

As part of a team of educators and community members in Worcester County, I write to you in strong support of the Kirwan Commission's policy and funding recommendations.

Chip Bertino, in his November 7 commentary posted by the Ocean Pines Association and in his testimony before the Commission asked the question, "What will Kirwan mean for Worcester?" The answer is that the Kirwan recommendations will result in an increase of some 30% or more Worcester students being college and career ready when they graduate from high school.

Mr. Bertino asserts that "From the time the children of Worcester County first walk through the doors of ...elementary schools we as a community have the responsibility to ensure that by the time they walk out the doors of...high schools, they are prepared and equipped to successfully embrace the opportunities of college or career."

That admirably describes the responsibility of Worcester County and the state of Maryland. The problem, however, is that Worcester County and the state are not currently meeting that responsibility.

The facts are as follows. College and career readiness in Maryland is defined as being able to pass a 10th grade English exam and an algebra I exam. In the case of English, only 57.6% of Worcester students succeed. In math, only 46.9% of Worcester students succeed. Those results are for ALL Worcester students. African American and Hispanic students are even more ill-served. While 67.8% of white students are college and career ready, only 29.4% of African American students and 52.6% of Hispanic students meet that relatively low standard. In the case of math, 57.8% of white students pass algebra I while only 19% of African Americans and 40.5% of Hispanic students meet the standard.

It should be noted that Worcester County students perform better than the state average (which is below 40%). It is also true that Worcester has been relatively generous in school funding, having chosen over the years to put more into school funding than state law requires. But any county in which only half of their high school graduates are college and career ready, should be asking the question, "What Should We Do Differently to Meet the Needs of our Children?" That is precisely the question that the Kirwan Commission has answered based on evidence from the best performing countries and states in the world.

Many correctly observe that money by itself will not make the difference. And that is true. That also distinguishes the Kirwan recommendations from the past. The Kirwan Commission identified education practices for which there is evidence of success with ALL students (a highly professional teaching force meeting higher standards with pay based in part on merit, 3 and 4 year old prekindergarten, increased mental health supports, higher graduation standards and career-technical education, help from Kindergarten through grade three for struggling students to

ensure all can read by the 3rd grade, extra support for low-income students, especially those attending school where most of their fellow students are also low-income. Many of the proven practices will be required but the point of the new funding is that they will NOT be unfunded mandates. It is clear, based on student outcomes, that accountability for the faithful implementation of proven practices and for student outcomes must be much more specific than has been the case.

Mr. Bertino correctly identified our responsibilities. Unfortunately, he misstated our success with our children. Now we have the opportunity to get it right.

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