receives a world-class education.

We build upon the foundational work of your committees and the support provided by the General Assembly through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, one of the most ambitious pieces of education reform in American history. This body began working on this initiative as early as 2016. Since then, you've encountered significant challenges beyond your control, including the lack of key partners who were meant to help implement the law.

When the Blueprint was passed, the state's leadership actively resisted it. The previous governor not only vetoed the bill but also ignored its existence, and MSDE lacked the leadership necessary to fully realize its vision. Compounding these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped public education in ways that could not have been anticipated.

That has changed and you now have eager partners in this work in the Governor's Office and at the Maryland State Department of Education who believe in the vision of the Blueprint.

Like any major reform, the Blueprint is a living framework and must adapt to stay effective and impactful. The Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act is not deviating from the Blueprint's primary goals and strategies – we are proposing to take the time needed to make strategic investments that ensure its success and adjust timelines to account for current realities in a post-pandemic environment.

Our proposal introduces common-sense adjustments to address the current realities in our education system. We are laser focused on ensuring that in this post-pandemic context, every child in Maryland is:

- learning by four,
- reading by eight, and
- college and career ready by sixteen.

Our plan outlines strategic investments aimed at ensuring the effective implementation of key components of the Blueprint, while also making targeted new investments in evidence-based strategies that address the current needs of our students, families, and educators. This includes efforts to recruit and support educators, as well as strengthen partnerships between schools and communities.

Specifically, our plan prioritizes enhancing the administration and implementation of the community schools program, while strategically pausing the rollout of collaborative time to ensure that the foundational principles are fully established for the success of this work.

## **Proposed Investments**

We are calling for continued historic investments in our students and teachers to drive high-quality implementation of the Blueprint in the years ahead.

If enacted, our proposal would place the Blueprint Fund on more sustainable footing in the years to come. Next fiscal year, the Blueprint Fund will be exhausted, with an estimated \$81 million deficit. Our proposal would cover the FY27 Blueprint Fund deficit and reduce the FY28 deficit in half from \$2.1 billion to \$1.1 billion.

This still places the state on track to spend \$53 billion in funding for K-12 public education over the next five fiscal years – a 30 percent increase from FY25 to FY30. Our administration is not backing down from our commitment to children.

From FY25 to FY30, the state will spend \$20.76 billion in funding for the foundation formula.

Over that same time period, the state will spend:

- \$4.2 billion in funding for special education;
- \$1.5 billion in funding for pre-kindergarten;
- \$8.7 billion in funding for compensatory education;
- \$2.9 billion in funding for community schools; and
- \$3 billion in funding for multilingual learners.

Our administration **believes in the promise of the Blueprint.**

The realization of that promise comes from making sure our investments are linked to student success. Our fidelity must be to our students and their current needs, not to funding formulas.

We cannot afford for these programs to fall short of meeting the academic needs of our students. Our goal is to ensure that when this groundbreaking bill is fully implemented, Maryland will sit atop the national education rankings in every category, from 4th grade reading, to 8th grade math, to college and career readiness, to the performance of students growing up in poverty. Failure to do so would only provide ammunition for critics who claim that investments in low-income communities are futile or that funding for educators is unnecessary to achieve the desired outcomes.

## **Collaborative Time**

The Blueprint calls for increased time for educators to engage in instructional planning, coaching, and student engagement outside of the classroom. This is also commonly known as “collaborative time” or the “60/40 rule”. It ensures that our educators have space to work together to sharpen their skills and better support students through increased opportunities for

professional development, small group instruction with students, co-teaching, and family engagement.

Let's be clear: Teachers should be treated like professionals and be empowered to work together. But we need to think through implementation. Right now, we need an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 additional teachers to meet the Blueprint's requirement that teachers be provided more time for collaboration. Without more teachers, it is not yet logistically feasible to implement collaborative time as called for in the Blueprint, while driving the intended benefits for student achievement.

