Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Comments to the 21st Century School Facilities Commission
by Stacy Korbelak, MABE Legislative Committee Vice-Chair
July 21, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I am Stacy Korbelak, President of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education and Vice-Chair of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education’s Legislative Committee. Thank you for allowing us to share our thoughts and concerns regarding school construction funding for all 24 LEA’s. Specifically, on behalf of MABE, I am here to request a $100 million annual increase in the minimum state investment in school construction, for a total of $350 million.

Adequate funding for school maintenance is essential to allowing school systems to preserve aging school facilities while at the same time moving forward on major renovation and school construction projects. Although school construction costs continue to escalate and existing facilities continue to age, local boards are tasked with providing school buildings in each of our communities that are able to address the needs of ALL learners. For MABE and Maryland’s 24 local school boards, the mission to provide equitable school facilities to all of Maryland’s students is a top priority.

When I think of equity – I think of the old t-shirt analogy. Equal means everyone gets a t-shirt. Equitable means everyone gets a t-shirt that fits. Do all of Maryland’s school children have a school they can attend? Certainly. But do all of Maryland’s school children have a school to attend that fits their needs as a 21st century learner? Perhaps not. The Maryland Constitution requires that the State provide a “thorough and efficient” system of public education, and MABE believes that this includes the duty to provide safe, high quality school facilities in which ALL students can learn.

It’s no secret that all 24 school districts are in urgent need of adequate capital funding to construct, renovate, and maintain school facilities. Adequately maintaining school facilities requires significant investments from both state and local governments, in part because the General Assembly has enacted significant mandates affecting school construction procedures and project costs, including strict environmental design standards and minority business enterprise contracting participation standards; and the recently expanded scope of prevailing wage rates. Under the current $250 million approach, we’re finding that project costs that dramatically exceed projected cost estimates means the anticipated state and local appropriations for pending projects just aren’t enough.

Sure, we can find ways to cut costs. Using repeat designs for elementary schools is one way. Public-private partnerships is another. In Anne Arundel County, I represent the district where we partnered with a local developer and a charter school company to open a brand new contract elementary school in just under one year. The developer made the land available for purchase so the charter school company could construct a 64,000 square foot modular building on that property that will eventually house close to 800 students in grades K-8. This type of construction will certainly require more maintenance than a traditional elementary
school over the course of its lifetime, but the quick, modular construction helped us quickly address exploding population growth in that part of our county, with on-going maintenance costs to be borne by the charter school company.

Is this the way to go with all school construction? Probably not – unless annual maintenance budgets increase significantly. Could we share designs across LEA’s to save design dollars? Maybe. But in a district like mine where magnet schools are prolific – a high school designed to accommodate a biomedical and allied health magnet program is not going to work at a high school designed to be a performing arts magnet. I’d hate to see design standardization take away the local board’s right to design schools that fit their population.

The needs and uses of public schools are dynamic, and local boards of education must be able to adequately address and finance the range of facility needs in the future. MABE supports a state funding level of at least $350 million for school construction and renovation projects for FY 2018 to provide the State’s share of approved projects to build, renovate, and improve school facilities throughout Maryland.

For more information on this or any other education matter, please contact MABE’s Director of Governmental Relations, John R. Woolums, Esq., at jwoolums@mabe.org or 410-841-5414.