

The ACLU of Maryland  
Advocates For Children and Youth  
CASA de Maryland  
Faith Leaders For Excellent Schools

The Greater Baltimore Urban League  
The Maryland State Conference of NAACP Branches  
Strong Schools Maryland

October 2, 2018

Dr. William E. Kirwan  
Chairman, Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education  
Maryland Department of Legislative Services  
90 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Kirwan:

In anticipation of the release of the Commission's final recommendations, the members of the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, a coalition of education equity advocates, education researchers, and civil rights organizations—see below—is writing to urge the Commission to seize this opportunity to ensure that Black, Native, and Latino students have the resources and opportunities that they need to succeed. The legislative directive for the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education is to “make policy recommendations that would enable Maryland’s preK-12 system to perform at the level of the best-performing systems in the world”. The Commission's goal cannot be reached without a comprehensive plan to address Maryland’s racial inequities, and we are offering our combined 200 years of experience serving Maryland’s Black and Latino communities to assist the Commission in developing solutions.

Maryland has been working on the issue of racial inequities in its schools for decades. Both the Thornton Commission and the Task Force on the Education of Maryland’s African-American Males made recommendations to address racial inequities, and when the Commission stated racial equity would be addressed in each of its workgroups, we were hopeful the Commission would prioritize developing a plan for closing these gaps. Our data show that Black, Native, and Latino students do not get equitable access to a wide range of resources and opportunities that they need to succeed. While far from being the only examples of inequities that need addressing, Black and Latino students are disproportionately likely to have inexperienced teachers and attend school in the most underfunded districts. Relevant to poverty and academic achievement, low income students face profound barriers that must be addressed. However, data in this area indicate that income is an inadequate proxy for race, because racial gaps exist in all income brackets and in some cases are actually larger for higher income students.

Like members of the Commission, we maintain belief that the racial inequities can be eliminated, and we are committed to working collectively and collaboratively for real solutions. Along that vein, we suggest that the Commission should consider development of a plan to include a dedicated mechanism for analyzing racial inequities and incorporating racial equity holistically into all of the Commission’s work streams --such as a racial equity task force. We also urge that the Commission’s final recommendations contain explicit recommendations to address both the disparities in outcomes between Black, Native, and Latino students relative to their White peers and inequities in access to resources and opportunities.

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It is essential that representatives from Maryland’s Black, Native, and Latino communities be partners in critical decisions that will impact their status – current and future. Moreover, we wish to aid the Commission in your efforts to make Maryland’s education system one of the top performing systems in the world. To further that collaboration, we request a meeting with the Commission to explore the above concerns as well as our new analysis and the data that we have gathered showing there are profound gaps in outcomes and opportunities between races that persist, even when controlling for income. We ask that you or your representative please respond to Sharnice Barnett [sbarnett@gbul.org](mailto:sbarnett@gbul.org) or (410) 523-8150 to schedule a meeting.

We thank you for your leadership and service on the Commission and hope to have the opportunity to work with you to advance racial equity in Maryland’s public school system.

Respectfully,

Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education

