



**Testimony in OPPOSITION of
Senate Bill 429/House Bill 504: Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**

**Senate Budget and Taxation/Education, Energy, and the Environment Committees
House Appropriations/Ways and Means Committees**

Position: Unfavorable

February 19, 2025

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future so every student in our state is equipped to thrive upon graduation. Strong Schools Maryland **strongly opposes Senate Bill 429/House Bill 504**, which would roll back critical investments in public education and break the commitments made to Maryland's students, educators, and families through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. This bill does not promote excellence. It introduces funding cuts, delays, and freezes that disproportionately harm students in poverty, multilingual learners, and schools that need resources the most.

The Blueprint was built on years of research and public input, ensuring that every child in Maryland has access to a world-class education. SB429/HB504 undermines that work and jeopardizes the future of our public schools.

Cuts to Per-Pupil Education Funding

SB429/HB504 reduces the per-pupil foundation funding every year moving forward. For example:

- In FY2026, the per-student amount drops from the planned \$9,226 to \$9,063.
- By FY2033, instead of reaching \$12,365 per student, it's cut to \$11,536.

These reductions directly impact what schools can provide which leads to fewer classroom resources, larger class sizes, and fewer instructional supports for students. Schools already struggling to meet student needs will be forced to make impossible choices: eliminating staff, cutting academic programs, and scaling back individualized instruction.

The cuts occur by delaying the implementation of collaborative time for educators until FY2030 – four years beyond the original Blueprint timeline. [Collaborative time is essential for improving student outcomes](#), especially for students with disabilities and multilingual learners. It allows teachers to plan effective lessons, analyze student progress, and provide targeted interventions.

Maryland is already facing a severe teacher shortage, and delaying this support will only make things worse. Without structured professional development and planning time, teacher burnout and attrition will continue to rise, directly contradicting the Blueprint's commitment to strengthening the profession.

Cuts That Harm Maryland's Most Vulnerable Students

Because funding for low-income students (compensatory education) and multilingual learners (MLs) is tied to the per-pupil foundation amount, these groups are hit hardest by SB429/HB504's cuts:

- **Less Funding for Low-Income Students:** Schools serving high-poverty populations rely on additional funding for tutoring, social-emotional supports, and intervention programs. SB429/HB504 shrinks that funding, limiting resources that help close opportunity gaps.
- **Reduced Support for Multilingual Learners:** ML students already face systemic barriers. SB429/HB504 reduces funding for language services, teacher training, and curriculum supports—making it even harder for these students to succeed.

The bill claims to “hold special education students harmless,” but that’s misleading. [Many special education students also qualify for compensatory education \(36.9%\) or multilingual learner services \(12%\)](#) meaning cuts to these funding streams still harm them. Holding one funding stream flat while slashing the others does not protect these students.

Freezing Community School Funding & 50% Flexibility Provision

SB429/HB504 freezes the Concentration of Poverty School Grants for FY2027 and FY2028, stalling the expansion of community schools, [a proven strategy for closing achievement gaps](#). Community schools provide mental health care, after-school programs, and other essential services to the students who need them most.

The bill also introduces a 50% flexibility provision that allows Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to withhold half of the Concentration of Poverty Grant (CPG) funds instead of investing them directly into schools. This undercuts the entire purpose of community schools, redirecting resources away from students and toward central office budgets instead.

Maryland made a promise to expand and support community schools under the Blueprint. SB429/HB504 breaks that promise, taking resources away from the students these grants were designed to serve.

Not a Long-Term Solution

SB429/HB504 is not a responsible solution to Maryland's budget challenges. It's a short-sighted attempt to cut education funding instead of pursuing sustainable revenue solutions. Rather than delaying and weakening the Blueprint, the Legislature should fully implement the Fair Share Maryland plan, which provides a progressive revenue strategy to fund public education without harming students.

[Maryland has been a national leader in education reform](#), especially with the passage of the Blueprint. Passing SB429/HB504 would reverse that progress, repeating the same mistakes made after the 2008 financial crisis when the state abandoned its commitment to fully funding schools. We cannot afford to repeat history.

Reducing education funding is not an act of fiscal responsibility. It is a choice to walk away from Maryland's students, educators, and communities. SB429/HB504 undermines years of work to create a fully funded, equitable education system and will hurt the students who need the most support.

For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland strongly urges an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 429/House Bill 504.

For more information, contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org.