

March 31, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Support with Amendments for HB0772

Dear Delegates and Senators,

I am writing to express my support with amendments for House Bill 0772, which proposes essential modifications to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Support for changes to career counseling originates from the collective expertise of twenty-four Maryland Superintendents, who have identified critical areas requiring improvement, course correction, or intervention to prevent potential challenges threatening the outcomes of the Blueprint.

HB0772 with amendments has the potential to address the dysfunctional Career Counseling Pilot with Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). **It is important to clarify that HCPS has a strong commitment to career driven initiatives and has invested heavily in such endeavors (see attached exhibit outlining HCPS's career-driven work since 2019).**

Our support of HB0772 is contingent on amendments that include:

- A **comprehensive review of existing LEA and WIB programs**
- A **district-specific needs assessment**, including school-level needs as applicable
- A **service delivery plan** with clear recourse if service is not provided
- **Fiscal accountability** for WIBs with the same rigor that LEAs are held-to and clear recourse if funds are not spent appropriately.
- **Performance management** with clear recourse if performance does not meet Blueprint Goals.

The current pilot's implementation has been inconsistent and problematic, creating unnecessary barriers rather than enhancing student career readiness. Where career counseling programs are working well, they are largely led by district-hired and trained staff, reinforcing the critical need for recourse if partners are not performing as the law has designed.

Our position in summary is as follows:

- **HCPS Leads in Career Readiness (see attached exhibit)** – HCPS has been a state leader in apprenticeships, career credential attainment, and fostering a career-driven mindset. Despite this success, the career counseling pilot restricts the district's ability to capitalize on proven innovation.
- **Current Pilot has Ineffective Use of Funds** – A significant portion of funding is absorbed by WIB overhead costs (14% in Harford County), covering office space, network expenses, and non-career coaching salaries instead of directly benefiting students. HCPS is not allowed to charge for such overhead.
- **Current Pilot has Bureaucratic Inefficiencies**– Excessive red tape requires legal reviews from multiple entities for contracts, delaying progress. The WIB has never been able to fully staff required positions, and onboarding career coaches takes months, limiting student access to support. There is a critical need for recourse when such inefficiencies impact service delivery to students.

- **The Career Counseling Pilot Hinders Progress** – Rigid requirements and bureaucratic obstacles prevent HCPS from effectively connecting students to real career opportunities, making career counseling an abstract process rather than a bridge to hands-on experiences.
- **Legislative Action is Needed** – Amendments to HB0772 would allow the State to have confidence in the management of career counseling, maximize the impact of funds, and ensure that resources are used effectively to support students in achieving meaningful career and college experiences.

The full details of our position are as follows:

HCPS has been a state leader in apprenticeships, career credential attainment, and fostering a career-driven mindset among students (see attached exhibit outlining HCPS's career-driven work since 2019). The very areas where we excel receive no career counseling funds, and we are explicitly prohibited from using these funds to support apprenticeships. Yet, despite these constraints, as of last week, 286 students are actively participating in apprenticeships—an achievement driven entirely by our ability to innovate and adapt.

Our success comes from flexibility and forward-thinking approaches, both of which are undermined by the rigid and restrictive requirements of the career counseling pilot. Rather than supporting progress, these limitations often serve as obstacles, making it harder, not easier, to connect students with meaningful career opportunities. Career counseling should not be an abstract exercise. It should be a bridge that leads students directly to meaningful career pathways. **When we focus on outcomes instead of rigid processes, we see real progress.** However, when we are required to follow inefficient, bureaucratic structures, results suffer, and resources are wasted.

The HCPS experience with the career counseling pilot is significant:

- **Ineffective Use of Funds**—a significant portion of funding is absorbed by WIB overhead costs rather than benefiting students. In Harford County, we are charged a total of 14% of funds diverted to overhead, while HCPS uses 0% of funds for such expenses.
 - › \$49,000 for a share of WIB office space.
 - › \$34,000 for a portion of their network costs.
 - › \$238,000 for *non-career coaching* office staff salaries.
- **Excessive bureaucracy**—three different lawyers must review every contract before it can move forward. The excessive time spent negotiating and overcoming administrative obstacles detracts from other educational priorities.
- **Persistent staffing shortages**—our WIB has never been able to fully staff the positions required for the pilot. It takes months for our partner to onboard a career coach and place them in schools.