Research shows that collaborative time can lead to stronger academic outcomes. But multiple studies also show that instructional time - that is, classroom time spent on a particular subject - is associated with academic achievement. We must ensure that the collaborative time policy amidst a teacher shortage does not have the unintended consequence of reducing instructional time for students and negatively impacting academic achievement. Further, as demand for teachers grows, we must ensure that efforts to fill positions do not disproportionately draw educators away from schools with higher concentrations of poverty.

Lower-income schools already face greater teacher vacancies than their better-resourced counterparts, and increased competition for teachers could further disadvantage these schools. Lastly, research finds that *how* collaborative time is implemented matters, and the form of collaboration may have varying degrees of efficacy for student achievement, demonstrating the need to ensure districts and schools are ready to effectively deploy this model.

To ensure school districts have adequate time to recruit and retain enough teachers for the successful implementation of collaborative time, we recommend a four-year pause.

Recognizing that high-quality teachers are one of the most significant drivers of student achievement, we will use this pause to focus on two key strategies aimed at strengthening Maryland's teacher workforce:

- 1) **Teacher recruitment**, to ensure we have the requisite number of high quality teachers, and
- 2) **Teacher retention**, to ensure they have the support, opportunities, and working conditions necessary to make teaching a long-term career path. **We cannot simply hire our way out of the teacher shortage** – we must focus on immediately supporting our current educators. The core elements of our teacher retention strategy include collaborative time innovation, teacher coaching, and training and mentorship for school leaders – all of which are essential to building a strong, resilient workforce and which I will address in more detail later in my testimony.

## 1. Teacher Recruitment

By pausing implementation, we can address the core issue – ensuring there are enough teachers in our classrooms.

Since the 2019-2020 school year, the number of teachers with conditional licensure has tripled, now accounting for 10% of the workforce. Currently, 1,600 classrooms statewide lack a teacher. To tackle this challenge, we are expanding pathways into the profession, broadening our search for future educators, and actively recruiting talent in new and innovative ways.

One key investment is funding the **Grow Your Own Initiative**, which provides a fully funded path to full teacher licensure – debt-free – while allowing participants to earn a salary with benefits, receive on-the-job training, and benefit from mentoring. This program will make it easier for school-based staff, high school graduates, and career changers to enter the profession, helping to diversify our workforce and reduce vacancies in high-poverty schools – both critical steps toward closing opportunity gaps and improving student achievement.

We are also determined to show the country that **Maryland is the best state to be a teacher**. With the goal of attracting talented educators from other states, we will help recruits navigate processes to become a teacher in Maryland, provide relocation bonuses for experienced out-of-state teachers to cover a portion of their relocation expenses, and reduce barriers for licensed out-of-state teachers to obtain a Maryland teaching license.

## 2. Teacher Retention

While teacher recruitment is critical, teacher turnover is equally critical to Maryland’s teacher workforce needs and student achievement. Research shows that school-level working conditions, including opportunities for teacher collaboration, shared decision-making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching and learning, are associated with teacher retention. The Collaborative Time Innovation grants, the Academic Excellence program, and the Maryland School Leader Academy created through this bill drive at the heart of the teacher experience in Maryland.

### **Collaborative Time Innovation**

We will use this strategic pause to test innovative models for teacher collaboration. We will administer Collaborative Time Innovation (CTI) grants, multi-year grants for piloting innovative models for teacher roles and collaborative time.

Research shows that supporting every child in the context of widening differences in student outcomes post-pandemic requires finding ways to ensure every child has an expert teacher in charge of their learning, receives small group support as they need it, and is known and has

relationships with caring adults. This will require organizing teacher time differently to work with students in small and larger groups, finding time for teachers to work with families, and creating time for teachers to work in teams with expert support to plan lessons, review student progress and adjust instruction. This is not “add on top” of existing structures that aren’t working now or simply about a required ratio of instructional versus non instructional time, but rather rethinking what the student and teacher day looks and feels like from start to finish.

