

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

August 30, 2018

William E. Kirwan, Chairman
Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education
c/o Office of Policy Analysis
Department of Legislative Services
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Tutoring as an Intervention for Students

Dear Commissioner Kirwan and Members of the Commission:

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC) writes to express several concerns about the Commission's recommendation for tutoring as an intervention for students.

Tutoring should not be viewed as a global solution to all of the challenges faced by students. Not all students who struggle in school do so because they are behind in reading, nor will tutoring address the needs of all students with disabilities. The framework of interventions should be broader; the Commission should develop recommendations for program supports that include evidence-based, wraparound behavioral and social emotional as well as academic interventions that will enable students who are not experiencing school success to achieve proficiency and to meet college and career readiness standards. These interventions must encompass more than tutoring and should include other recommendations, especially those for the base funding and compensatory education weight.

With respect to tutoring itself, we wish to make several points:

- 1) Limiting tutoring to kindergarten through third graders who are behind in reading as has been recommended would ignore other needs and would disregard other vulnerable students such as upper elementary, middle and high school students. They too are far behind, with little time left to turn the tide, and they would continue to be left to languish until they either drop out of school or enter the school to prison pipeline, an all too common outcome.
- 2) Tutoring will only be successful for students in need of this service if the tutors are qualified and able to teach with a methodology that matches the student's needs. Tutors should be general education and special education teachers who are well trained. Additionally, since students with disabilities will need the same access to tutoring as students without disabilities, tutors will need to understand how to make needed curriculum adaptations and accommodations.

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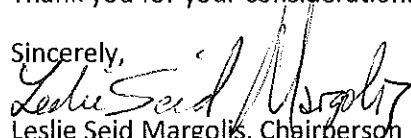
William E. Kirwan, Chairman
August 30, 2018
Page Two

- 3) For purposes of the tutoring program, reading screening should be used to identify which students need additional reading interventions or tutoring, particularly in prekindergarten through second grade, when standardized assessments such as PARCC are not yet required. Students in third grade and above should be given informal diagnostic assessments to determine their areas of reading need and to help educators plan instruction and intervention. The assessment framework should also include progress monitoring to ensure that the student is closing the reading gap.¹ Reading screening instruments typically are brief, valid, reliable measurement procedures conducted to identify or predict students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes.
- 4) If the intent is that tutoring will be provided after school, this will make for a very long school day for young children who already have many academic demands placed on them. Further, school systems will incur increased transportation expenses to ensure that students, including students with disabilities for whom transportation is a required IEP related service, are provided with late transportation so they are able to access the tutoring. We do not believe the Commission has factored in the cost of additional buses or other forms of transportation such as cabs.
- 5) If the intent is that tutoring will be provided during school hours in addition to the academic instruction students already will receive, it will be important to schedule it in accord with best practice so that students are not deprived of arts instruction, physical education, or other non-academic subjects. One element of being college and career ready is the well-roundedness that comes from exposure to these nonacademic areas.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views, and hope that we will have the opportunity to discuss these issues with you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Leslie Seid Margolis, Chairperson
Disability Rights Maryland

Selene Almazan
Selene Almazan Law, LLC

(signatures continued on next page)

¹ Universal screening for reading difficulties before a student begins to struggle is a preventative best practice recommended by the Maryland State Department of Education Technical Assistance Bulletin on Specific Learning Disabilities, and is part of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. Reading screening to prevent failure is supported by years of evidence and is included as a best practice by the National Center on Improving Literacy, the Southern Region Education Board, the Institute for Education Sciences and the CEEDAR Center, among others.

William E. Kirwan, Chairman
August 30, 2018
Page Three

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William E. Kirwan, Chairman
August 30, 2018
Page Four

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