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BILL: SB 852

TITLE: Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Alterations

DATE: March 5, 2025

POSITION: Favorable

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four Maryland local school superintendents, strongly supports Senate Bill 852.

This legislation makes multiple changes to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future including adjustments to College and Career Readiness (CCR) initiatives, including changes to the Career Counseling Program and funding for post-CCR pathways; required reporting by county boards on per-school funding for certain programs; providing a waiver from the minimum funding per school requirement for schools with 350 or fewer students; altering the definition of "Tier I child" for purposes of publicly funded prekindergarten to include special education students and multilingual learners; changes to the career ladder provisions for school-based administrators and future salary incentives for re-certification of National Board Certified (NBC) educators; requiring an adequacy study of special education and the effectiveness of NBC in student achievement and diverse teacher recruitment; and, clarifying language regarding collective bargaining provisions.

As the state's top educators, the local superintendents strongly stand behind the Blueprint and applaud those who have fought hard to make this vision a reality. We have gained invaluable experience and insight after three years of implementation - celebrating early successes, but also experiencing frustrations and challenges. We thank the sponsor for her leadership in putting forth this legislation that largely encompasses our 2025 policy and legislative recommendations. Those recommendations were the result of analyzing student data, qualitative experiences of educators and staff, and thoughtful contemplation of the following questions:

- How is this pillar/activity/initiative performing against *Our Core Mission and Measure of Success - Student Growth and Achievement*?
- What has been accomplished that enhances and promotes *student achievement*?

- What is new, or enhanced that has *worked*?
- What has challenged our ability to grow *student success*?
- What has been our ‘*Return on Investment (ROI?)*’ on each activity?
 - Will further investments in an initiative achieve *student success*?

We look forward to working with the Committees as you carefully consider this legislation.

Administrators on the Career Ladder

This legislation amends the statute to remove Assistant Principals (APs) and Principals from the Blueprint’s career ladder provisions. This adjustment aligns with long-established bargaining structures in school systems, where teachers and administrators are represented by separate units. In addition, declassifying APs and Principals as “teachers” exempts them from teaching requirements in the Blueprint, and more accurately reflects their leadership roles in schools.

This change also removes any requirement that principals must earn National Board Certification (NBC). NBC is a teaching credential and not appropriate or representative of administrators roles.

PreK Tier I Students

These provisions would move special education students and multilingual learners students into Tier I for funding purposes. In previous sessions the General Assembly identified these students in the top tier, but in FY ‘26, they returned to Tier II or Tier III status, and are no longer priority PreK populations. This bill would make them ineligible for State funding for both private and public providers.

Career Counseling

This legislation will return the per pupil funding to the Local Education Agency (LEA) to continue the important work of career counseling at the expiration of the pilot funding in FY '26. Starting in FY '27 the LEAs will take the lead in running the program and the partnerships with local workforce investment boards and community colleges are encouraged, but not mandated.

The implementation of this initiative has been problematic and inconsistent. Where it is working well, it is largely implemented by staff hired and trained by the districts, and should be implemented within LEAs. It is essential to continue partnering with the local community college and workforce boards, but career coaches should be employed directly by the local school system. In the extensive Blueprint review by the superintendents this fall, this partnership rose to the top of the "NOT WORKING" list of Blueprint programs. With \$55 million a year at stake, this is too important to get wrong. Where these programs have had success, they should continue, but local discretion is key to ensure funds are used in the most effective and efficient way that will *invest in students*.

Money Following the Student - Administrative Reporting Requirements

One of the guiding principles of the Blueprint was that money should follow students in order to ensure equity and adequacy. The statute required that eight funding streams be reported separately - demonstrating that 75% of the funding flows directly to the student's school. However, the drafting of the statute reflects a limited knowledge of the intricacies of school funding accountability, and the rigidity of this provision has created an administrative nightmare for school systems without truly accomplishing the goals. *This small, but important change will allow for Blueprint categories to be reported by school level, instead of by individual Blueprint category.* Under the bill - these would all be added together and there would be one compliance target. It is important to note that this is identical to how Title I funds are budgeted and spent "School Wide" (spend money on the whole school) and not "Targeted Assistance" (only spending money on the students in poverty at the school).

This proposal would have numerous benefits for the districts, while maintaining the integrity of the "Money Following the Student" tenet including:

- Greatly alleviate accounting and human resources compliance burdens;
- Demonstration of money flowing to the schools;
- Easier interpretation by the public once the dashboard is made public;
- Policymakers (including MSDE and AIB) can still see how districts are spending money through monthly "State Category and Object reporting."

Lastly, this provision greatly allows schools the flexibility to develop resource plans to implement their school improvement plans with less bureaucracy. For instance, school funding is based on the prior years' student enrollment/demographics. This aggregation allows for flexibility when there are unexpected changes in student demographics from one year to the next - such as an influx of multilingual learners in one year, with a decline in the same student populations the following year.

