



MEMO

To: Dr. Brit Kirwan, Chair of the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education and Commission Members
From: Strong Schools Maryland
Subject: Comments on Work Group 1-4 Recommendations
Date: September 14, 2018

The facilitators and members of work groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 have done an outstanding job, wrestling with very difficult challenges. Elements of the structural and significant changes to Maryland's public education system described in the work groups recommendations include:

1. Initiatives for children birth to age two.
2. Recommendations to expand three- and four-year-old prekindergarten and strengthen the quality of programming.
3. Changes to preparing, recruiting and retaining a high quality, diverse and professional teaching force and school leadership.
4. A commitment to Maryland's adolescents for post-secondary college and career opportunities,
5. Recognizing that the state has a responsibility to provide additional resources for schools with concentrated of poverty.
6. An effective accountability and governance system.

While the work groups have developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for each of their assigned areas, Strong Schools Maryland remains concerned that the proposed system reforms will not result in more equitable outcomes for Maryland's most vulnerable populations; African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American students, students with disabilities, English language learners and students who live in poverty.

We urge the members of this Commission to take into account the recommendations to directly and substantively address the needs of African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American students. Racial bias systematically and substantially disadvantages Maryland's children of color in schooling and in virtually every aspect of their lives. The failure to address racial/ethnic disparities in the Commission's recommendations would be an

egregious omission. We urge the Commission to explicitly acknowledge, in this document, the powerful, inequitable effect of race and ethnicity on students' educational outcomes in Maryland. Although not exhaustive, we have provided some recommendations to address this issue.

Strong Schools Maryland suggests modifications to the existing recommendations to further improve the level of attention and intention paid to students who have traditionally been the least likely to have the resources and opportunity to meet state standards. The following summarizes them.

Work Group 1: Early Childhood Education

Based on the research that concludes that 80 percent of a child's brain is developed by age three and 90 percent by age four, the zero-two recommendations need to be expanded. The Commission cannot meet its charge of producing a world class education system that prepares students for college, without remediation, and/or a high-skill and high-wage career if the brain development for a substantial proportion of Maryland's children is delayed or does not take place at all. Early prevention by investing in substantive programming from birth – age two increases the likelihood that all students have an equitable opportunity to meet state standards. Thus, the Commission must be as aggressive in this area as it is in so many others to meet its charge. Three additions would meet this need:

- A provision for home visitation for all of the most at-risk, first-time moms from an evidence-based program such as Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) and appropriate home visitation from other highly regarded programs for at-risk moms not eligible for NFP. NFP has a clear definition of eligibility.
- Currently, Work Group 1 suggests that there should be as many Judy Centers as there are Title I schools (more than 300), but the actual recommendation of Work Group 1 provides less than half that number (122) within 10 years. We urge the Commission to make a recommendation that fully meets the need within the 10 years.
- Currently, the suggestion from Work Group 1 is to have a Family Support Center "in every underserved neighborhood." That's exactly the right objective. But, the actual recommendation provides only 55 centers 10 years after implementation begins. There are 136 school communities in which 90 percent or more of the students are eligible for free and reduced-priced meals and more than 90 additional school communities in which more than 80 percent of the children are eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. Strong Schools Maryland urges the Commission to make a recommendation to provide a Family Support Center in every underserved neighborhood in the next 10 years. Then define underserved against a standard of need measured by the percent of families living in poverty in the community.

Work Group 2: High Quality Teachers and Leaders

Work Group 2 has focused on developing recommendations that seek to strengthen the teaching profession through the development of standards, career pathways and training. The members also paid some attention to the recruitment of a diverse workforce. Strong Schools Maryland believes that additional attention should be paid to recruiting a diverse workforce, ensuring teachers receive training in culturally relevant education, and providing students, especially those furthest from meeting state standards, receive instruction from teachers with three or more years of experience in the classroom.