HCPS has made extensive efforts to work within the pilot's framework, but the structural issues remain. Unfilled positions, bureaucratic delays, and a lack of authority to directly manage career counseling have negatively impacted students' access to essential resources.

We respectfully urge legislators to support HB0772 with amendments, which will empower all to:

- ✓ **Confidently manage career counseling**, tailoring programs to local structures and needs and workforce demands.
- ✓ **Maximize the impact of funds**, ensuring resources benefit students. Increasing the return on investment is a win for all.
- ✓ **Have recourse for lack of progress**, which is important as responsible stewards of taxpayer funds.

Please support HB0772 with amendments to ensure the future of career counseling leads to the best outcomes for Maryland students.

Thank you,



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Since 2019,
HCPS has
transformed
the goals,
structures, &
supports in
grades 6-12 for
career driven
outcomes.



Systemic Vision & Structures

- **Launched the North Star Initiative** to establish a unified vision for graduate outcomes and promote the development of learner attributes across all grade levels.
- **Released Advancing the Strategic Plan** which includes Superintendent priorities including Career Driven; Graduate Outcomes; Learner Attributes; and Personalization for Academic Needs.
- **Created Blueprint North Star Stakeholder Engagement** and work groups to leverage system and partner expertise.
- **Enhanced a Crucial Leadership Partnership** with Harford Community College (HCC) including nightly data exchanges, regular executive meetings, and shared design of certain positions.
- **Leveraged Local Leaders** including Harford Business Roundtable for Education, Susquehanna Workforce Network, Northeast Maryland Technology Council, and Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Data & Performance Monitoring

- **Aligned School Performance and Achievement (SPA)** framework to support school progress toward district goals.
- **Launched Early Warning Dashboards:** Completed: Grade 6, 9, & 10. In Progress: Grades 7 & 8.
- **Developed North Star Outcomes Dashboard** for longitudinal data by school, student demographics, and system.
- **Created Public-facing Dashboards** providing a weekly update of key metrics including student apprenticeships and students & families accessing Canvas (Learning Management system), and yearly snapshot of 6th and 9th grade.
- **In-progress K-12 Measurable Continuum** for student learner attributes focused on “I can” statements.

Middle School Innovation

- **Standardized Middle School Schedules** across all schools, incorporating two 90-minute blocks per week for Project-Based Learning (PBL) and small-group instruction.
- **Aligned Course Offerings** across middle schools, adding student choice in Unified Arts and world language for credit.
- **Adapted Curriculum Delivery** to support Gold Standard Project-Based Learning.
- **Implemented Separate ELA and Writing Blocks** for Grades 6 and 7.
- **Introduced a Weekly 90-Minute Advisory Block** (Grades 6–8), divided into:
 - 45 minutes: Career Coaching, Career Exploration, PBIS, and Financial Literacy (starting SY 2025–26).
 - 45 minutes: Personalized math instruction via i-Ready.
 - In-progress high-performing math students serve as peer tutors after testing out of i-Ready.
- **Improved Family Engagement** with the launch of a new Middle School Handbook (SY 2025–26).

Career Driven Initiatives

- **Implemented Individualized Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)** starting in Grade 7 to guide through Grade 12.
- **Standardized High School Bell Schedules** to facilitate dual enrollment and shared courses across the district.
- **Developed Student Enrollment Options (SEO)** to align high school and community college dual enrollment processes. Expanded uses include part-time employment and work-based learning modules including Personal Finance instruction.
- **Launched the Harford Youth Workforce Investment Program** with HCC for non-credit programs and credentials.
- **Created Workforce Readiness Skills Modules** for students in Grades 6–12, along with modules on Canvas (instructional platform) supporting industry recognized credentials.
- **Initiated a Comprehensive Student Apprenticeship Program** to connect students with real-world career experiences.
- **Began a Career Coaching Program** (Grades 6-12) following the requirements of the Blueprint.