Through the CTI demonstration grants, LEAs will have the ability to pilot models of whole-school teaching in a small number of schools. The models include elements such as smaller learning communities, bell schedules that optimize teacher collaboration, and shared content teams led by instructional experts that lead to improved outcomes for students.

This work is critical because it ensures that our collaborative time model, once fully implemented, will not only better serve our teachers, but will also affirmatively drive gains in student achievement.

### **Academic Excellence Program**

Educators are our greatest asset, and investing in their development is critical to ensuring student success. The Academic Excellence Program is designed to strengthen educator capacity through robust coaching and professional development.

Regional coaching teams will support teachers in implementing evidence-based strategies that accelerate student academic growth. Non-evaluative instructional coaches will offer tailored, on-the-ground support to address specific classroom challenges, allowing teachers to receive personalized guidance without fear of evaluation.

Early literacy and math skills are the foundation of lifelong learning. This proposal prioritizes targeted support for these essential areas to help every student reach their full potential. Despite Maryland’s decline in national rankings from 2011 to 2022 in 4th and 8th grade reading and math, we are seeing promising progress. The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show modest improvements in mathematics and continued progress in reading. Most notably, the focus on early literacy has led to significant gains, with Maryland’s 4th-grade reading performance improving from 40th to 20th in the nation. These gains demonstrate the effectiveness of prioritizing high-quality instruction and teacher training. While progress is evident, we must continue to build on this momentum to restore Maryland’s standing as one of the top states for public education.

### **Maryland School Leader Academy**

Effective school leadership plays a pivotal role in teacher retention and student success. To strengthen leadership in our schools, we are launching the Maryland School Leader Academy, a

tuition-free, MSDE-led training program designed to develop the next generation of school administrators.

Participants in this program will commit to serving as an administrator in a community school for two years, ensuring that leadership development directly benefits the schools and students who need it most. By leveraging existing Blueprint Leadership Training funding streams, we will expand access to leadership development for both current and aspiring administrators across the state. This investment in strong, well-prepared school leaders will help create a more supportive and effective educational environment for Maryland's teachers and students.

These strategies – Collaborative Time Innovation, the Academic Excellence Program, and the Maryland School Leader Academy – demonstrate our commitment to addressing immediate challenges while fostering long-term innovation and excellence in education. Strengthening our teacher workforce requires more than just recruiting and training new educators; we must also invest in retaining and developing the talented teachers already in our schools. This will take time, but by providing the support, resources, and professional growth opportunities they need, we can ensure lasting improvements for both educators and students.

### **Strengthening Community Schools**

Community schools are a cornerstone of our efforts to improve student outcomes and combat child poverty.

The Governor's budget includes a \$130 million increase for community schools – raising Maryland's commitment to nearly half a billion dollars in the coming school year. Over the next five years, we plan to invest \$2.9 billion in these vital communities, underscoring the central role community schools play in the Governor's education and poverty agendas.

Since the start of our administration in FY 2024, the number of community schools has grown by 60 percent from 447 schools to 715 schools and the overall funding provided to the community schools program has grown by nearly 117 percent from \$227 million to \$492 million.

To date, positive results are being seen in communities across the state and there are many bright spots in Maryland's community schools that we can replicate. At Morrell Park Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore City, their community school model features a weekly food market that has decreased food insecurity from 21 percent in 2020 to 8 percent in 2024. At Vanguard Collegiate Middle School in Baltimore, enhanced wraparound support and a coordinated health outreach program have led to a 100% immunization compliance rate and a 27% reduction in chronic absenteeism.

However, these outcomes are not consistent across the state. While some communities with extensive experience in the community school model are seeing promising results – especially those that had well-developed plans in place before the pandemic – **many districts continue to face challenges in achieving full and effective implementation.**

Schools have shared concerns about not knowing how to best utilize resources, highlighting the need for more training and support. A 2023 review of Maryland’s community schools conducted by the National Center for Community Schools found that school and district staff lacked sufficient knowledge of the community school model and the State’s vision for implementation. An audit by the Office of the Inspector General for Education, involving eight school districts, revealed that clear policies were not provided and that there was insufficient training on the management of Concentration of Poverty funds (CPG). This resulted in **\$12.3 million in unused funds** from FY 2020 to FY 2022, with LEAs facing challenges in determining allowable expenditures. Lastly, a 2024 Community Schools Legislative Report recommends additional support to establish school steering committees, target interventions for absenteeism, and leverage data collection tools for improved accountability and impact analysis starting in August 2025.

