

October 5, 2018

Joy Schaefer, Chair of Work Group 4 Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education Room 121,
House Office Building Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Recommendations for Analysis, Strategies, and the Integration of Latino, EL and Racial Equity into all Levels of
Education Services

Via Electronic Mail

Dear Chairwoman Schaefer and Work Group 4 Members,

I am writing to follow up on the Work Group's discussion pertaining to additional recommendations on Latino, EL and race equity in the September 21, 2018 meeting document. As the committee charged with studying the "At-Risk" Students, we ask you to create specific recommendations to address racial disparities for Latino and English Learner students in the state and we stand alongside other civil rights organizations that have submitted recommendations for African American and Native American students to this workgroup.

The Latino and English Learner student population across Maryland has increased significantly in the last five years. In counties like Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Latino students represent more than 30% of the student population. Data shared by the Maryland State Department of Education in 2015 reported that each school system in Maryland had at least one student identified as an English Learner. According to a 2017 brief by the Maryland Equity Project "Trends in Maryland Public Schools: English Language Learner Enrollment"¹ reports that counties such as Frederick and Talbot saw significant increases in English Learner enrollment with 5% and 4.3% respectively. Yet the data on the outcomes for Latino and English Learner students is alarming in some communities across the state. According to a 2014 report from the Urban Institute "From Cradle to Career: the Multiple Challenges Facing Immigrant Families in Langley Park Promise Neighborhood",² Langley Park families, a community situated between Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, face a myriad of challenges --- lack of access to medical attention, poor housing conditions and limited educational attainment amongst a host of additional challenges. Many of the children in Langley Park face an uphill battle as they get themselves on a pathway to college and career readiness. Here are some of the most startling data points:

- *Langley Park children start school less ready to learn than their peers. With no pediatricians in Langley Park and the surrounding area, many young children fall through the cracks. Rates of medical homes among children under 5 lag behind county averages by 24 percentage points and only a third of Langley Park three-year olds and four-year-olds attend early education programs. As a result, most Langley Park kindergarteners (75 percent) enter school with limited English proficiency and struggle with age appropriate functioning, particularly in the domains of language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, and social studies.*
- *Despite their resilience in elementary school, Langley Park students quickly lose ground in middle school. Two of every 3 Langley Park middle schoolers falter with reading and math proficiency or begin a pattern of chronic absences. Also, rates of suspension nearly triple from elementary to middle school, just as communication between parents and schools starts to break down. LEP students continue to experience the most difficulty; they represent only 17 percent of Langley Park middle schoolers but account for 42 percent of those with the highest need.*
- *In their high school years, Langley Park students face tremendous pressures to leave school early. Many youth drop out before receiving their diploma to help provide for their families. The numbers are staggering: 37 percent of Langley Park 16 to 19 year olds are working and not in school, a rate more than 4 times the national average.*

¹ <https://education.umd.edu/research/centers/mep/research/k-12-education/trends-maryland-public-schools-english-language-learner>

² Molly M. Scott, Graham MacDonald, Juan Collazos, Ben Levinger, Eliza Leighton, Jamila Ball. *From Cradle to Career: the Multiple Challenges Facing Immigrant Families in the Langley Park Promise Neighborhood*, June 2014. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/cradle-career-multiple-challenges-facing-immigrant-families-langley-park-promise-neighborhood>

Many Langley Park youth also find themselves dealing with early parenthood. Birth rates among 15 to 17 year-olds in Langley Park are more than double the state average. To make matters worse, about a third of students at the LPPN partner high school reported that there were no adults that would help them if they had a problem.

- *Less than half of Langley Park high school students finish in 4-years; and LEP students fare worst. Only 27 percent of first-time 9th grade LEP students graduate on time. Participants in student focus groups pointed to limited support and systematically low expectations for English language learners as the main reasons for this gap.*
- *Graduation rates for Limited English Proficiency students in 2017 for Montgomery County and Prince George's County remain low, 40.7% and 51.5% respectively, despite having the largest shares of LEP students across the state.*³
- *In Montgomery County, the graduation rate for Latino students is still lagging behind White students by nearly 20 percentage points.*⁴

