

Chapter 6

Summary of Preliminary Recommendations and Next Steps

During 2017, the Commission reviewed the 9 Building Blocks and the gap analyses prepared by NCEE that compared Maryland’s education system and outcomes with top performing systems in the world — Singapore, Shanghai, Finland and Ontario, Canada — and 3 US states — Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New Jersey. The Commission also heard from other experts from the US and around the world on the importance of, and best practices in providing, early childhood education, teacher quality and teacher preparation, instructional systems and integrated college and career pathways, school finance equity, and governance and accountability. These became the 5 areas around which the Commission organized its policy recommendations. [Add Exhibit with crosswalk] The Commission’s findings and recommendations in each policy area are detailed in Chapter 8. A brief summary of the preliminary recommendations follows below. In reviewing the preliminary recommendations, the Commission wants to emphasize that these recommendations must work together to form an integrated education *system*, and are not a series of independent policies and practices.

In early 2018, the Commission will break into a workgroup for each of the 5 policy areas and, working with Commission staff, APA and NCEE, and other experts, develop greater specificity for each of its preliminary recommendations in order to “cost out” the fiscal impact of the recommendations, both individually and as a complete system. This could be described as a “successful nations” method, one of several methodologies that the Commission will use to determine the costs of enabling Maryland schools to match the performance of the schools with the most successful education systems.

The fiscal impact will include both new funding and, where possible, the reallocation of existing funding to support these priorities. For example, as the State elevates the status of the teaching profession and more teachers remain in the profession, teacher turn over will subside and school systems will need to spend less on teacher recruitment, freeing up those dollars to support higher teacher salaries and/or more effective teacher induction programs. This is just one of many examples where existing spending can be redirected to other purposes over time as the policy recommendations are implemented.

The results of the costing out process will then be synthesized into “base” and “weights” for the funding formulas, and the Commission will consider them alongside the APA recommendations. Therefore, until the “costing out” work is completed, the Commission cannot make recommendations on the amount of the base funding in the formula, nor the weights to be applied to that base for at-risk students. Once this process is complete, the Commission will be in a position to recommend the “adequate” amount of funding needed for the purpose of getting Maryland students to achieve the College and Career Ready standards. These recommendations will be made in the Commission’s final report.

Additional aspects of the funding formulas for Maryland schools will be addressed in spring/summer 2018 after the costing out of the preliminary policy recommendations is completed. These include determining (1) the base per pupil amount and weights for at-risk

student populations; (2) the method for calculating local wealth; (3) the equitable distribution of funds; (4) the possible inclusion of an geographic cost adjustment factor; (5) the proxy for estimating the number of low-income students; (6) the funding for prekindergarten; (7) the possible requirement for local school systems to fund their share of the at-risk funding formula; and (8) the impact on the local maintenance of effort requirement.

Early Childhood Education is Critical

Maryland is widely regarded as a leader in early childhood education in the United States, from its Family Support Centers and Judy Centers that coordinate necessary services for low-income children and their families to compulsory full-day kindergarten for all 5-year-olds and the availability of half-day prekindergarten for low-income 4-year-olds. However, unlike 10 other states, Maryland does not offer universal education for 4-year-olds. Maryland must expand its current early childhood education program so that all 4-year-olds, regardless of income, have an opportunity to enroll in a quality full-day program. This can be accomplished with a “diverse delivery” system composed of both public and private providers. The State should offer free education for students from low-income families while higher-income families would be expected to pay a portion of the cost. Three-year-olds from low-income families should also have access to a quality full-day program. Provision of a full-day program must be given to special education children regardless of family income.

Policies designed to support these changes, mainly increasing the supply of quality early childhood educators and providers, would need to be phased-in over time. The Commission also believes it is critical that every child is assessed before entering kindergarten in order to provide a baseline of the child’s school readiness, which will inform the teacher’s instruction, and to provide information on the quality of the early education being provided.

The Commission learned that Maryland and the US are far behind top performing systems in providing support to young children and their families, not just to 3- and 4-year-olds but from birth and prenatal care. These supports include free medical care, paid family leave, and free or heavily subsidized child care. In many other countries they also include subsidized housing, parental “allowances” and baby “bonuses, and other financial support.

