

BILL: Senate Bill 1030
TITLE: The Blueprint for Maryland's Future
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: March 6, 2019
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Budget and Taxation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, strongly supports Senate Bill 1030 in order to launch the funding and policy recommendations of the Kirwan Commission on Excellence and Innovation in Education.

Maryland must renew its commitment to fulfilling its constitutional mandate to fully fund the equitable access to an excellent education for all students. MABE firmly believes that local boards must be at the helm, and accountable, for fulfilling their responsibility to govern school systems in the best interests of all students. MABE believes this legislation, "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future," will make possible significant improvements in the educational outcomes for all Maryland students by ensuring a balance of funding initiatives and increases, and strengthened accountability measures.

The Kirwan Commission labored for more than two years to craft a comprehensive set of educational reforms. The Commission's work was supported by outside consultants who concluded that Maryland has fallen far below adequate funding levels based on our college and career ready learning standards. This legislation will accomplish much of the Commission's vision by providing major increases in State funding for priority programs such as prekindergarten, early interventions for struggling learners, teacher compensation, students in communities with concentrated poverty, and special education programs and services.

MABE strongly supports this bill's significant expansion of prekindergarten funding to support all four-year olds in full-day programs. Decades of research have confirmed that quality educational components to early child care arrangements have a positive impact on children's development, well-being, and academic potential. State school readiness research shows that children with formal prekindergarten experiences prior to entering kindergarten enjoy much higher levels of school readiness.

This legislation would also provide much needed increases in funding for special education services. Today, Maryland's local school systems are ensuring that students receive high quality special education programs and instruction to meet the unique needs of every student. Maryland's public school systems are mandated to provide a wide array of special education services in accordance and compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and corresponding federal and state regulations. Unfortunately, federal funding is woefully inadequate to support the federally mandated services. The significant State funding provided by this legislation will contribute mightily to supporting these underfunded but critically important services.

MABE is pleased that this legislation includes the new funding program to support schools with high concentrations of poverty. Maryland has seen the increase in the enrollment of students who are economically disadvantaged based on family income; an increase from 35% to 45% of all students in the past 10 years. At the same time, Maryland remains a very wealthy state that has wide gaps in income among communities, and high concentrations of poverty in many areas. Therefore, MABE supported the Commission's recommendation to add a concentrated poverty weight to the funding formula to support intensive services for students and their families to enable them to succeed in school, that are coordinated and able to meet the additional needs of students in schools located in distressed communities.

MABE also supports this bill's provision of significant funding to support supplemental instruction for struggling learners. Students across the State will benefit from the expanded access to one-on-one and small-group tutoring with a certified teacher, a teaching assistant, or any other trained professional.

Local boards place a very high priority on the value of our classroom teachers to educate and inspire our students each day. This bill would advance the State role in compensating teachers for their work by funding an additional 1.5 percent in salary increases, based on locally funded increases of at least 3 percent. In addition, seed grants would be provided to teacher collaboratives between school systems and teacher preparation programs. MABE greatly appreciates the Commission's attention to the critically important issues surrounding student access to high quality teachers in every school and classroom. This bill represents a significant step toward achieving this goal.

Local boards recognize that a major component of the Kirwan Commission recommendations centered on increased accountability for local school systems. This bill would strengthen Maryland's accountability system by expanding the oversight role of the General Assembly to conduct performance audits of state and local government agencies, including local school systems. MABE believes that this approach should garner the shared commitments of the Governor, General Assembly, State Board, local governments, and local school systems. MABE generally prefers this type of approach to increased accountability versus the creation of another State board, agency, or governing body.

On behalf of local boards of education, MABE is committed to strong advocacy for the funding and policy reforms contained in this legislation toward the goal of providing the constitutionally adequate and equitable funding needed to support a world class education for all students.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 1030.