



September 25, 2019

Dr. William (Brit) Kirwan
Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1925

Re: Formula for Distribution of State Funds for Education

Dear Dr. Kirwan:

On behalf of the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce representing 600 member firms in western Maryland, I am writing to you to express our concerns with the current formula used by the State to distribute funding to public school districts throughout Maryland. This formula is known as the “wealth formula” for it attempts to calculate the wealth of a community thereby determining the amount of school funding the community should receive.

The current formula does not work and results in poor communities like Garrett County, receiving far less funding than other school districts. Garrett County Public Schools are located in Appalachia and more than half of our students receive free or reduced-price lunches. However, the data for Garrett County gets skewed due to part-time residents and second home owners. Just because these individuals may be wealthy, does not mean that the wealth is transferred to the County, especially since Garrett County does not collect the income tax from these part time residents.

It was our understanding that the Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education was going to review and revise the wealth formula to make it more equitable and to better assist the poor communities. While we appreciate the recommendation for the new concentrated poverty formula included in the Commission’s report, we believe that instead of this supplemental funding, the wealth formula should be adjusted to incorporate poverty to more equitably distribute funds to the school systems. According to the report, the supplemental funding must be used for programs or services and not for standard operations. The report also concludes that school districts with high concentrations of poverty students are academically deficient but Garrett County schools are high performing and the achievement gaps for students are minimal.





Additionally, the State continues to shift more costs to counties and local governments. Garrett County cannot afford to continue to take on more costs and pay more in increased maintenance of effort. Currently, Garrett County has the 7th highest per pupil cost for one of the poorest school districts in the State. This cost shifting also includes construction and maintenance of school facilities. It makes no sense that Garrett County has to match State funding of facilities at 50%. This is a one-to-one match for a school system that is in desperate need of upgrades and maintenance to new facilities. The community has no way to fund these projects.

We would strongly encourage the Commission to revise the wealth formula to include a high concentration of student poverty as a determinant for school funding. The wealth formula should be adjusted prior to formulating a plan to fund the recommendations that communities like Garrett County will never be able to implement without increased funding from the State of Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Christian, CCE, IOM
President & CEO

Cc: Governor Larry Hogan
Secretary David Brinkley
Senator Bill Ferguson
Delegate Maggie McIntosh
Senator George Edwards
Delegate Wendell Beitzel
Paul Edwards, Chairman of the Board of Garrett County Commissioners
Matthew Paugh, Chairman of the Garrett County Board of Education
Barbara Baker, Superintendent of Garrett County Public Schools

