



INFORMATIONAL: Senate Bill 343 – County Boards of Education – Post College and Career Readiness Pathways – Payment of Costs

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 18th, 2026

The Blueprint Coalition, a coalition of more than 30 organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Marylanders and co-led by Strong Schools Maryland and the Maryland Education Coalition, submits informational testimony on Senate Bill 343. The Coalition is committed to the full and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and offers the following context to support the Committee's consideration of this bill.

Senate Bill 343 authorizes county boards of education to develop income eligibility guidelines and procedures for covering costs associated with certain post-College and Career Readiness (post-CCR) pathways, while requiring that students from families earning below 400% of the federal poverty level retain access at no cost. The bill reflects an effort to balance statewide expectations with local fiscal flexibility and establishes an important protection for students with the greatest financial need.

The Blueprint's vision for post-CCR pathways is grounded in equity and universality. Current law guarantees that students who meet the CCR standard can access advanced academic, early college, dual enrollment, and high-quality career pathways based on readiness rather than family income or zip code. This universal access is a cornerstone of the Blueprint's strategy to close opportunity gaps and ensure that students meet college and career readiness benchmarks at equal rates across student groups.

SB343 preserves this commitment in part by ensuring that students below 400% of the federal poverty level continue to receive post-CCR opportunities at no cost. This provision is significant and aligns with the Blueprint's focus on protecting access for students most likely to face financial barriers. At the same time, the bill introduces local discretion over cost-sharing for other students, which represents a shift from a uniform statewide guarantee to a county-by-county approach.

As the Committee considers this bill, the Coalition encourages attention to how local variation may affect the Blueprint's equity goals. Differences in county fiscal capacity, eligibility guidelines, and implementation practices could result in uneven access to post-CCR pathways for students with similar academic readiness. Families just above the income threshold may face new financial considerations that influence participation decisions, potentially limiting access to rigorous coursework and early college opportunities that the Blueprint was designed to expand.

The Coalition recognizes that local flexibility can be valuable, particularly as school systems manage complex program costs and implementation challenges. At the same time, the Blueprint's success depends on maintaining clear statewide expectations that readiness, not local resources or family income, drives access to postsecondary preparation. Ensuring transparency, consistency, and ongoing evaluation will be essential if local flexibility is expanded.

The Blueprint Coalition offers this information to highlight both the strengths of SB343 and the considerations it raises for equitable implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We appreciate the Committee's leadership and thoughtful review of how this bill aligns with the long-term goals Maryland has set for its students.

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