

C. Tolbert Rowe, MABE Immediate Past President

Statement to the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence

November 12, 2019

I am Tolbert Rowe, a member of the Caroline County Board of Education, and Immediate Past President of MABE. The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, appreciates this opportunity to present our positions, priorities, and concerns regarding the pending policy and funding decisions being considered by the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

MABE is honored to be represented on the Commission by former MABE President Joy Schaefer, and greatly respects the dedication and expertise of each member of the Commission. MABE has participated fully in the Commission's work, and supports the thrust of significantly increasing the State's investment in a high performing and innovative statewide system of public schools toward the goal of improving our schools so that our students are as well prepared as students educated in the highest performing school systems in the world.

Local boards of education, through MABE, led the advocacy effort to create the Commission precisely so that an updated adequacy study and other funding and accountability issues could be debated and transformed into legislation to update and improve Maryland's school finance system. Local boards believe that Maryland can and should move forward by adopting meaningful changes to our current school finance system, a system we can all be proud of, but which now dates back to 2002.

Launching Kirwan is a constitutional imperative in Maryland. The Maryland State Constitution requires the General Assembly to:

“establish throughout the State a thorough and efficient system of free public schools; and shall provide by taxation or otherwise for their maintenance.”

The State agreed to uphold its constitutional duty by enacting the Bridge to Excellence Act in 2002. Today, Maryland is poised to reaffirm this duty to our students by enacting and funding the Kirwan Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

MABE is confident that on a timeline not to exceed 10 years, Maryland can renew its commitment to fulfilling its constitutional mandate to fully fund and support the equitable access for all students to an excellent education in all twenty-four school systems. Extending this schedule of funding increases and reforms beyond 10 years is unacceptable. Maryland's nearly 1 million public school students deserve a world class education today.

Thank you for your leadership in developing your recommendations. MABE looks forward to the successful passage of the Kirwan Blueprint legislation in the 2020 session.

Julie Hummer, MABE Legislative Committee Chair
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I am Julie Hummer, a member of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education, and MABE's Legislative Committee Chair.

MABE views the Kirwan Blueprint for Maryland's Future as a "Call to Action" for the building of a world class education system in Maryland. MABE supports the focus on policy and funding recommendations in the following major policy areas, to ensure that each student is provided with:

- High-quality early childhood education programs;
- High-quality and diverse teachers and principals;
- Access to college and career readiness pathways (including advanced college prep programs and career and technical education that leads to employment); and
- The significant additional state and local resources needed to ensure that each and every student is afforded every opportunity to succeed.

For MABE, the Kirwan Blueprint appropriately focuses on our youngest learners as well as our students on the threshold of moving on to success in college and careers. Local boards recognize the need to invest in high-quality early childhood education. This includes a significant expansion of full-day pre-school, which will be free to for all low-income three- and four-year-olds. These programs are critically important if we are to truly prepare each child to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

MABE supports the Commission's recommendation to count prekindergarten students as enrolled, but also to county them separately for State funding purposes through the implementation phase. Importantly, MABE endorses the Commission's recommendation to define prekindergarten students as enrolled students for purposes of triggering the mandatory local share of funding on a per pupil basis.

MABE and local boards also strongly support the Commission's focus on creating a world-class instructional system which will enable most students to achieve "college- and career-ready" status by the end of tenth grade and then pursue pathways that include early college, Advanced Placement courses, and/or a rigorous career and technical education (CTE) programs leading to industry-recognized credentials and high-paying jobs.

CTE programs are in high demand, and critically needed to prepare our students for success. This is why MABE supports significantly increased state funding to expand and strengthen the system of comprehensive high schools with specialized CTE programs, and specialized CTE high schools, in accordance with local school system priorities and local board governance.

MABE also agrees with the Commission that we should introduce students to career and academic options early, including during middle school to give students the opportunity to take introductory CTE coursework in order to engage their interest and retain them in high school.

Thank you for your vision in providing a comprehensive set of recommendations and reforms to improve school readiness and college and career readiness for our students. MABE believes these programs will prove to have an enormous return on investment for our students, communities and the entire state.

Pamela L. Cousins, Secretary, MABE Board of Directors
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Good evening, I am Pamela Cousins, a member of the Calvert County Board of Education, and Secretary on MABE's Board of Directors.

Equity, in funding and educational policies and programs, is a top priority for MABE and the local boards we represent. For MABE, educational equity means providing access to essential academic, social, emotional, and economic supports in order to engage each student in rigorous instruction with appropriate educational resources to achieve their highest potential.

Funding equity is necessary to support educational equity, and clear and formal requirements for state and local investments in programs, schools and students are needed to ensure that both of these equity outcomes are achieved. This is why MABE so strongly supports the Commission's recommendations to increase funding for all students, but even more so for students learning English, receiving special education services, from economically disadvantaged households and communities, and struggling learners.

MABE also supports adding a concentrated poverty 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.

Lastly, MABE strongly endorses the Commission's recommendation to phase-in a new requirement for local governments to pay a local share of per pupil funding for economically disadvantaged students, students receiving special education services, and students learning English. The current funding formulas provide substantial state funding, on a wealth-equalized basis. However, the law includes no mandate that local governments "close the gap" by providing an equitable local share of per pupil funding for these students who need a strong, shared investment of state and local dollars the most.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Maryland's public schools and each and every one of our students.