

## Maryland's Education Call to Action 2019

When Governor Hogan and the General Assembly created the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, they recognized that the fate of our state and the opportunities it creates for our children and grandchildren to enjoy successful careers and rewarding lives depends on the quality, equal access and effectiveness of PreK-12 education in every city and county across the state.

The Commission's charge also showed that state leaders understand that in today's interconnected, global economy, the benchmark for education quality is not only what is happening in the top performing US states, but also across the world in countries where students are outperforming their global peers, in systems that are more effective, and have higher levels of equity in learning outcomes. That is why state leaders asked the Commission to develop new policies, implementation strategies, updated funding formulas with a strong accountability system that will enable *all* Maryland schools – and schoolchildren – to perform at the level of the world's top education systems.

Given that charge, the Commission began its work by asking: Where are Maryland schools today? And we were surprised to learn that in terms of student learning outcomes, we are neither where we thought we were nor where we need to be. To be sure, this state has many fine schools and outstanding teachers, as well as a deserved reputation for innovations, such as being among the first states to provide half-day pre-school for four-year olds and broader access to Advanced Placement courses for high schoolers. Such smart moves were a major reason why some state rankings placed Maryland's education system near the top for several years. However, the real test for the quality of a school system is what its students are actually learning. On this measure, the picture for Maryland in 2019 is not nearly so bright.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) administered by the Federal government provides learning outcomes for fourth and eighth graders in reading and math every two years. In the most recent cycle, Maryland placed near or below the middle in both subjects and at both grade levels. Worse, Maryland was the only state to see scores drop – on all the tests – between 2013 and 2015. That would be bad enough if the US was a world leader in PreK-12 education but it is not. On the latest round of PISA, a highly respected international exam measuring 15-year-old student learning in math, reading and science, American student performance placed well down in the second quartile against students from some 72 other countries.

These data forced the Commission to face the uncomfortable truth: when it comes to actual student learning, Maryland schools perform at a mediocre level in a country that performs at a mediocre level internationally. But that is not the only troubling fact that Commissioners learned: like most other states, Maryland has glaring gaps in student performance based on income and race. We learned that

fewer than 40% of our high-school graduates are truly “college and career ready.” We learned of the state’s big teacher shortages, especially in science and mathematics, and the fact that Maryland schools must recruit over half of their new teachers each year from outside the state. And several national studies show Maryland to be “regressive” in its school funding, which means, in effect, that our school finance system is unfair to poor communities and the children who live in them.

Surely we can and must do better on all these dimensions. Nothing less than the future well-being of our State and its citizens is at stake. But to do better, Maryland needs a roadmap for creating an education system that learns from the world’s best, but can work in Maryland based on our context and needs.

That’s precisely what the Commission was asked to do, and toward that end its members, staff and consultants have labored long and hard – and benefited as we did from marvelous input and feedback from across the state. We benefited, too, from the expertise of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), which has spent the past two decades doing careful research on the distinguishing features of the world’s best school systems. Through this research, NCEE has identified what it calls the “building blocks” of high performing systems. These top performers can be found in different regions of the world; they operate under different forms of government; they have different cultures and traditions; and many are as demographically diverse as Maryland. But when it comes to their school systems, they exhibit remarkable consistency in using the building blocks that NCEE identified and the results speak for themselves.

With NCEE’s support, the Commission did an extensive and rigorous “gap analysis,” comparing Maryland’s present policies and practices with four high performing international systems and with the states of New Jersey, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Based on that analysis, the Commission developed recommendations in five key policy areas:

- **Investing in High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care:** Significant expansion of full day pre-school, to be free for all low-income three- and four-year-olds, so that all children have the opportunity to begin kindergarten ready to learn;
- **Providing Supports to Students that Need it the Most:** Broad and sustained support for schools serving high concentrations of poverty, with after school and summer academic programs and student access to needed health and social services;
- **Creating a World-Class Instructional System:** An internationally benchmarked curriculum that enables most students to achieve “college and career ready” status by 10<sup>th</sup> grade and then pursue pathways that include early college, Advanced Placement courses, or a rigorous technical education leading to industry-recognized credentials and high paying jobs;

- **Investing in Teachers and School Leaders:** Elevating the standards and status of the teaching profession, including a performance-based career ladder and salaries comparable to other fields with similar education requirements;
- **Ensuring Excellence for All:** An accountability-oversight board appointed by the Governor with Senate consent that has the authority to ensure that the Commission's recommendations are successfully implemented and produce the desired results.

Changes of this magnitude will require much effort, take substantial time, and require a significant increase in funding. The Commission has developed a ten-year phase-in plan that, when fully implemented in 2030, will cost an additional \$3.8 billion (combined state and local) annually. That amount averages out to 3.3 percent more per year or a 33% increase over current expenditures by 2030. While the increase is significant, the cost of not moving Maryland education from its present status – “mediocre with bright spots” – to world class will ultimately prove far greater, while the *benefits* of such a move include greater prosperity for Marylanders, greater equity across our diverse state, and a brighter future for all.

Residents of this state – parents and taxpayers especially – have every reason to ask, what precisely are the benefits from such an investment? Research demonstrates that, as a society's education levels rise, crime and healthcare costs decline; the cycle of inter-generational poverty begins to break; civic engagement improves; and family structures are strengthened. A recent study in Pennsylvania showed that a high school dropout consumes \$2700 in public health insurance versus just \$170 for a college graduate. Our prisons, too, are disproportionately populated with high school dropouts. The National Institute of Justice estimates that incarceration drains \$450 billion from the US economy annually.

That's not all. As education and skill levels rise, so does personal income and the quality of life. Businesses are more prosperous because they are able to more easily recruit a workforce with the necessary talent and skills in the ever increasing sophistication of the modern workplace.

The Commission's recommendations are carefully constructed to produce exactly these benefits. Investing in full-day early-childhood education will greatly increase the proportion of students who come to school ready to learn. A top-notch curriculum, coupled with the greater resources for schools serving disadvantaged youngsters plus a highly qualified professional teaching corps, will ensure the vast majority of students are on track to be college and career ready by the tenth grade. The exciting pathways that follow during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade will enable most students to leave high school with significant college credit or a skill that is immediately valued in the workplace. And, importantly, the recommendations include an independent accountability process with the authority to ensure the desired results are achieved.

That is the future Maryland can have if it embraces the Commission's recommendations.

One piece of work remains for the Commission to do and that is to recommend a fair distribution of the costs of the Commission's recommendations between the state and its 24 local jurisdictions. Leaders of the General Assembly have said the legislature cannot address both the scope of the policy changes recommended by the Commission *and* the distribution of costs within a single 90-day session. So they have asked the Commission to continue its work and make funding recommendations in the coming months, which it will do. In the meantime, much can be accomplished during the present legislative session. The State has wisely set aside up to \$325 million that could be allocated to "jump start" the Commission's recommendations and the Commission is making recommendations on how these resources should be allocated for fiscal 2020. The Legislature can also set aside funding this session for fiscal 2021, the first year of the Commission's ten-year plan.

The Commission's recommendations create for Maryland a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set a bold course and create a bright future for the state and its citizens. The question that remains is, does the State have the will, discipline and persistence required to make it happen? We believe it does and it must.