



OPPOSE: House Bill 504

Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act

House Appropriations/Ways and Means Committees

February 19, 2025

The Blueprint Coalition, a 30+ member organization representing hundreds of thousands of Marylanders and co-led by representatives of Strong Schools Maryland and the Maryland State Education Association, dedicated to the full implementation and funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, **strongly opposes House Bill 504**. HB504 would reduce promised education funding, undermining the commitment Maryland made to its students, educators, and communities.

House Bill 504, misleadingly titled the "Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act," does not advance excellence. Instead, it introduces sweeping funding cuts, delays, and freezes that will disproportionately harm at-promise students, particularly those living in poverty and multilingual learners. The Blueprint was developed through years of research, public hearings, and legislative debate. HB504 threatens to undo that progress and jeopardizes the future of Maryland's students and schools.

Significant Cuts to Per-Pupil Education Funding

The bill reduces the target per-pupil foundation amount every upcoming fiscal year. For example, in FY2026, the originally planned \$9,226 per-student allocation is cut to \$9,063. By FY2033, instead of reaching \$12,365, per-pupil funding is slashed to \$11,536. These cuts will mean fewer resources for classrooms, larger class sizes, and reduced instructional support. Schools already struggling to meet student needs will be forced to make difficult choices, whether to eliminate staff positions, limit academic programs, or reduce individualized instruction.

These cuts to target per-pupil amounts are caused through proposed delays to the implementation of collaborative time for educators. Maryland is already facing a severe teacher shortage, yet HB504 delays the implementation of collaborative time for educators, postponing much-needed professional development and planning time. [Collaborative time increases student outcomes](#) by allowing teachers to refine lesson plans, analyze student progress, and coordinate interventions, especially critical for students with disabilities and multilingual learners. Originally

scheduled to begin to phase in by FY2026, funding for collaborative time is now delayed until FY2030, forcing schools to operate four more years without these essential supports. This delay will exacerbate teacher burnout and attrition, as professional development and structured planning time are key to keeping educators in the profession – collaborative time also helps to retain teachers by improving the working environment. Without investment in teacher retention, Maryland will continue to face severe staffing shortages, undermining the Blueprint’s Pillar 2 goal of elevating the teaching profession.

Trickle-Down Cuts That Hurt the Most Vulnerable Students

Because funding for compensatory education students and multilingual learners is calculated as a percentage of the per-pupil foundation amount, any cuts to the foundation funding result in automatic reductions for these groups.

- **Compensatory Education Funding Shrinks:** Students who qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARM) receive additional funding based on a multiplier of the foundation amount. When the foundation is cut, the funding available for low-income students declines in lockstep. This means less money for intervention programs, tutoring, social-emotional supports, and wraparound services that help students from historically underfunded communities.
- **Multilingual Learner Funding is Reduced:** Similarly, multilingual learners (MLs) receive supplemental funding based on the foundation formula. As the foundation amount shrinks, so does the funding for essential language services, teacher training, and curriculum adaptations that support our multilingual learners. ML students already face systemic barriers, and this bill will deepen those inequities.

The bill’s funding changes for students who receive special education services claim to “hold them harmless,” but in reality, the funding changes ignore the intersectionality of special education students, FARM students, and multilingual learners. [Many students with disabilities also qualify for compensatory education \(36.9%\) and ML services \(12%\)](#), meaning that cuts to these funding streams will still negatively impact them. While the bucket of funding for special education may be “held harmless” by HB504, the actual students with disabilities will be significantly harmed in a number of ways.

Freezing Community School Funding and 50% Flexibility Provision

The bill pauses increases in Concentration of Poverty School Grants for FY2027 and FY2028, stalling the expansion of community schools that serve Maryland’s most vulnerable students. These schools were promised additional support through the Blueprint to provide mental health care, after-school programs, multilingual services, and other essential wraparound supports.

[Community schools are a proven model](#) for addressing achievement gaps, yet HB504 deliberately freezes progress in these schools for two years. This means fewer counselors, fewer health services, and fewer academic interventions for students who need them most. Schools

that were relying on these funds will be forced to make cuts, leaving students without access to necessary resources.

Alarming, the bill also proposes new 50% flexibility allowance for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with two or more community schools, which permits up to 50% of Concentration of Poverty Grant (CPG) funds to be withheld by central offices instead of being used directly in schools. By allowing LEAs to withhold up to half of these funds, HB504 deprives schools of essential services and diminishes their ability to address the root causes of inequity. This policy shift moves Maryland further away from the community school model that the Blueprint promised to expand and moves resources further away from the students these grants were meant to serve.

Not a Long-Term Solution

HB504 does not offer a real solution to the state's fiscal concerns. Instead, it takes the easy way out – delaying investments in education while refusing to fully explore sustainable revenue options. The Blueprint was built on a long-term vision for transforming Maryland's schools, but HB504 abandons that vision in favor of short-term budget maneuvering. Rather than cutting critical education funding, the Legislature should fully implement the Fair Share Maryland plan, which provides a progressive revenue strategy to keep the Blueprint on track.

[Maryland has been a national leader in advancing equitable education policies](#), rejecting harmful efforts to defund public education. However, HB504 reverses that progress. At a time when the federal government is actively rolling back protections for marginalized communities, Maryland should be strengthening its investment in public education, not weakening it.

This is not the first time Maryland has faced this choice. In the early 2000s, the state passed the Bridge to Excellence Act, based on the recommendations of the Thornton Commission, only to abandon those investments after the 2008 financial crisis. Now, history is repeating itself.

These proposed cuts are not grounded in transparent discussions with stakeholders, nor are they necessary to ensure the long-term success of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The decision to reduce education funding is not an act of fiscal responsibility; it is a choice to abandon the commitments that the Legislature has made to Maryland's students. The Blueprint Coalition stands firmly in support of a full and fair funding plan, rather than balancing the budget at the expense of the state's most vulnerable children.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue an Unfavorable Report on House Bill 504.

Please contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.