



OF BALTIMORE

t 410.662.5500 f 410.662.5520  
2305 N. Charles Street, Suite 200  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
familyleague.org

TO: Chair Kirwan and members,  
The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education  
FROM: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore  
DATE: October 8, 2018

Family League of Baltimore was established in 1991 as the city of Baltimore's Local Management Board to manage and deploy public funds to meet the needs of children and families. The organization serves as an architect of change in the city, leveraging relationships with public and private entities; building the capacity and efficacy of practitioners and affected community members; and convening stakeholders from local government, the funding community, and direct service organizations to target financial supports to the realization of a shared vision for Baltimore in which every child grows up in a thriving family and community.

The work of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has implications for generations of Baltimore City students. We are appreciative of the hard work and long hours the Commission has dedicated to meeting its charge. We write today to support key components of Working Group 4's recommendations, particularly as they pertain to a full-service Community Schools strategy as a demonstrable best-practice in supporting children living and learning in areas of concentrated poverty.

#### Community Schools and Out-of-School Time (OST)

Family League supports Working Group 4's recommendation that additional funding be allocated to schools reaching a certain percentage of the federal Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMS) rate for the explicit purpose of hiring a Community School Coordinator (CSC). When implemented with fidelity, a robust, fully-funded, full-service Community Schools strategy includes a companion high-quality OST program. Together, the Community Schools and OST strategies have been demonstrated to be effective in both reducing chronic absenteeism and improving school climate over time. A 2016 study<sup>1</sup> from the Baltimore Educational Research Consortium (BERC), found that full-service Community Schools in operation for at least 5 years saw a decrease in chronic absenteeism by at least 40 percent<sup>2</sup>, and that participation in Community School-based OST programming was a contributing factor in the decreases in chronic absenteeism<sup>3</sup>. The same report found increased parental engagement, decreases in student transience, and improved interpersonal staff relationships; all of which contribute to a positive school climate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Baltimore Education Research Consortium. (2016). *Baltimore Community Schools: Promise & Progress*. Baltimore, MD

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

As a partner in the facilitation of the Community Schools strategy in Baltimore, Family League works with lead agencies such as the University of Maryland School of Social Work, the Y of Central Maryland, Koinonia Baptist Church, and other community-based organizations to provide funding for and professional development opportunities for CSCs to work on-site in schools.

The work of CSCs varies based on the needs of the student populations they serve and can span areas such as food access (food pantries), housing (partnerships with organizations like Family Connections), mental health (meditation as an alternative to detention), and English language acquisition (after-hours programming for adult non-native English speakers). As additional needs and partners are identified, Community Schools can serve as the infrastructure for integrating programming, creating efficiencies in service delivery. CSCs employ the support of local organizations to meet these needs and rely on these strong relationships to maintain the benefits inherent to the Community Schools strategy.

### Equity and Concentrated Poverty

The Commission, through its recommendations, has the unique opportunity to begin eliminating the systemic barriers which fuel racially disparate educational outcomes and initiate honest conversations about the root causes of educational inequity in Maryland while addressing the needs of all students. Community Schools are a strategy essential to the pursuit of educational equity and increased access to opportunity for the most oppressed students and communities. In April of 2014, the Institute for Educational Leadership<sup>4</sup> stated that, in light of broadening achievement gaps for children of color, a color-blind approach will not suffice for educational reforms.

Moving forward, Family League recommends that the Commission utilize a nonlinear weighting approach to funding each district and close loopholes in the current funding structure which: (1) allow for funding floors and (2) apply a reducing factor to the funding provided to all jurisdictions, both of which exacerbate inequities in funding across jurisdictions.

The current education funding structure includes a minimum state aid guarantee, mandating that the State provide every jurisdiction with at least 15 percent of its total base funding and 40 percent of its total special needs funding,<sup>5</sup> regardless of the wealth of each jurisdiction. This pursuit of equal funding of jurisdictions makes truly equitable funding impossible, as wealthy districts that may not need additional financial support are funded at a direct cost to less-wealthy jurisdictions that would benefit from additional resources.

---

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Educational Leadership. (2014). *Community Schools are an Essential Equity Strategy*. Washington, DC

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

In the report<sup>6</sup> presented to the Commission by APA Consulting, it was noted that “under a nonlinear weighting approach, a higher weight would be applied to districts (or schools) with higher concentrations of students in poverty. Under this approach, districts with higher concentrations of students in poverty would receive more funding per eligible student than districts with lower concentrations. Under a linear weighting approach, all students receive the same weighting (and amount of additional funding) regardless of poverty concentrations.” The utilization of a linear weighting approach directly jeopardizes the Commission’s charge to address the impacts of high concentrations of poverty on local school systems by ignoring the unique challenges faced by schools serving students who live in concentrated poverty.

We thank the members of Working Group 4 and all members of the Commission for their attention to the empirical research which demonstrates the efficacy of a coordinated Community Schools strategy – one that engages relevant stakeholders at all levels and prioritizes feedback from community-based partners, organizations, parents, and students. We encourage all members of Working Group 4 and the Commission to stay true to the best practices of Community Schools strategy implementation in their final recommendations.

Sincerely,

Demaune A. Millard  
President & CEO

---

<sup>6</sup> Augenblick, Palaich & Associates. (2016). *Final Report of the Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in Maryland*. Denver, CO