



## **SB429 – EXCELLENCE IN MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACT**

February 19, 2025

BUDGET AND TAXATION

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

### **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports with amendments **SB429 – Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**. This bill makes numerous changes to the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future law (Blueprint.) AACPS believes in the vision of the Blueprint to transform public education in the State by fully and equitably funding world class public education. AACPS is committed to implementing the Blueprint with fidelity, while also advocating for Blueprint reform as necessary to account for lessons learned during the first three years of implementation. While this bill proposes needed changes to improve the use of community school funding and improve teacher recruitment, this bill also proposes delays in funding that would be detrimental to community schools and public education. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully offers the following comments in support of SB429 with amendments.

#### *Targeted Per Pupil Foundation*

In 2016, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (Kirwan Commission) was established to review and assess current education funding formulas and accountability measures, and how each local school system is spending its funding, including the increased State funds provided through the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act. The work of the Kirwan Commission confirmed what we already knew: Maryland public schools are in need of adequate funding. In 2021, the General Assembly overrode Governor’s veto of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future which significantly changes State education policy based on the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission. The Blueprint law proposes a long-term phase in of mandated increases in State and local funding that represent the commitment Maryland must make to fully and equitably fund a world class public education for all of Maryland’s nearly 1 million students.

AACPS opposes the provisions of this bill that would reduce the targeted per pupil foundation amount beginning in FY2026, delaying the commitment of the Blueprint to adequately fund public education. The targeted per pupil foundation amount is currently insufficient to meet the needs of students given increased costs associated with providing special education services and transportation services. Enhanced foundation funding is necessary to ensure that districts can continue to provide world class public education to all of Maryland’s students. Furthermore, this reduction in the targeted per pupil foundation will result in a reduction in funding meant to support some of the State’s most vulnerable students, low-income and multilingual learners. Funding for these populations is a weight of the targeted per pupil foundation, any reduction to the foundation also results in reduced concentration of poverty grants and dedicated funding for multilingual learners. If there must be a targeted reduction in the per pupil funding, AACPS proposes that funding for concentration of poverty grants and multilingual learners be held harmless in addition to enhanced funding for students receiving special education services.

### *Collaborative Time Per Pupil Funding*

AACPS opposes this delay in collaborative time per pupil funding. This proposed delay not only postpones necessary changes in the teaching profession to increase the amount of time teachers spend outside of the classroom collaborating with colleagues but will hinder AACPS from further expanding level four of our career ladder. Instead of funding collaborative time, this bill proposes to fund increased staff for the Maryland State Department of Education, teacher recruitment and retention programs, and professional development opportunities. The commitment to improving the teaching profession is a strong recruitment and retention tool for local school districts as we work to implement the Blueprint. This bill proposes to walk back on that commitment to teachers to elevate the teaching profession and allow them the opportunities to further develop their craft, one of the best recruitment and retention tools we have in Maryland.

### *Community Schools*

AACPS has a growing community schools program and is starting to see the impact of the community school strategy on student engagement and achievement. Research is clear that when families and students have access to crucial wraparound services, students excel personally and academically. In fact, last year we had 12 AACPS schools that improved by at least one start on the Maryland Report Card. Of these 12 schools, nine were Blueprint Community Schools.

AACPS supports the provision of the bill to permit school systems to expend funding at the district level on behalf of community schools. Community school coordinators are overwhelmed with managing grants for the community schools program, including working on budget, payroll, and contracts. Allowing local school systems to use a limited amount of community schools funding to support schools in grant management will allow local school coordinators to focus on engaging families, supporting students, and working with community partners to grow the community school strategy to best meet the needs of their school community.

AACPS opposes the proposed pause in the number of and funding for community schools at FY2026 levels in FY2027 and 2028. As stated, the community schools strategy has been successful in Anne Arundel County. This bill proposes to deny future community schools the benefit of these wrap around services in order to address the State's structural deficit. This delay only exacerbates current funding challenges, leaving school systems without the resources to meet the needs of their most vulnerable learners and improve academic success.

### *Collaborative Time Innovation Grant*

AACPS opposes the reduction in collaborative time per pupil funding to local school systems in order to establish the Collaborative Time Innovative Grant within the State Department of Education. School systems have been diligently working toward the goal of 40 percent collaborative time for teachers. In fact, we already have an approved plan from the Accountability and Implementation Board to begin this work. This change forces school districts to apply to receive funding we already expected to receive to implement increased collaborative time. If funding cannot be preserved to implement a change in career ladders statewide, AACPS recommends that career ladders approved by Accountability and Implementation Board be eligible to receive funding through this grant.

### *National Teacher Recruitment Campaign*

AACPS opposes the creation of a state National Teacher Recruitment Campaign as implementation of the collaborative time provisions of the Blueprint would be a much more effective recruitment and retention tool for local school systems.

### *Maryland Teacher Relocation Incentive Grant*

AACPS supports incentives for teachers to relocate from other states to Maryland. Moving expenses are frequently cited as reasons for declining a job with the school system. This is a resource for educators licensed in other states who may not otherwise be able to afford to move to Maryland to ease the current teacher shortage we face.

### *Academic Excellence Program and Fund*

AACPS opposes the establishment of the Academic Excellence Program and associated fund. Once again, the bill proposes to use funding already anticipated by local school districts to implement collaborative time to create a professional development program at the State level. While we support the objective of the program to establish high-quality, job embedded professional development at the State level, local districts are already doing this work. This provision of the bill would duplicate those efforts unnecessarily at the State level.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** committee report on SB429.