



Maryland Education Coalition – 2020 Public Policy Platform*



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Adequate Funding and Equal Educational Opportunity - The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is a group of organizations and individuals that have advocated at the local, state and federal level for adequate, equitable policies, funding and systemic accountability for 900,000 plus public school students in Maryland's schools, regardless of their academic, cultural, economic, geographic, racial or other demographic status, for over 40 years. We work to ensure that Maryland provides for all students "a thorough and efficient System of Free Public Schools; and shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance" as required by **Article VIII of the Maryland Constitution**; that all students are "taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers in conformity with the federal **Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 (ESSA)**"; and to "ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights."

➤ **Core Academic Subjects** – All students must be adequately and equitably provided access to quality instruction in each core academic subject area defined in state law or regulation, including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography and the arts (*dance, media arts, music, theatre, visual arts*). Each subject must be taught by highly qualified educators, grounded in evidence-based standards that are age, grade, ability or program appropriate to allow academic growth. All courses must be evaluated to ensure they are evidence-based based as per current expectations and standards, consistent with assessment content. We believe that each student must have adequate, equitable access to a range of non-core subjects and programs as well.

➤ **Challenging Programs for All** - The State, in cooperation with local school systems, has a responsibility to meet the educational needs of all children, including lower-income, special needs, limited English, Gifted and Talented and twice exceptional. All students must be universally screened for reading, hearing, vision and Gifted and Talented status by third grade using successful evidence-based practices. The talents and abilities of all children must be recognized and supported with challenging, appropriate academic options in all subject areas, as defined by state regulation using successful practices.

➤ **Discrimination** – MEC opposes discrimination against staff, students, parents/guardians or visitors by age, culture, economic status, educational background, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, language, marital status, mental ability, national origin, parental status, physical ability, political philosophy, race, religion, sexual orientation or work experience.

➤ **Public Funds for Public Schools** - MEC supports adequate, equitable investment of public money in public and approved private special needs schools only - essential for teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for our children to be contributing members in our communities, without discrimination. MEC opposes the use of any public operating or capital funds for vouchers, tax credits, or tax subsidies for all other non-public, private, parochial or home schools.

Charter Schools - Charter schools must be subject to the same rigorous teaching requirements, academic, and fiscal accountability standards as are traditional public schools without discrimination against any student.

Discipline – Ample evidence establishes that too many children continue to be pushed out of school.

These children are disproportionately students of color, lower-income, students with disabilities or gifted and talented. Once suspended, these children are denied crucial instruction time and placed at significant risk of disengaging from school, dropping out, acting inappropriately or entering the criminal justice system.

Students enrolled in Pre-K through 3rd grade must never be removed from their regular program, except as allowed by federal or state law, and only after all other options have been thoroughly explored, investigated and documented using proven evidence-based practices reviewed and agreed upon by all responsible stakeholders (*administrator(s), guidance counselor, mental health professional, student advocate, parents/guardian.*)

Schools should use exclusionary consequences only as a last resort. Whenever possible, removal from the normal classroom or school setting, including alternative placements, suspensions and expulsions, should be replaced by more appropriate and meaningful techniques, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices, bullying prevention, conflict resolution and peer mediation, designed to keep kids in school and learning with trained, effective oversight and regular reports to the parent(s).

Dropout Prevention and Alternative Education – The State must provide increased financial and programmatic incentives for local systems to develop early intervention strategies and alternative programs for low-achieving, chronically absent, at-risk or behaviorally challenged students. Maryland cannot afford the loss of human potential, which results from unacceptably high alternative program enrollment or dropout rates within all student groups, especially disproportionate numbers of lower income, special needs and students of color. Local school systems must develop and maintain high-quality career, technology or vocational programs for students who are not college-bound that allow opportunities for internships, certification and quality post-secondary employment.

Early Intervention and Pre-Kindergarten - Developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and other early intervention programs must be available for all children in Maryland with priority access to lower-income students. All Pre-K and primary grade students must be universally screened for reading using evidence-based practices. Qualified eye and hearing exams referrals must be made available for students not meeting age and academic milestones and students identified as "struggling learners" must have access to transitional supplemental instruction and related resources. Pre-school education programs must be coordinated with state approved child-care and other services as needed. Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must be fully funded and fully implemented to ensure appropriate interventions for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

Equity and Equality – All education funding and public policy decisions must apply equity principles of fairness that are culturally unbiased, using equality principles that reduce achievement, learning and opportunity gaps among all student groups regardless of community, cultural, economic, familial, linguistic and racial status.

