

August 29, 2018

Dr. William (Brit) Kirwan, Chair  
Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Dr. Kirwan:

I am writing to endorse the work of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education as it relates to reinventing high school and creating a world-class career and technical education system in Maryland.

Unfortunately, many high school students are not fully benefiting from their high school experience. Gaps in graduation rates still exist and certain student populations are dropping-out of school without reaching their full potential. Youth unemployment rates are unacceptably high, while high-paying, high-skilled jobs go unfilled.

In a 2015 Commentary in the Baltimore Sun, I called on every Marylander to join in the critical conversation about the need to rethink and transform the high school experience to maximize the potential of every student and meet the workforce needs of employers. The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has answered that call with a number of thoughtful and thought-provoking recommendations.

I concur that meaningful career exploration must begin before high school. I applaud the recommendations to create new governance structures that cut across the current departmental silos that exist and engage all partners in “the process of building a world-class career and technical education system for Maryland.” I believe that work-based learning experiences offered in state-of-the-art employer facilities, taught by skilled industry professionals and practitioners, are critical to success. I also support innovation and flexibility in the way we “marry” classroom theory to workplace practice.

Maryland has long been recognized as a leader in career and technical education. In 2016, the General Assembly authorized the creation of the Frederick High School LYNX (Linking Youth to New Experiences) School in Frederick, Maryland. This school is implementing many of the innovations in work-based learning that are being recommended by the Commission. I strongly recommend that the Commission look to the pioneering work of the LYNX School to inform future career and technical education decisions.

The LYNX School is a comprehensive public high school of 1200plus students. LYNX Advocates (counselors) begin working with students in middle school to develop personalized plans for success. By the time students arrive at the LYNX School, teachers and staff have a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills each student will need for success. Career and technical education is not treated as an alternative to the academic curriculum for a small percentage of students. Career and technical education is part of the academic curriculum for every student in the LYNX School.

Business partnerships are key. The Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Frederick and individual employers engage with students in career exploration activities (at the school, in the

workplace and through video-conferences), work-based skills training, internships and apprenticeships. The Chamber of Commerce is developing “soft skills” training modules (time management, teamwork, ethics, problem-solving strategies) for every 10<sup>th</sup> grade student.

The LYNX School operates on an extended schedule from 7:00am – 6:00pm. Students can arrive later in the day and stay into the evening, or students can arrive early and/or stay late to take an extra course, receive tutoring and support, access on-line learning, or engage with business partners. Business partners are also requesting expanded summer sessions where training can take place at the partner’s worksite with state-of-the-art equipment.

The LYNX School is the first school in Maryland to adopt competency-based instruction, where student success is measured through mastery of skills rather than through a semester of seat-time. This instructional method provides the perfect opportunity for teachers and business partners to collaborate on setting competency standards and on the most effective “marriage” of classroom theory and workplace practice.

As the workgroup acknowledged, much work remains to be done. I strongly endorse the LYNX School as an incubator for much of this work.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick  
Presidential Scholar  
Towson University