

Education Policies Kids Can Count On

A Strong Public School System Should Guarantee Essential Services

Testimony Given before the Working Group on Resources for At-Risk Students, Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education

Public education is part of the foundation of a thriving state. High-quality public schools create tomorrow's skilled workforce, encourage companies to do business in Maryland, and embody our commitment to provide all children the support they need to learn and thrive. The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education offers a rare opportunity to guarantee that all children in Maryland can get a world-class public education, and the Working Group on Resources for At-Risk Students plays an essential role.

While all children benefit from an effective public school system, not all children have the same opportunities. Students who grow up in low-income families or struggling neighborhoods face a unique set of barriers that can make it harder for them to succeed in school. Children of color face an additional layer of obstacles built over decades of residential segregation and other forms of discrimination.

Robust, evidence-backed educational supports can make a difference. This working group's deliberations have shown both a commitment to breaking down the barriers many students face in the classroom and an understanding of the policy tools that can get the job done, such as on-site physical and mental health services. Ultimately, these policies can only succeed if students have meaningful access to the services they need. The Maryland Center on Economic Policy encourages the working group to take two steps to guarantee that access to all students:

- **Recommend direct state funding of supportive services.** The working group has done important work concerning supportive services that can break down barriers to learning, particularly physical and mental health services at the school site. The group should recommend direct state funding of these services. An approach that relies on existing services or philanthropic dollars is likely to be inadequate, and state-funded service coordinators will have little ability to fill the gap on their own. With direct state funding, children can count on getting the services they need.
- **Avoid double-counting, but don't let services slip through the cracks.** The working group has been careful to avoid calling for compensatory or concentrated poverty-based funding for services that may already be included in the formula base. This approach reflects appropriate respect for the division of policy areas among the Commission's working groups. At the same time, if this group omits services that are not ultimately recommended by any other working group, students will bear the cost. For this reason, the working group should exercise the same level of care in ensuring that essential services do not fall through the cracks.