- In Maryland, 41 percent of third to eighth grade students meet the statewide standard for English test scores, and one-third meet the standard for math. When these numbers are disaggregated along the lines of race, black and Hispanic/Latinx students underperform compared to their white and Asian peers. Culturally relevant education (CRE) can serve as a building block to close the opportunity gap for students of color meeting state standards. CRE training addresses the teacher's attitudes and dispositions; those dispositions determine instruction, planning and assessment. Teachers make learning relevant vis a vis students' interests using students' culture as a vehicle for learning. They recognize the value of knowledge within a student's community and use that knowledge to empower students and to engender their highest learning. Every Maryland teacher should be required as part of their teacher training programming to learn how to implement culturally relevant education in the classroom. *For more information about culturally relevant education please see Appendix I.*
- Workforce diversity is important to reducing the achievement gap between black and Hispanic children and white children and between girls and boys. Nationally, the teaching force is 80 percent white and 71 percent female. Research has found that boys, and particularly black boys, are more heavily impacted by challenges like poverty and racism. They are also the least likely to have a teacher that looks like them. Seth Gershenson at American University has found that "when black children had a black teacher between third and fifth grades boys were significantly less likely to later dropout of high school, and both boys and girls were more likely to attend college." (NY Times, September 10, 2018, Does Teacher Diversity Matter in Student Learning.)

Work Group 3: College and Career Readiness Pathways

Work Group 3 determined that an early warning system is necessary to ensure early detection of students in middle and high school who are not on track to meet CCR standards by the time they are 16. They also determined that those students should receive the supports needed to meet those standards.

- What it means to be off track to post-secondary success must be defined to understand the implications of the recommendation.
- The tutoring recommendation should expand from giving priority to K-3 to giving priority on the basis of need not age or grade. Ensuring that all students who need tutoring services receive them does not diminish the priority given to young children. It simply expands the scope of support.
- Adopt CCR standards to encompass more than English and mathematics. The recommendations should describe what other areas of proficiency are necessary to achieve career and college readiness, make clear what proficiency in those areas is, how it will be measured and the timing and type of intervention that may be helpful in meeting the needs of students struggling to achieve at the proficiency level. The timing and type of intervention, including but not limited to tutoring, must be explicit enough to identify cost it out.

Work Group 4: More Resources for At-Risk Students

We applaud the Commission's effort to prioritize recommendations related to students challenged by poverty, disability and, for whatever other reasons, those who are failing to meet achievement standards necessary to their success. We should point out that the section on at-risk students should take particular notice of the additional challenges faced by children of color and those whose first language is not English. Our recommendations related to early childhood, teacher diversity and an explicit early detection system for all students K-12 not on track to meet the CCR standards by age 16 all address the system's shortcomings. These challenges arise from the system's inadequacy, not the children themselves or the knowledge that exists to provide the necessary supports.

We want to add that the structure Work Group 4 established in its recommendations about what to include in the base, the add-ons for compensatory support, the special recognition given concentrated poverty, and provisions for Community Schools and a health professional are very positive.

There are two other areas we urge you to consider:

- Augment the current recommendations with a categorical emphasis on the urgent need for a positive climate in schools. Strong Schools Maryland suggests an explicit recommendation that would ensure a fully funded Restorative Practices (RP) program in every school that earns six or fewer points on the school climate portion of the State ESSA accountability rubric. Investment in school climate and restorative practices training and implementation is one strategy that Maryland can employ to begin to dismantle the racial inequities associated with expulsions, suspensions and office referrals, that disproportionately impact African-American students.

- The APA suggestion that in a 400-500 student school with 50 percent low-income kids, relying on the 125:1 ratio and on four additional teachers arising from the compensatory money, a school could have six tutors. This formula will likely result in severely under-serving students who need additional support to learn to read. Assuming there are 250 students in the school who need tutoring, each of the teachers would have a caseload of 41. It is highly unlikely that a single teacher can deliver 41 kids the intensity of tutoring they need. Minimally, the Commission must describe and provide for a model that is credible in the context of need. Additionally, Strong Schools Maryland recommends that the Commission recommend the use of achievement data to identify how many students K-12 need tutoring. The commission should use the most recent achievement data and identify how many students at each grade level scored below proficiency. Approached in this way, the formula would yield adequate data on the basis of which each year's budget can be developed and distribution of funds to schools can be made. The recommendations should define when a separate tutoring intervention program is no longer needed in terms of when the data tells us it is no longer needed, not by an arbitrary number of years.