



maryland state education association

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**EDUCATORS  
TOGETHER**

To: Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, Workgroup 4  
From: Maryland State Education Association  
RE: **Workgroup 4 Recommendations**

## **WORKGROUP 4**

Successfully addressing the needs of our most vulnerable students is not only the most pressing responsibility of our profession but is also the paramount responsibility of our state. To be clear, the outcomes and impacts of the recommendations laid out by this working group are far reaching in their scope. MSEA acknowledges the gravity of this challenge.

### *Element 4A*

1. **MSEA enthusiastically supports a concentrated poverty weight commensurate with providing intensive supports to our students most in need.** Educators have been concerned for years about the growing needs of our students, particularly our most vulnerable. We know first-hand the adverse impacts experienced by our schools as they work to meet the needs of our students, especially those who struggle with effects of concentrated poverty and systemic inequity. While we understand that funding alone is not the solution to the myriad challenges our schools and students face, we are confident that robust financial supports will have a measurable impact on and chart a path toward closing opportunity gaps for all of our students. While we have not taken a position on the exact threshold that should be used to determine concentrated poverty, we do support using the lowest possible percentage so as to have an impact on the greatest number of students and communities in need.
2. **Dedicated funding for community schools and school-based health services is sound policy and has our absolute support.** There is overwhelming research from across the country about the efficacy of the Community Schools models. We have also witnessed the successes of community schools here in our own state. This intervention should be made available immediately to our schools in areas of greatest need and, eventually, to all schools in Maryland. We also support dedicated funding for the provision of either school-based health clinics or mental and behavioral health services for struggling students. We applaud the flexibility provided in Design Assumption 4, which allows local districts and communities to determine what wrap around services and supports are best to meet the needs of their students. We believe that the positive impacts experienced thanks to these interventions will be reflected in both school climate surveys and in student achievement results.
3. **We remain concerned about the method used as a proxy for determining concentrated poverty and the potential impacts resulting from the under counting of students most in need.** We are well aware of the potential problems associated with the use of direct certification (or community eligibility) and the potential adverse impacts federal immigration policy could have on an accurate needs assessment. We want to ensure that all students who are most in need are accounted for and that the funding provided for them is as accurate as it can be. We also know that decisions made at the federal level related to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the upcoming decennial census could create a situation in which many families from immigrant communities could face the unfathomable choice of hiding in the shadows, thus denying themselves access



to desperately needed services and supports, or stepping forward and being counted, risking their safety and security. Believing that this is a choice no family should be forced to make, we support a system that will duly compensate for these realities with a goal of providing for every family and community in need.

*Element 4B*

1. **MSEA supports the inclusion of trauma-informed practices in any training provided to those working with and within school communities.** The decades-old research on the impact resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (or ACEs) could not be more compelling. If we are to truly address the needs of our struggling students, we must do so utilizing trauma-informed best practices. Efforts such as this must be intentional and directly involve anyone tasked with direct interactions with our students and schools.

*Element 4C*

1. **MSEA supports an increase in the formula weight for special education students.** There can be no argument that more can and must be done for our students with special needs. Based on the academic and non-academic outcomes experienced by this student population, we have much to do in order to close the opportunity and academic achievement gaps of these students. For far too long, the promise of full funding made by the federal government in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has remained unfulfilled. States and localities have not been able to make up the difference. Meeting this promise is our obligation. We must do what is legally and morally required to provide a free appropriate public education for all of our students with special needs. While we are still uncertain of the exact funding weight that will accomplish this, we are supportive of recommendations contained in this element that would set a “stop-gap” weight of 2.18. We eagerly await the results of the study required by HB1415. In the meantime, we believe this weight makes a significant step in the right direction. We do acknowledge the unknown reality of whether this stop-gap serves merely an adequate amount or the required amount. Nevertheless, we are encouraged by the significant step taken by this working group to address current concerns and remain open to future adjustments necessitated by research results.

*Element 4D*

1. **MSEA supports the inclusion of additional weighted funding for English language learners.** We applaud the effort to not only provide additional supports for our ELLs via the increased weights for struggling student populations at large, but also to provide additional targeted funding meant to meet the specific needs of this student population. We know first-hand the challenges our ELLs face as they work to learn a new language. We also know the daunting challenges their families face as they attempt to navigate a complex and often confusing education system. We know that in order for our students to be successful, they must have the support of not only their educators but that of their families and communities as well. The funding provided in this element will assist in making this possible, and will result in greater outcomes for our ELL population.