

The second NCEE Building Block to a world-class education system is to provide “more resources for at-risk students.” While Maryland was one of the first states in the nation to develop a funding formula to ensure *all* students would have the opportunity to meet State education standards, recent studies that evaluate the concept of equity have shown that Maryland has disparities in the level of resources provided to schools serving more low income students as compared to high income students. It is important to note that the resources referred to in the building block and in the studies are not exclusively monetary resources. They also include staffing resources in terms of quality and experience of teachers and the availability of intensive assistance for students who are struggling to succeed at grade level.

Universal school readiness for Maryland’s children is an *essential* first step in achieving equity throughout a student’s schooling career. The Commission’s recommendations for early childhood education are categorized under Building Block 1 to “provide strong supports for children and their families before students arrive at school.”

The Commission finds that there are significant disparities in the equitable distribution of resources, not only between Maryland’s districts but also within districts. The Commission believes it is imperative that schools serving high concentrations of low income students receive substantially greater resources. Although Maryland has the highest at risk weight for low income students (.97) in the nation, the Commission recommends that a “concentration of poverty” weight be developed based on a sliding scale that provides additional resources to schools commensurate with the number and proportion of low income students they serve.

The Commission recognizes that more money alone does not mean greater equity. Equally important is how the increased funding for schools serving areas with high concentrations of poverty is spent. The Commission specifically recommends funding be provided for after school or before school opportunities for struggling learners; perhaps year round school for certain students and/or districts; and community schools to provide “wrap-around” services for students and their families in all districts with high concentrations of poverty to ameliorate life struggles that impact academic success.

One particular strategy that the Commission recommends is ensuring that more high-quality, and presumably more experienced, teachers should teach in high need schools. This can be achieved by offering incentives such as higher pay, smaller classes, more planning time, and mentoring. A concept that is further explained in Building Blocks 5, 6, and 8 is that of a career ladder. The Commission recommends that one of the requirements for a teacher to move up the career ladder is to teach or have taught in a high needs school.

The Commission also strongly recommends that the weight for special education students be increased. In contrast to the weight for low income students, Maryland has one of the lower weights for special education (.74). The commission recommends increasing the weight to 0.91 at a minimum, as proposed by APA, but recognizes that the appropriate weight requires further study and depends on the base per student amount to ensure the appropriate resources are invested to meet the needs of special education students. The Commission also recognizes the importance of providing the necessary supports for students *before* they fall too far behind grade

level. This relates to Building Blocks 3 and 4 and the imperative for building an instructional system with an early warning system that identifies students as soon as they begin to fall behind and provides the necessary supports to get them back on track. Investing in this strategy should reduce the number of students who are identified as in need of special education services in the future. At about 12% of students statewide, Maryland’s special education enrollment is about average for the U.S. but more than double the special needs identification rates of the top performers in the world.

Finally, the Commission recommends the general concept of money, services, and staffing “following the student.” Because the funding formula is based on how many students are enrolled and whether they are an “at-risk” student, the money generated from this methodology should be provided to the school at which the student is enrolled. Further, these funds should be used to provide high-quality teachers and additional services for these at-risk students to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to succeed in school.

For further discussion

1. Formula aspects of equity
 - a. Base and weights
 - b. Counties paying local share for at-risk formulas/Maintenance of Effort
 - c. Concentration of poverty factor
 - i. What should the sliding scale look like
 - ii. How much “extra” should be provided at each step of the scale
 - iii. Incorporate concentration of poverty at school (rather than district) level
 - d. Identification of special education students
 - e. Adjustment for overlap between at risk categories
 - f. Proxy for low income
 - g. Include GCEI or not
 - h. Wealth calculation
2. Accountability in use of funds
 - a. Dollars following students to school level
 - b. Staffing level requirements