

Testimony in Support with Amendments of Senate Bill 429 / House Bill 504: Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
House Appropriations Committee
House Ways and Means Committee
February 19, 2025

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) supports with amendments Senate Bill 429 / House Bill 504, and appreciates the opportunity to share examples of critical district progress before decisions are potentially made to alter the state's education funding formula as previously set forth in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

City Schools' strategic budgeting of concentration of poverty funds not only creates well-rounded experiences in our community schools, but has directly contributed to the following:

- As released last month, City Schools' 4th graders saw the third largest growth among school districts in large cities on The Nation's Report Card (NAEP).
 - City Schools' fourth-graders approximately doubled the growth of their peers in large-city school districts and quadrupled the growth of national public students.
 - Fourth-grade economically-disadvantaged students increased their math performance by 10 points.
 - Fourth-grade African-American students increased their math performance by 8 points.

- As released last week on February 11, City Schools showed greater improvement than Maryland and the country on the latest Education Recovery Scorecard:
 - City Schools students have the second largest growth in reading nationally since 2022 among large urban school districts.
 - City Schools is one of five large urban school districts that are performing better in reading than before the pandemic.
 - We are among the nation's leaders in math recovery. Since 2022, City Schools is in the top 25 percent of large urban school districts nationwide.
 - City Schools has the second largest growth in reading in Maryland. We are one of two Maryland school districts that are performing better than before the pandemic, even with the highest rate of economically disadvantaged students.

- City Schools’ chronic absence rate decreased by 5.4 percentage points last year while every other large Maryland school district experienced an increase.
- City Schools continued a three-year run of improvement in ELA and math scores on the MCAP during the 2023-24 school year, outpacing statewide growth in both categories.
 - Economically disadvantaged students more than doubled their proficiency growth versus their peers in Maryland in 2024.
 - As reported in the Baltimore Banner, the district’s year-to-year percentage increases in both ELA and Math were the highest in the state.
 - City Schools’ math scores represented a 15.91% percentage increase – the highest in the state – versus a 3.4% percentage increase statewide.
 - Baltimore City’s literacy scores represented a 6.54% percentage increase over 2023, versus a 1.04% percentage increase statewide.
- City Schools’ overall rate of kindergarten readiness is its highest in nine years. 53.4% of City Schools students who attended City Schools PreK demonstrated readiness on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) in the 2024-25 school year. In the 2023-24 school year, the comparable percentage for Maryland overall was 44%.
 - In addition to City Schools outperforming Maryland in absolute performance for KRA, City Schools also outpaced Maryland in terms of growth in kindergarten readiness. Between the 2021-22 and 2023-24 school years, City Schools kindergarten readiness improved by 16 percent, four times greater than the state during that same period.
- The number of fine arts teachers in City Schools increased from 174 in SY17/18 to 309 in SY24/25
- Every school in Baltimore City has been a Gifted and Advanced Learning (GAL) site since SY20/21.
- The total number of unique students enrolled in AP classes in SY23/24 was 4,014 — up from 3,074 in SY20/21.
 - In 2024, 3,379 students of color enrolled in an AP course – more than have ever been enrolled in the past.
 - The number of Black/African American students enrolled in an AP class that sat for the AP exam increased from 62% in 2021 to 90% in 2023
 - The number of Hispanic/Latino students enrolled in AP class that sat for the AP exam increased from 57% in 2021 to 91% in 2023
- City Schools’ PreK-12 enrollment for SY24/25 is 76,842 — an increase of 1,031 students over last year. This trend is extremely positive at a time when Baltimore City is losing population.

Given the ongoing work of our district as demonstrated above, we certainly support the provisions of SB429/HB504 aimed at increasing teacher recruitment, namely Maryland's entrance into the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact. The purpose of this Compact is to facilitate the mobility of teachers across the member states, with the goal of enhancing the exchange of licensure by removing barriers to re-licensure in a new state. We believe Maryland's entrance into the Compact will assist in our ability to hire qualified, competent out-of-state teachers.

Our concerns with the legislation lie with proposed changes to the Blueprint funding formula, which if left unaddressed, will not only result in reduced supports for the state's most vulnerable learners but will stand in stark contrast to the most basic premise of the Kirwan Commission – that concentrations of poverty matter in school funding.

It is critical for policymakers to understand that pausing collaborative time, as proposed under SB429, has a direct effect on overall Blueprint funding, reducing the amount schools receive for students living in poverty and students learning English. When combined with the proposed freeze to Concentrations of Poverty per pupil grants, City Schools estimates \$396M in reduced aid over the next four years, until FY30.

Given that any proposal to rollback Blueprint poverty funding will have direct consequences for Baltimore City's students, we respectfully request consideration of the following amendment concepts:

1. If the legislature decides collaborative time must be paused, rather than limit the current hold harmless to only one of three at-risk student categories (special education), expand the provision to ensure both compensatory education and supports for multilingual learners are also held harmless.
2. Strike the proposed two-year pause in Concentrations of Poverty per pupil grants.

As City Schools continues to see important growth and progress across a wide swath of metrics, it is undeniable that Blueprint investments are making a difference in outcomes for students. Adoption of the amendments above will restore approximately \$275M of \$396M in anticipated funding reductions to the district over the next four years.

The Blueprint was intentionally designed to phase in over the course of a decade, in an effort to begin to remedy the well-documented and historic underfunding of Baltimore City Public Schools. Unstable and inconsistent funding is a persistent trait of the systemic structures that have undermined high poverty districts like Baltimore City for years and that the Blueprint was designed to disrupt. We are deep in the work of implementation, and we are seeing results. It is imperative that policymakers act with urgency and take seriously the responsibility to ensure the fidelity of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Now is not the time to reverse course on our most vulnerable students. For these reasons, City Schools respectfully urges a **favorable with amendments** committee report of SB429/HB504.