

August 26, 2019

Dr. William E. 'Brit' Kirwan
Chair, Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education and
Blueprint for Maryland's Future Funding Formula Workgroup
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Dr. Kirwan,

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, submits the following positions on several policy and funding decisions being considered by the Funding Formula Workgroup prior to the reconvening of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

Timeline

MABE is confident that through incremental implementation of funding recommendations developed by the Workgroup and Commission, on a timeline not to exceed 10 years, Maryland can renew its commitment to fulfilling its constitutional mandate to fully fund and support the equitable access for all students to an excellent education in all twenty-four school systems. Extending the overall implementation schedule of funding increases and reforms beyond 10 years is unacceptable in light of the delay in updating the current school finance system enacted in 2002, and the nearly 1 million students deserving a world class education today.

Local Funding Share for All Students

MABE strongly supports a workgroup recommendation to phase-in a new requirement for local governments to pay a local share of per pupil funding for economically disadvantaged students, students receiving special education services, and students learning English. The current funding formulas provide substantial state funding, on a wealth-equalized basis with a 40% floor applied to the state share. However, the law includes no mandate that local governments "close the gap" by providing an equitable local share of per pupil funding for the students within these three categories.

Equity, in funding and educational policies and programs, is a top priority for MABE and the local boards we represent. For MABE, educational equity means providing access to essential academic, social, emotional, and economic supports in order to engage each student in rigorous instruction with appropriate educational resources to achieve their highest potential. Funding equity is necessary to support educational equity, and clear and formal requirements for local investments in all students are needed to ensure that both of these equity outcomes are achieved.

Prekindergarten

MABE recognizes the need to determine whether to include prekindergarten students in the full-time equivalent (FTE) count with all other students, or to count them separately. MABE supports the proposal to count prekindergarten students separately, at least through the implementation phase. However, MABE also supports defining prekindergarten students as enrolled students for

purposes of triggering the mandatory local share of the foundation amount on a per pupil basis. This issue has not been presented to the workgroup, and MABE requests a workgroup recommendation to begin to count prekindergarten students as enrolled students in order to require, for the first time, an annual local government per pupil allocation of funding for each of these students.

Enrollment

MABE endorses the proposal to use the “greater of” methodology to determine student enrollment in order to calculate local wealth. In this instance, “greater of” refers to using the greater of the prior year’s September full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment count or the average of the three prior years. This approach will smooth out the funding impact of declining enrollment while ensuring immediate funding increases based on enrollment growth. MABE also supports the corresponding proposal to retain the use of the “September 30” student enrollment count for purposes of determining state and local per pupil funding amounts. This approach is essential to providing annual funding amounts most closely aligned with the numbers of students intended to benefit from the enhanced programs and services.

Wealth Calculation

MABE urges the Workgroup to recommend adjustments in the relative role of property and income wealth to address longstanding concerns. Several jurisdictions are disproportionately negatively affected by the overwhelming role that property values play in determining their local wealth, and therefore their diminished allocations of state aid for education. The Workgroup has considered certain scenarios, but without any clear indication that these concerns will be rectified. MABE recognizes the Workgroup’s reluctance to recommend comprehensive reforms, and therefore requests continued attention to wealth calculation changes to benefit these school systems.

Conclusion

MABE supports comprehensive recommendations to enhance our school finance system by increasing the foundation amount of funding for all students, sustaining and increasing the additional “weighted” per pupil funding for our students learning English, students living in poverty, and significantly increasing the weighted funding amount for students receiving special education services. In addition, MABE strongly supports adopting a per pupil funding approach for both the state and counties to support current, and expanded, prekindergarten programs.

Again, MABE appreciates this opportunity to present our perspectives and positions on the issues being considered by this Workgroup and the Commission.

Respectfully,



C. Tolbert Rowe, MABE President