While the Commission recognizes that many of these supports are outside its charge, it feels it would be remiss to ignore the impact that a child’s first three years can have on the rest of the child’s life. Therefore, the Commission believes Maryland must adopt better support for families with young children like the top performing systems do. Specifically, the Commission urges the State to significantly expand its network of Judy Centers and Family Support Centers to reach all low-income families and their children who need them, increase child care subsidies so that working families have access to affordable, high quality child care, and expand the current infant and toddlers program that provides support to families with special needs children.

Elevating the Teaching Profession is Essential

In examining top performing systems, the Commission learned that these systems tend to recruit the best students into teaching and retain them because teaching is treated as a high status profession, not unlike engineering, architecture or business, with the accompanying expectations

and compensation of a well-educated professional. An abundance of highly qualified teachers working as high status professionals is perhaps the single biggest factor in the success of these top performing systems.

In the US, teaching is still viewed in most places as more of a “blue collar” job with no real opportunities for professional advancement without leaving the classroom. The State faces a significant and growing shortage of highly qualified teachers. If the State hopes to have a system that performs at the level of the world’s best systems it simply must invest in elevating the status of the teaching profession so that more of our most talented young people — and adults — choose to become and remain successful teachers. Accomplishing this goal will require a wide-ranging change in policies and, to avoid teacher shortages and other unintended consequences, a coordinated effort over time.

Another concern in Maryland is a shortage of teachers from diverse racial backgrounds. The Commission believes, and evidence shows, that some school children respond better to and are inspired by a teacher who “looks like me.” Given Maryland’s rapidly changing demographics and that, currently, only 25 percent of Maryland’s teachers are underrepresented minorities, the State needs to make special efforts to recruit a more diverse teaching workforce.

As part of its effort to elevate the status of the teaching profession, the State will need to develop a career ladder framework that will allow teachers to improve their skills and advance in their profession, while primarily remaining in the classroom, with a significant portion of compensation ultimately tied to placement and advancement on the ladder. Teachers rising to the level of Master Teacher would be highly effective teachers, leaders in their schools, and successful mentors to other teachers. The career ladder would be Y shaped with teachers beginning at the base and then choosing the “Master Teacher” or “Administrator” track, with assistant principals and principals first working primarily in the classroom and demonstrating success as teachers and mentors. While the career ladder will have a statewide framework, local school systems and bargaining units would negotiate the compensation and specific responsibilities at each step, as well as any additional ladder steps or requirements added to the statewide framework through local negotiations.

Teaching standards must also be increased to levels similar to top performing systems like Massachusetts, which has adopted the most rigorous teacher certification standards in the US. Teachers prepared in Maryland and those coming from out of state, which are currently the majority of teachers employed in Maryland’s public schools, must all be held to the same standard. Likewise, renewal of teacher certification must be tied to demonstrating effective teaching at a high level and not simply taking continuing education courses, which has not proven to be effective in improving teaching quality.

As the career ladder is implemented and teaching standards are increased, teachers’ compensation and working conditions must be improved and should be benchmarked against other professions requiring similar levels of education. During this transition period, Maryland needs to systematically phase-in salary increases for teachers (above and beyond cost of living adjustments) over the next 4 to 5 years in order to stem the decline in teacher recruitment and retention and to begin reducing the gap between compensation levels for teachers and other professions requiring comparable levels of education.

While salary is important, teachers report that their working conditions are equally if not more important. Maryland needs to change the way its schools are organized and managed to make them more effective and to create a more professional environment for teaching, which the career ladder is designed to facilitate and support. The State should phase-in a reduction of the maximum time, currently 70 to 80%, that teachers are expected to teach in a typical week. This would give teachers more time to work as professionals in collaboration, as is the case for teachers in countries with high performing systems, to improve the curriculum, instructional delivery, and tutor students with special needs. In order to effectively use this additional collaborative time and the new organization of schools, teachers should receive training on the Commission's recommendations and the best uses of collaborative time to build professional learning communities.

