



Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education

William E. Kirwan
Chair

Senate Bill 1030
The Blueprint for Maryland's Future
Testimony of William E. Kirwan
March 6, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in strong support of Senate Bill 1030. As chair of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, I want to express my profound appreciation to the Presiding Officers, Senators King and Pinsky, and the newest Senators on the Commission Senators Ferguson and Young, for crafting a bill that so closely and carefully responds to the Commission's recommendations.

As you know, the Commission was asked by the General Assembly and the Governor to make and cost out recommendations so that Maryland schools could perform at the level of the best-performing schools in the world. Since economic success for individuals and for the State in this day and age requires access to high-quality education, the State's elected officials have shown admirable leadership in giving the Commission such a bold and forward-looking charge.

The Commission took its charge very seriously. Given this charge, we first had to understand where Maryland schools are today in terms of their performance, not just within the United States but in comparison to the best school systems in the world.

Maryland enjoys a reputation for having a strong school system. It is also viewed as an education innovator, offering broad access to Advanced Placement courses and support for early childhood education. To be sure, Maryland has some excellent schools and high-quality teachers. But, the Commission learned that the quality of the State's education system is very uneven and largely depends on zip code. Too many students are not receiving the quality of education that will enable them to have successful careers in today's economy. And too few are graduating with the skills necessary for success in life and the workplace.

Let me cite some very troubling facts that came to light during the Commission's work.

- Maryland is at or below the median in student performance on NAEP scores, the nation's national exam on student learning outcomes.
- Less than 40% of high school seniors will graduate this year deemed "college and career ready," and even fewer students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities.
- Maryland spends less on schools serving 30% or more of low-income students than they do on schools serving wealthy communities; Massachusetts and New Jersey both spend more.
- Almost half of new teachers in their second year will not return for a third year.

As a State, we can and must do better. The State's social fabric and economic future is at grave risk if we don't.

Informed by these and other concerns and with the assistance of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), the Commission undertook a rigorous and exhaustive benchmarking process, comparing policies and practices in Maryland with some of the world's best education systems. Incidentally, some years ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) worked with NCEE and produced a report called, *No Time to Lose*. This report urged all states to use the NCEE framework and do exactly the kind of benchmarking against the world's best education systems that the Commission carried out. Maryland is the first state to do this, although we hear others are impressed with the work we have done and are starting processes to emulate our efforts.

It is precisely this process that led the Commission to its five major policy recommendations, which are faithfully captured in this bill as The Blueprint for Maryland's Future:

- early support and interventions for young children and their families, including full-day prekindergarten that is free for low-income 3- and 4-year-olds;
- high-quality and diverse teachers and school leaders, including elevating the teaching profession comparable to other fields with the same education and with comparable compensation, establishing a career ladder so that excellent teachers remain in the classroom, and increasing the rigor of teacher preparation programs and State certification standards;
- a college and career readiness (CCR) standard set at the level required to virtually guarantee success in the first year of a community college program, with Maryland schools focused on getting most students to CCR by the end of tenth grade, and nearly all by the end of high school; providing supports for students who are not on track for CCR; and providing post-CCR pathways for students who achieve CCR, including early college programs that allow a student to earn an associate degree at no cost while in high school and Career and Technical Education pathways that lead to an industry-recognized credential;

- additional resources, supports, and services for students who need them to achieve the CCR standard, including English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families, with particular attention on students in schools with high concentrations of poverty; and
- a strong accountability system with the authority to hold all entities accountable for implementing The Blueprint for Maryland's Future effectively to ensure that all students are successful.

The General Assembly wisely set aside funds in the 2018 session to “jump start” the Commission’s recommendations in fiscal 2020. The Commission thought carefully about the highest and best use of these funds and made recommendations for expenditures tied to our policy recommendations. These are fully reflected in the bill (see bill summary/table). The Commission also recommended that the General Assembly set aside funds in the fiscal 2021 budget to provide the State’s share of the first full year of The Blueprint’s ten-year implementation plan, which is also fully reflected in the bill.

There is, of course, a substantial cost to these recommendations. But as we consider these costs, we have to also consider the cost of inaction. Can we thrive as a State economically, if we continue to have less than 40% of our high school graduates, our future workforce, deemed college and career ready? Can we thrive as a State, if we continue to have such significant inequities in school funding and student success rates? Can we thrive as a State with a school system where teaching is becoming a revolving door, not a career? I don’t think so, and I hope you agree with me. This is our moment. This is our opportunity to put a stake in the ground, begin the process of building a school system as good as any in the world, become the nation’s beacon for high-quality education, and secure a bright future for the State and all of its children.

Finally, the bill extends the Commission’s deadline to submit its final report to December 1, 2019. With the policy recommendations and estimated costs finalized, the Commission will turn to determining the appropriate distribution of the total costs between the State and county governments and make recommendations on funding formulas to distribute the costs. The Presiding Officers have asked that a small working group meet over the summer to develop recommendations for the full Commission’s consideration in fall 2019.

Let me conclude by saying, and I suspect I speak for my fellow Commissioners, how very gratified I am that the Commission’s hard work, so ably facilitated by Rachel Hise and the DLS team, has been taken so seriously and is so well reflected in Senate Bill 1030.

Thank you.