

As members of the Frederick County Board of Education, we have seen firsthand the critical impact of growing student populations on our operating and capital budgets. We fully support the formation of the proposed Task Force on Education Funding and Student Population Growth in SB 62 to analyze the challenges related to the delay in student enrollment counts and its effect on school funding. Due to our scheduled budget work session, we regret we are unable to testify in person.

Examining a new approach to school funding to account for growing county populations - such as Frederick, Howard, Charles, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, and St. Mary's Counties - is essential to ensure educational equity and adequacy. Over the past ten years, Frederick County grew at a rate of nearly 10%, leading to increased school enrollment, strained resources, and infrastructure challenges. Given that the student population count lags a year when allocating funding, counties with growing populations are adversely affected. Modernizing the formula to more accurately reflect the student population will distribute resources in a more responsive and equitable approach – allowing these local education agencies (LEAs) to hire additional staff and invest in technology and programs that meet the needs of their growing student bodies.

As one example - at the student enrollment count on September 30, 2022, FCPS reported 46,996 students. At the student enrollment count on September 30, 2023, FCPS reported 47,681 – an increase of 685 students. In 2023, our per-pupil allocation was just over \$16,000 per student. For 685 students who enrolled in 2023 but were not included in the allocation, this equates to nearly \$11 million in revenue not allocated until the following year. However, these students are provided with a seat in a (possibly already overcrowded) classroom staffed by a teacher and other crucial personnel, programming, special education support, food/nutrition services, and transportation from the moment they enroll in FCPS. This provides just one example from year to year – imagine the impact of ten years of growth not accounted for in the school funding formula each year.

This delay in funding forced our Board of Education to make difficult decisions regarding our budget over the past several years - from increasing class sizes, reducing the ratio of technology for our primary students, and eliminating valuable programming to meet the unique needs of students. We fully support a full examination of the impact of growing populations on funding allocations to ensure that any growing county within the state of Maryland can meet the needs of their enrolled student population while not negatively impacting school districts that are remaining stagnant or losing students over time.

We appreciate the bi-partisan work of Senator Lewis Young and Minority Whip Ready for sponsoring SB 62, as well as Chair Guzzone and the members of the Budget and Taxation Committee for their willingness to consider the issue of fairness in education funding and student population growth.

Rae Gallagher, President
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