For higher education, teacher preparation programs must modify their programs to reach the higher certification standards. The State should use its recently-expanded program approval authority to ensure that teacher preparation programs are rigorous and accountable. Programs must ensure that students are required to master a content area as well as pedagogy, receive the research, data analysis, and observation training they need to evaluate students' instructional needs and instructional materials, and have appropriate and diverse experiences in the classroom so they are prepared for the realities they will be faced with in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs must also work more closely with school systems, and vice versa, so that they can ensure the success of their teachers in the classroom, particularly in the first few years.

To incentivize school systems and teacher preparation programs working more closely, the Commission is proposing the creation of "collaboratives" consisting of one or more local school systems and teacher preparation programs supported by multiyear seed grants. These collaboratives would work together to, among other things, elevate standards for admission and reform teacher preparation and training programs; create more effective teacher induction programs; implement career ladders; and "professionalize the working environment in schools. The collaboratives would develop pilots for implementing statewide the new leadership development systems, teaching career ladder systems, and advanced forms of school organization and management that the Commission is recommending.

There are additional recommendations in this policy area that relate to teacher recruitment and teacher induction programs. This policy area involves the most recommendations and undoubtedly will be the most costly to implement. As a result, the Commission will be spending substantial time in 2018 determining the appropriate balance of increases in teacher salaries, reductions in teachers' class time, the availability of funding that can be reallocated, and other related policies.

Students Must Leave High School Better Prepared for College and Careers

Top performing systems typically have a tightly aligned, high standards curriculum available to all students who must take a standardized test at the end of 10th grade to determine whether a student is qualified to pursue further studies or begin a career. For their final two years in high school, students go either into a program intended to prepare them for university or for a career in a high skill profession, with work beginning right after high school or after more career and technical education at the postsecondary level. In many countries, students who are in a career and technical program increasingly go on to postsecondary education after high school, and

students who are in the academic stream in high school are getting vocational qualifications as well as academic credentials. In these countries, employers and universities know just what it means to have met the 10th grade qualification, what is typically referred to as college and career readiness in the US. Ultimately, this is exactly what a high school diploma should signal to employers and colleges and universities in Maryland and across the United States.

No state in the US has built a real system based on all of these attributes. But Maryland has assets that can be built upon to create such a system. Maryland was among the first states to develop the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards that are measured by the PARCC tests aligned with the standards. Students are currently expected to reach that standard by the end of their junior year, although only about 40% of high school students have so far done so. Maryland has an additional standard that all students are required to reach, and a defined set of courses in subjects that are required, in order to graduate from high school. These elements can be built on to create a qualification system set to global standards. To do that, the Commission recommends that one standard, called “on track for college and career readiness,” be established that students are expected to meet by the end of the 10th grade, and a defined set of college and career pathways for the junior and senior years be created, which would include access to an AP or International Baccalaureate curriculum and rigorous technical training leading to an industry certified credential. To do this, the entire education system must be aligned from the early grades through 10th grade to provide students with the opportunity to meet the standard by the end of 10th grade, although the Commission recognizes that it may take some students longer to reach the standard.

An “early warning system” must be created as soon as possible that enables teachers to better identify students in every grade who are beginning to fall behind, and work to get the student back on track. Ultimately this system will catch students before they fall too far behind, but during the transition period additional resources and support will be needed to address struggling learners.

Students who are “on track” must have rigorous pathways toward college, including more IB and AP diploma opportunities and even the ability to earn an associate’s degree while still in high school, not just for students in designated early college high schools. They must also have access to high quality career pathways that result in either an industry–recognized credential or entry into a demanding postsecondary program of technical education and training.

Apprenticeships and other opportunities to participate in a career while in high school must be significantly expanded. While Maryland has made considerable progress in creating Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, the State must make significant changes in its approach to CTE education if it wants to provide high quality programs like those established by countries leading the way in this arena have established. The Commission recommends that a small group of individuals with expertise in CTE and Maryland employers be formed as soon as possible to benchmark Maryland CTE programs against the best in the world and make recommendations to build out rigorous career pathways and apprenticeships that meet the needs of Maryland’s economy and employers.