The bill also provides a waiver of this reporting provision for schools with fewer than 350 students. This policy is currently under consideration by the AIB and the MSDE and we encourage the Committees to work with them before adopting any statutory changes.

National Board "Maintenance of Certification" (MOC)

This legislation proposes a measured approach to the issue of maintenance of certification. During the Kirwan Commission's deliberations, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' had a 10 year cycle for the Maintenance of Certification for NBC teachers. By the time the Blueprint became law, the National Board had decreased the re-certification time period to every 5 years. The change has significant salary impacts for the State and local governments, especially over the lifetime of a young teacher. *Therefore, this legislation would reduce the State's contribution to:*

- \$4,000 (down from \$8,000) for the first MOC;
- \$4,000 (down from \$7,000) for the second MOC; and,
- \$3,000 increase (down from \$6,000) for the third MOC.

However, it is important to note that some LEAs have already negotiated these provisions in good faith and are relying on State reimbursements. *Therefore, any changes should apply prospectively to avoid disrupting existing agreements; this protection is reflected in Section 5 of the bill.*

Access to College and Career Pathways

This bill addresses two aspects of College and Career Readiness (CCR):

- *Funding flexibility for income-eligible students, and*
- *Ensuring a balance of new costs for dual enrollment between school systems and community colleges.*

Currently the Blueprint requires all students meeting CCR to enroll in a post-CCR pathway at no cost to the student or their families. These pathways include:

- Competitive entry college prep (IB, Cambridge, or AP).
- Dual enrollment leading to an associate degree or 60 college credits.
- Career and technical education (CTE) programs, apprenticeships, or industry certifications.

The superintendents believe the implications of unfettered access to all of these resources is fiscally unsound, and as we look for ways to make the Blueprint affordable, this should be a serious consideration of the Legislature. To ensure the sustainability of this open-access model, LEAs should have the flexibility to target funding for tuition and ancillary costs.

Lastly, Section 2 provides “intent” language that there is an appropriate balance of shared and new costs between county boards and community colleges for dual enrollment students. Dual enrollment has been a major success of the Blueprint, but the administrative and fiscal application has been uneven across the State. Some school systems have taken on additional costs that were not part of pre-Blueprint agreements with community colleges - specifically - new and increased fees - not just increased tuition. The huge State investment in dual enrollment should not bolster the bottomline for community colleges, or create a new cost shift for local school systems.

Special Education

Section 4 compels MSDE to undertake an adequacy study of special education funding, including:

- The adequacy of current funding formulas;
- The feasibility of weighted funding based on disability level; and,
- Transportation and nonpublic school placement costs.

Local school systems spend over [\\$1 billion in special education services](#) that are *NOT* reimbursed by the state and federal governments. This is the untold story of education funding - there is no "discretionary" funding for LEAs - they use almost all of their unrestricted funding for these necessary services.

For instance, in Frederick County, special education costs are just under \$90 million, but FCPS receives only \$44 million from the state and federal governments, leaving the remaining \$46 million to be paid out of local funds. In Montgomery County, special education costs are \$452 million, but MCPS receives only \$210 million from the state and federal governments, leaving the remaining \$242 million to be paid out of local funds.

Every single school system would be able to fully implement the Blueprint and exceed its goals and expectations if they were able to fully use the Foundation as intended, without the need to use these funds to pay for profound deficits in special education. To be VERY clear - these are costs to cover the legitimate and necessary costs of educating our most vulnerable students. Services that these students and families are entitled to and school systems are committed to providing them. But there is no denying how extraordinary these costs are, and they will continue to grow. We must dive deep into this issue and explore sustainable funding options.

National Board Certification - Effectiveness

Section 3 directs the AIB to explore critical questions related to the effectiveness of NBC in teacher recruitment and student achievement. Specifically,

- The relationship between NBC and student achievement outcomes;
- The successful attainment of NBC (and commensurate salary increases) for diverse teacher candidates; and,
- The feasibility of additional, parallel pathways that better address the diverse needs of all educators.

Collective Bargaining Safeguards

This legislation protects due process in collective bargaining in State law. Specifically, it restricts the AIB's influence over long-standing collective bargaining processes except for elements directly related to the career ladder for educators.

The Blueprint's goals are achievable, but the implementation needs to be streamlined and realistic with clearer expectations and guidance from State leaders. We ask for the committees' serious consideration as we work together to ensure the success of the Blueprint and

Therefore, PSSAM **supports** Senate Bill 852 and kindly requests a **favorable** report.

****For more detail on PSSAM's Legislative and Policy Recommendations, [click here](#).**