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January 3, 2023

Sent via email only

The Honorable Governor-Elect Wes Moore
State House, 100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor-Elect Moore:

We are writing on behalf of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) to respectfully request your consideration of several funding and policy issues relating to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the FY 2024 State Budget. MABE is wholly committed to the successful launch and full funding and successful implementation of the Blueprint. To this end, in July of 2021 MABE created an ad hoc committee on the Blueprint to provide a forum for coordinated monitoring, inquiry, analysis, and communications relating to the state and local implementation of the Blueprint. The following funding and policy requests were developed through MABE's Blueprint Implementation Committee and are intended to help ensure successful outcomes in each of our 24 local school systems and for each of our nearly 900,000 public school students.

Full-Day Prekindergarten Expansion

MABE requests your support for the development of a comprehensive state plan to address the operating and capital costs of fully implementing the Prekindergarten (PreK) expansion contained in the Blueprint. Local school systems are striving to implement the Blueprint's mandate to ensure access to all income eligible families to full-day PreK for their three and four year olds, either in public schools or through partnerships with private providers. Under the Blueprint, both public and private PreK programs must meet rising quality standards and have adequate classroom space. Statewide experience, to date, shows that private sector interest in participation is minimal, based on the increased costs and other restrictions within the Blueprint relative to doing business as usual. Local school systems understand this, but have no control over private provider business decisions, and therefore must reasonably prepare to provide the overwhelming majority of expanded full-day PreK called for by the Blueprint. Public school systems also struggle to secure sufficient numbers of highly qualified PreK teachers and aides and request your support for expedited funding and programming to address these needs. Further, given the insufficient classroom space for PreK, MABE also requests substantially increased school construction funding in the FY 2024 capital budget, and beyond, for public PreK projects.

Enrollment

Maryland's school finance system hinges on per pupil funding and equitable increases in per pupil funding for categories of students with special needs. Under the Blueprint, both the state and local shares of funding are intended to increase to benefit all students, including students receiving special education services, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students and communities. The COVID pandemic saw dramatic reductions in student enrollment and, unfortunately, many school systems continue to experience such reductions. MABE appreciates the hold harmless provisions enacted in recent years to prevent the detrimental impact reduced enrollment would otherwise have on the mandated amount of state and local funding. Today, certain school systems continue to experience some drop in enrollment. However, these reductions are not proportionate to the ongoing demands on fixed costs to maintain teachers and other staffing levels and other operational and administrative costs. For this reason, MABE

requests that state education aid in FY 2024 provide another year of hold harmless funding levels for school systems with decreasing enrollment.

Inflation

The Blueprint utilizes the revised enrollment counts and increased foundation amount of per pupil funding in conjunction with additional amounts of per pupil funding for students under the categories of special education, English learners, and economically disadvantaged. The law defines the annual target Per Pupil Foundation Amounts (PPFAs) of state education funding to be provided each year from FY 2023 through the full implementation of the Blueprint in FY 2033, after which the PPFA will begin to increase annually by inflation. However, not only does the Blueprint fail to include an inflation factor adjustment for state funding until 2033, it also eliminates the education effort adjustment to ensure increased local funding.

MABE supported the 2012 maintenance of effort (MOE) reform legislation which established the requirement, beginning in FY 2015, that a county with an education effort below the five-year statewide average education effort must increase its MOE payment to the local school board each year its local wealth base increases. The mandated increase is the lesser of the increase in a county's per pupil wealth, the average statewide increase in per pupil local wealth, or 2.5%. This provision is known as the "MOE escalator". The Blueprint eliminates the MOE escalator beginning in FY 2024, thereby eliminating the funding role of the education effort index. MABE urges your consideration of the need to provide a meaningful inflation adjustment to Blueprint funding through the implementation phase, and to provide a mandated local funding adjustment to ensure adequate local investments essential to the Blueprint's success.

College and Career Readiness

The Blueprint includes clear mandates to provide guaranteed access to high quality college preparatory and career training programs for all students meeting academic standards. The success of these programs relies on partnerships between each local system and community colleges and many other institutions of higher education as well as with local workforce development boards and myriad employers. Fortunately, the Blueprint provides substantial funding, including per pupil funding amounts to local workforce development boards. However, the Blueprint also imposes significant burdens on local school systems to support these costs as well as the costs of dual enrollment in higher education classes. These well-intended Blueprint provisions are required to be implemented on a timeline that is not aligned with sufficient state resources to provide access to all eligible students to college and career readiness programs. Therefore, MABE requests alignment of state funding and the costs of program expansion to ensure equitable access to all students.

World Class CTE Facilities

The Blueprint includes clear mandates to provide guaranteed access to high quality college preparatory and career training programs for all students meeting college and career readiness academic standards. The success of these programs relies on partnerships between each local system and community colleges and many other institutions of higher education as well as with local workforce development boards and myriad employers. MABE recognizes that the Blueprint calls for much more teaching and learning of high school students in colleges and at workplaces. However, the major expansion of CTE programs will also require the construction of new technical high schools and renovations of existing comprehensive high schools. Therefore, MABE is requesting increased state investments in FY 2024 and beyond in locally identified school facility projects aligned with the CTE expansion required by the Blueprint.

Student Behavioral Health

The pandemic heightened public awareness regarding the severity of scope of the mental and behavioral health needs of students, and the lack of adequate professional staff to meet these needs. MABE joins other education advocates in urging bold and innovative programming at the higher education level to recruit high school and college students to pursue degrees in fields such as school counseling, school psychology, school social work, and school nursing. Importantly, these staff positions are not included under the Blueprint's mandated salary increases for teachers. Therefore, MABE urges consideration of future state investments in short and long-term solutions to providing the professional resources our students deserve.

Governance and Accountability

MABE, and all 24 local boards of education, recognize the magnitude and value of the education reforms contained in the Blueprint. MABE also advocates vigorously that state and local initiatives not reduce local board governance or budgetary authority or create unfunded mandates. Therefore, as the Blueprint legislation was being enacted, MABE raised concerns with the unprecedented creation of the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) and its plenary power over the governance authorities of the State Department and Board of Education, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and certainly local boards of education.

MABE is pleased to report that to date the operation of the AIB, through its members, work groups, and staff, have evidenced a strong commitment to collaboration and coordination with the State Board, MSDE and local school systems. MABE believes that continued state investments in staffing of the AIB and MSDE are essential to achieving and sustaining the capacity to lead Blueprint implementation. Similarly, MABE requests designated state funding to support the compensation of local Blueprint Coordinators, whose ongoing professional responsibilities deserve such a targeted investment.

MABE's Priorities in the 2023 Session

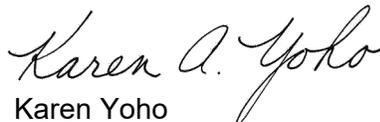
MABE's 2023 Legislative Positions include position statements on key state and federal issues and priority positions in support of local board governance and adequate and equitable state and local funding. Maryland's local boards of education are dedicated to the work of governing local school systems so that all students are prepared for success in their futures. Thank you for your vision and leadership in supporting these efforts.

MABE looks forward to an ongoing dialogue and productive relationship with you and your administration in pursuit of funding and policy actions to ensure an excellent education for each of Maryland's nearly 900,000 public school students. Thank you for your consideration of the requests and concerns we have identified concerning the Blueprint and [MABE's 2023 Legislative Positions](#). Please do not hesitate to contact MABE regarding these or any other educational matters.

Sincerely,



Joseph W. Goetz
President
Blueprint Implementation Committee Chair



Karen Yoho
Legislative Committee Chair