More Resources Must be Provided for At-risk Students

Maryland currently ranks 11th in per pupil spending in the United States, but drops to 19th when adjusted for regional cost differences, even though Maryland’s median income is the highest in

the nation. The average of spending in the benchmark states of Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New Hampshire is \$2,200 per student more than Maryland, which includes state, local, and federal funds. Still, Maryland spends about 50 percent more than the top performing countries, although this does not take into account that many of these countries spend much more on general support and social, medical, dental, and other services for families with young children than the United States does, none of which is accounted for in their school budgets. In the United States, the schools bear the burden of trying to address the problems that the lack of such support in the United States causes for the schools as they try to educate students who are increasingly entering school far less ready for school.

It came as a surprise to many on the Commission that Maryland does not do well on measures of funding equity. Although Maryland has the highest weight in the country for low-income students in its funding formula, the State spends 4.9 percent less money (state and local) on poor school districts than on wealthy ones, making it the state with the 15th most regressive funding system in the nation. By contrast, Massachusetts spends 7.3 percent more money on students in low-income districts.

The Commission endorses the basic structure of the Thornton funding formulas, with a base funding amount per pupil and weights applied to the base for at-risk students. However, until the “costing out” of the preliminary policy recommendations is completed, the Commission cannot make recommendations on the amount of the base funding in the formula, or the weights to be applied to that base for at-risk students. For the purpose of costing out the preliminary recommendations, the Commission recommends that the special education weight be increased. The final recommendations will specify the weight, which should be a placeholder until an in-depth study is conducted by experts. Implementation of the new 10th grade standard and early warning system described above should ultimately reduce the number of students identified as needing special education services over time except for the most severely disabled, which is the case in top performing countries.

The Commission also recommends that a new weight for schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty should be added. An analysis of what this additional weight should be and whether the weight should be differentiated among levels of high poverty will be conducted and included in the Commission’s final report. Wraparound services for at-risk students and their families must be significantly increased so that all students have the opportunity for academic success. To the extent that existing providers cannot meet the needs of students, the new concentration of poverty factor should provide the funding to support these services. These services must include incorporating a service coordinator at each school above a certain poverty level to coordinate services provided by public and private agencies and expanding the community schools strategy. The physical and mental health needs of students and their families must also be addressed as well as the need for expanded learning time such as after-school and summer programs.

Greater Accountability is Necessary for Success

In the US, unlike in top performing countries, P–12 spending and accountability are highly decentralized and policies and practices are not routinely benchmarked against top performing systems. Many different bodies have independent authority for specific parts of the P–20 education system and not infrequently work at cross purposes with one another. The system for governing education in Maryland, like the systems throughout the United States, can best be described as highly fractionated. Maryland will have to find an innovative approach to education governance in order to get the same kind of coherence and power from the education system being proposed by the Commission that top performing countries have achieved. Put another way, the question is how to set up a governance and accountability mechanism for implementing the Commission’s final recommendations that maximizes the chance that the recommendations will be well and truly implemented.

The Thornton Commission recommended, and the Bridge to Excellence legislation codified, a master plan requirement that was innovative at the time and in theory held school systems accountable for the use of education aid, but it did not work as intended. Master plans, both the writing process by the school systems and the review process by MSDE, became more compliance–driven rather than a real “strategic plan” for education policies and practices to be implemented with fidelity. The master plans did not result in systemic changes in policies and practices that produced sustainable and ever–increasing outcomes. The task in this case is to establish a governance and accountability structure for implementing the Commission’s recommendations similar in form but very different in practice from the structure established by Thornton, a structure that stands on what was learned from Maryland’s experience with Thornton. The nature of the criteria used to judge school system master plans must be very different. Instead of describing particular interventions that must be used, the criteria must focus on, for example, whether a district is doing what is required to find, hire, train and provide working conditions that would attract very high-quality teachers and enable them to do the best work of which they are capable.

The Commission believes there must be a strong system of accountability in the implementation of its recommendations. In particular, a meaningful portion of new funding must be subject to the approval of specific plans to implement the Commission’s recommendations and must be subject to demonstrated progress towards greater student success. The Commission’s final report will further address this issue as well as the appropriate entity or entities to monitor implementation of the Commission’s recommendations. At the end of the implementation period of the Commission’s recommendations, an evaluation of whether the Commission’s goals have been achieved and their effectiveness should be required.

The Commission also recommends that Maryland join the OECD PISA survey so that it can compare itself, like Massachusetts, to education systems around the world on both student achievement and the strategies that top systems are using to get both high achievement and high equity.