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To: Kirwan Commission

From: Michael C. Weisner

As a Maryland resident for many years with experience as a parent of five children who attended Maryland secondary schools as well as being a small business owner, I would like express my thoughts on ways to improve the educational system in our state.

Currently, teacher salaries are based mostly on years of service rather than the job description or effectiveness. Other than the first one or two years of employment, there isn't much to differentiate a teacher with a few years work experience from one with 25 or more years' experience, but there is a huge difference in the pay scale. What many new teachers lack in experience, they may more than make up for in enthusiasm. Using years of service as the major determining factor for pay means you get longevity but not necessarily competence. Exceptionally talented or hard-working teachers receive no financial rewards under the current system.

Another factor that negatively impacts the quality of the teaching profession is tenure. Once a teacher receives tenure, they are almost impossible to fire. Ineffective teachers, who remain on the job year after year after year, do not bring respect to the profession. Moreover, poor teachers with tenure are detrimental to the education of those students who are unlucky enough to be stuck in their classrooms.

In short, a system that is not merit based but rather based solely on seniority and tenure does not lead to good outcomes for the students nor reward those who are just plain better educators.

A frequent complaint of those in the field of education is salary. On a purely numerical scale, the take home pay isn't very high, especially for those who are new to the profession and who may have a high college debt load. However salary alone is not the only item in the compensation package. Not mentioned as often are the generous benefits offered along with the salary. Benefits are a huge component in total compensation offered to teachers and administrators. As everyone knows, health insurance costs are extremely high and getting higher, most of which is included in that generous compensation package.

Defined benefit pensions are also offered, at a huge cost to the state. Nowadays, because of the cost, few private business offer pensions at all, and if they do they only offer much less generous 401k plans. When health insurance and pensions are factored into the overall compensation package for educators and administrators, it looks pretty generous.

One more item that should be considered in regards to compensation is the number of hours worked. Teachers in general work 180 days a year. The general working population with a fulltime job works 250 days a year, a difference of 70 days or 39% more days per year. If one takes the salary of a first year teacher in Wicomico County and multiplies it by 39% we get  $\$44,644 \times 139\% = \$62,055$ . Taking the maximum salary paid to a Wicomico County teacher of  $\$77,364 \times 139\% = \$107,535$ , plus excellent benefits. Not bad.

The bottom line is that when one considers the hours worked, the health insurance and retirement benefits, teachers are treated quite well financially.

However, there are several areas that could benefit from increased state funding, the main one being limiting the number of students in a classroom. I do not know what that number might be, and it would vary by age and educational ability but there must be some statistics that would help determine that number.

There are also many other areas that the state could lend support that are not directly related to class room education but have a big impact on student achievement. They relate to the social, financial and cultural environment of the student body. Many of the problems in contemporary society show up at the school gate. Students need nutritious meals to do well academically, so schools should offer both breakfast and lunches to all that need them. More in-school support staff, like nurses and councilors would be beneficial at many schools. After school programs, not just in sports but in all types of activities, would help keep students safe and constructively occupied. Teachers always mention about how many supplies they need to purchase, not just for themselves but also for their students. Allocating say \$1,000 per teacher to help them cover these costs would be appreciated by both teachers and students. There are numerous other ways to help students achieve success that I'm not aware of but would be worth considering and funding.

In summary, I feel that rewarding educators based on merit, not on seniority, doing away with tenure, and more funding for the non-academic needs of the student body would pay big dividends in the health, well-being and academic success of our student population. And ultimately our state and country.