Research shows that community schools can reduce opportunity gaps, but implementation matters. To address these challenges, the Governor has proposed slowing the pace of funding increases over the next two years to allow for strategic investments in capacity-building. This approach will provide schools and districts with clearer policy guidelines, ensuring funds are allocated effectively in collaboration with parents, community members, and local leaders. These measures will help ensure that resources reach the students and families who need them most, while strengthening the long-term success of Maryland’s largest-ever investment in community schools. **Community schools are too important to get wrong.**

We look forward to working with our colleagues in the General Assembly, the AIB, MSDE, and the Children’s Cabinet to ensure our district, school, and community partners receive the training, information, and resources they need to leverage the community school model to provide robust academic and wraparound support to children living in concentrated poverty.

During the proposed pause, we are proposing a three-point plan to make Maryland’s community schools the best in the nation. The three pillars of this plan include:

1. **Building Capacity for Strong Implementation**
2. **Fostering Community and Government Partnerships**
3. **Prioritizing Academic and Whole-Child Interventions**



To address our district and schools **capacity** to implement the community school model, we will enable districts to reserve a portion of their Concentration of Poverty Grant funds to ensure strategic implementation district-wide. Currently, in most districts, CPG grants function as pass-through funding, placing the full responsibility of designing and implementing a community school strategy solely on individual schools. Schools need support and training to do this work.

We are also proposing resources at the state level for robust training and support to schools, leveraging partnerships with national nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education. These activities will be supplemented with philanthropic funding.

Lastly, we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in this strategy without a plan to evaluate our work. This bill proposes resources to conduct an evaluation of Maryland's community school strategy, which will enable us to learn more about what's working and areas for growth, laying the groundwork for long-term success.

To foster **community and government partnerships**, our proposal also seeks to establish nationally recognized best practices by fostering school-community partnership committees at every community school to drive a shared plan for success developed by educators, parents, community members and local leaders.

We will also leverage the Governor's Children's Cabinet to take an all-of-government approach to community school implementation. The Children's Cabinet agencies are already working to direct state agency resources into high-poverty schools and build Community School Coordinators' knowledge of available state-level benefits and programs, empowering them as critical connectors between families with services.

And finally, to prioritize **academic and whole-child interventions**, we propose to broaden the allowable uses of funding, empowering schools to invest in programs that improve academic outcomes and support the overall wellbeing of students and families. We must ensure that schools can leverage these resources to support strategies that have proven most effective in helping low-income students recover from pandemic-related learning loss. This includes high-dosage, high-impact tutoring, high-quality instructional materials, and comprehensive training and support for both teachers and families to effectively use these resources.

If we do this well, we can further cement our position as a national leader in community schools – leveraging community resources to provide a holistic approach to supporting our children's success.

## **Conclusion**

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is, and will remain, the central piece of our shared education strategy.

On behalf of the Governor, I want to acknowledge the work of the General Assembly to continue to prioritize investments in our students through your work on education issues and the Blueprint. We recognize that this has come at the expense of other priorities from the legislature and individual members but there can be no greater unifier than the betterment of our children and future workforce.

I hope today's testimony provides more clarity on the Governor's commitment to the full implementation of the Blueprint and our plans to improve on its promise. The decisions in front of you are difficult ones, particularly the proposal to freeze the increases to Community Schools for two years. We hear your concerns. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to address those concerns and strengthen this legislation on behalf of every child, teacher, and parent in our public schools. I thank the Committees and request a favorable report on SB 429 and HB 504.

Sincerely,  
Fagan Harris, Chief of Staff  
Office of the Governor Wes Moore