While a more comprehensive analysis of the state of Latino and English Learner students is not available, the data above are samples of the experiences of these subgroups across the state. Moreover, the need for a comprehensive examination of the state of Latino and English Learner students is imperative as the state debates on recommendations and best strategies to adequately address their needs. In 2012, the Commission to Study the Impact of Immigrants in Maryland⁵ looked at quantitative data of key challenges faced by immigrants in Maryland and important contributions they make to the state. Included in the report were broad recommendations on education that emphasized the need for “culturally appropriate standards for instructing immigrants in English language usage” and that school systems across the state monitor for performance in successfully using the standards. Additionally, the Commission recommended that school systems effectively communicate with parents to provide access and navigate systems that include academic, extracurricular and community resources to support their students; this access may also include teaching parents how to use these systems. These recommendations are just a starting point. Many school systems have created more opportunities to be involved in their students schooling but little has been done to determine whether these systems are effectively being used by parents.

We ask that the Kirwan Commission delve deeper and with a racial equity lens into the following recommendations which we hope will best serve Latino and English Learner students:

English Learner strategies

- We strongly urge that the Commission look into how students are identified as English Learners especially for elementary school aged students since the current process is based on a Home Language Survey and testing which has led to a large percentage of elementary school aged being labeled as English Learners even if they American born. A significant percentage of these students remain as long term English learner.
- Create a well-defined family liaison role to best serve the English learner students and families in each school and provide strong guidance on qualifications and professional development requirements. Additionally the family liaison role has to be different from the Community Services Coordinator role stipulated under the Community Schools strategy.
- Review and revise the recommendations provided by the 2015 Maryland EL Task Force created by the Maryland State Department of Education which was made up on EL experts, MSDE staff and key stakeholders. Of note are the following recommendations:
 - Require a stand-alone Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) specific course for all pre-service educators and all educators renewing certification.
 - Draft additional guidelines for higher education institutions to include more training for teacher preparation programs and refine competency recommendations and standards for these programs.

³ Data retrieved from: Maryland Report Card 2018, <http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov>

⁴ Data retrieved from: Maryland Report Card 2018, <http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov>

⁵ http://www.inforum.umd.edu/mdimmigration/content/md_immigration_commission_finalreport.pdf

- Create an action plan for increased dual language programs in Maryland that value and recognize heritage/native language (L1) learners.
- In addition, expand dual language opportunities for pre-K students to use their native language skills more effectively and increase Kindergarten readiness.
- Increase the amount of culturally specific information, supports and services available for newly-arrived immigrants, and increase partnerships with community-based programs to promote and encourage parent engagement.
- Consider additional methods for measuring poverty aside from direct certification of programs to which not all immigrants have access to. Assess best practices of what other states like California or New York with high numbers of immigrant student populations have done to ensure proper funding.

Latino Students

- Assess the statewide experiences of Latino students in Maryland to best address their needs.
- Identify and implement culturally specific pedagogy, curriculum investments and assessments.
- Expand early learning opportunities such as expanding universal pre-k, expansion of dual language programs and family visiting programs to improve kindergarten readiness.
- Provide best practices to increase the number of Latino students into advanced placement and dual enrollment programs.
- We support the ACLU's recommendations to
 - Provide explicit training on racial, linguistic and cultural responsive pedagogy and practice, and social justice for teachers and administrators.
 - Collaborate with culturally specific community-based organizations to provide wraparound services, youth mentoring, and other supports to assist in reducing absenteeism or discipline incidents.

These are only a few of the strategies we consider to be imperative for Workgroup 4 to consider as you finalize recommendations on the best ways to address the needs of at-risk students. While the intention is to provide strategies that serve all students, many of these strategies should be viewed through a racial equity lens to ensure that they are equitable to all student groups such as English Learner, Latino and African American students, who need specific and explicit supports. As our partners in this work have stated, this is what equity looks like – providing students with what they need and moving away from a one-size fits all approach that has failed in the past.

CASA supports the work of the Kirwan Commission and looks forward to providing the Commission with support and guidance in the creation or revision of recommendations that will impact future generations of Latino, immigrant and English Learner students and families in Maryland. We are confident that the best strategies will come out of a race equity lens and incorporate the expertise of individuals such as Dr. Ivory Toldson and other Latino/EL experts to ensure the best strategies are incorporated in the overall recommendations made by the Kirwan Commission.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and your continued work on the Commission. We look forward to ensuring the best education is made available to all students in Maryland and that we work together to ensure this becomes a reality.

Thank you,

Maritza Solano
 Director of Education
 CASA