

MEMORANDUM

TO: MABE Ad Hoc Committee on the Blueprint for Maryland's Future
FROM: John Woolums
DATE: 11/8/2021

SUBJECT: Response to request to identify assumptions underlying the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education recommendations

The NCEE Gap Analysis

Primary sources for identifying key underlying assumptions of the Blueprint law can be found in the work of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). More specifically, NCEE refers to the work of its program, the Center on International Education Benchmarking® (CIEB), which “funds and conducts research around the world on the most successful education systems to identify the strategies those countries have used to produce their superior performance.”

As this work relates to Maryland, NCEE presented CIEB’s findings to the Kirwan Commission in January 2018 in a 140-page report entitled, “[How Does Maryland Stack Up? Gap Analysis Comparing Maryland to International and Domestic Top Performers](#)” (CIEB, NCEE, 2018). This extensive gap analysis is organized according to NCEE’s 9 building blocks, which were subsequently integrated into the Blueprint law’s 5 major policy areas.

As recently as November 4, 2021, Dr. Brit Kirwan referred to the NCEE Gap Analysis as the best resource for reviewing the assumptions guiding the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission and ultimately the Blueprint law itself.

Outline of NCEE’s 9 Building Blocks and Opening Statements of Each Gap Analysis

Building Block 1

PROVIDE STRONG SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES BEFORE STUDENTS ARRIVE AT SCHOOL

The Benchmark

To ensure readiness at school, top performing jurisdictions provide strong supports for children and their families before children arrive at school.

Building Block 2

PROVIDE MORE RESOURCES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

How Does Maryland Compare?

Equitable and adequate financial resources for at-risk students: Per-pupil spending in Maryland is the 10th highest among states, but drops to 16th highest when adjusted for regional cost differences. While Maryland spends more than many states on education,

we would expect it to be a higher spender given its wealth, as Maryland's median income level is the highest in the nation.

Building Blocks 3 & 4

INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS AND GATEWAYS

This gap analysis focuses on instructional systems and gateways and summarizes what the top-performing benchmark jurisdictions and Maryland do in terms of: • standards and whether they are benchmarked; • curriculum and assessment and whether they are aligned; • the format of assessments, including whether they are writing-, problem- and project-focused and whether scoring is transparent; and • the exit requirements for high school, whether they align with the entry requirements for postsecondary, and whether these are what is needed to be successful.

Building Block 5

ASSURE AN ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS WITH THE NECESSARY DISPOSITIONS, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The Benchmark

Top-performing systems believe it will be impossible to deliver to all their students the kind and quality of education formerly reserved for their elites unless they are able to put a highly skilled teacher in front of all their students. These teachers must possess strong enthusiasm for teaching; the ability to connect with students; mastery of the subject matter they will teach, including the conceptual underpinnings of the subject and how to teach that subject effectively; and the ability to conduct research to design new strategies, monitor their own effectiveness, and continually improve their craft.

Building Block 6

REDESIGN SCHOOLS TO BE PLACES IN WHICH TEACHERS WILL BE TREATED AS PROFESSIONALS, WITH INCENTIVES AND SUPPORT TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE THEIR PRACTICE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR STUDENTS

The Benchmark

The top-performing systems have designed schools to be places in which teachers are treated as professionals, with incentives and support to continually improve their practice and the performance of their students.

Building Block 7

CREATE AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Benchmark

Key to a healthy economy is an effective system of career and technical education (CTE), which is also sometimes known as vocational education and training (VET) in other countries. These CTE systems offer a viable route to well-paying occupations as well as postsecondary education and training. Employers often take the lead in designing CTE programs to ensure that students are working towards standards that reflect industry expectations and current skill needs.

Building Block 8

CREATE A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM THAT DEVELOPS LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS TO MANAGE SUCH SYSTEMS EFFECTIVELY

The Benchmark

The global top performers all prioritize developing skilled principals who can ensure that their schools offer high quality and equitable learning opportunities to their students. They see them not simply as skilled managers and administrators but as the spear of their strategies to implement highly effective, complex and integrated strategies to greatly improve student performance and close gaps at scale. Perhaps most important, they see their principals as crucial to the selection, development and effective support of highly-qualified professional teachers.

Building Block 9

INSTITUTE A GOVERNANCE SYSTEM TO DEVELOP POWERFUL POLICIES AND IMPLEMENT THEM AT SCALE

High-performing education systems have governance systems with the authority and legitimacy to develop coherent, powerful policies and are capable of implementing them at scale. This means that: • roles and responsibilities are clear; • there are shared goals across the system; • progress towards these goals are clearly tracked; and • there are ways to identify parts of the system that are not performing well and to provide effective help so that they improve.