Family and Community Involvement – Federal law requires and MEC supports family and community involvement in schools.

Education policy requires meaningful stakeholder consultation with parents, students, community members, principals, teachers, and other staff in the decision-making process. Every school district and school must have an effective and adequately supported program to welcome, involve, inform, and support families and their students using best practices. Promoting an environment in which parents are valued partners in their children's education and development is essential.

➤ **Family and Community Services** - The State Department of Education and local school systems must support school-based, community and government linked services that meet student and family academic, social, emotional and physical health needs through collaboration among families, students, school personnel, community leaders, social or health care specialists, and others from nonprofit or government agencies, including community, summer and before/after-school programs in qualified community-based centers.

Healthy Lifestyles – MEC supports healthy lifestyles in nutrition, exercise and instruction by expecting that all foods, beverages and snacks served by schools meet National School Nutrition Standards. All students must have access to physical and health education as well as opportunities to be physically active for 60 minutes per day. All policies must include all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Pupil Transportation – The State must provide substantial support and base its grants on the current need for and costs of providing adequate transportation, staffing and training with safety as a priority for all eligible public-school children throughout Maryland.

School Construction – MEC believes all public school facilities must meet 21st century standards, and that a safe and supportive learning environment is a factor in ensuring equal educational opportunity. The State must allocate ample funds for school construction, renovation, maintenance, systemic replacements, and safety in a way that prioritizes need by district and major category. Children from every jurisdiction must be treated fairly and equitably and assured adequate, attractive, physically accessible, environmentally comfortable, technologically appropriate, and well-maintained space for instruction and family/community services that promote child development. MEC also supports smaller learning and career-technology programs within larger school facilities with appropriate program offerings, facility modifications, staffing, and instructional resources.

School Performance and Accountability - The overall goal of student assessment and testing programs must be to improve instruction and increase learning. Assessments should be used to increase the opportunities for students and not as the primary method of evaluating teachers, nor as punitive tools for school systems, schools, staff or students. Testing alone cannot be the only tool to measure the success of a school, which is why it is essential that MSDE should select School Quality and Student Success Indicators, as federally required by ESSA, to provide a clearer picture of the student experience in a school and areas for needed improvement. All assessments or tests must be independently evaluated for cultural, linguistic or racial bias and used in an unbiased, scientifically valid manner. The amount of classroom time devoted to testing students must not exceed a point at which undermines instruction and learning.

Recruitment and Retention of School Personnel - To attract and retain talented, motivated, and effective teachers, principals, and other school-based personnel, the State, in partnership with every school district, must ensure a compensation package (salaries and benefits) that is competitive with those offered to other professionals with comparable levels of education and professional licenses in their geographic region.

Each district must have a salary scale and a benefits package that adequately supports entry-level personnel, appropriately rewards experienced staff, and is balanced and fair across district lines. There should be ample opportunities for growth within each staff member's area of expertise, and documented exit interviews.

➤ **School Leaders and Central Office Staff** - Quality school leaders are essential to the performance of schools; therefore, they must be adequately trained, evaluated, and recognized for their accomplishments in the educational system with additional support and accountability for those not meeting expected standards. School systems should implement long-term strategies to develop leaders at all levels including teachers, principals, support staff, and central administrators.

➤ **School Personnel Preparation and Development** - High standards, rigorous preparation, self-discipline, and ongoing professional development are the hallmarks of a strong profession. The State must set high entry standards for educators and encourage professionals at all levels to participate in the formation and enactment of policies regarding preparation, certification, and development promoting professional development opportunities. We also support collaborative partnerships with certified post-secondary institutions and the use of alternative paths by which an individual with a baccalaureate degree may enter the teaching profession, become certified and successful. All training must include quality content about the characteristics of all student groups including cultural competency, behavioral interventions and safety.

School Safety and Climate - MEC supports the allocation of funds that will help to improve school safety and climate, as determined school-by-school. We do not believe there is enough evidence that deployment of School Resource Officers (SROs) is always the right solution for maintaining safe schools. Local decision-makers are in the best position to create safety plans designed to develop positive school climates, keep kids in school and learning, and avoid the criminalization of students. The State must specify and standardize among all districts, the type of incidents addressed by SRO/Police versus school administrators or staff. Training must include identifying and appropriate actions with students.

➤ **Child/Sex Abuse or Neglect** - Schools must establish clear expectations and training for all staff, so they recognize and report abuse and neglect in accordance with all laws in a timely manner.

Special Education - The State, in cooperation with local systems, is responsible to meet the educational needs of all children, including those with learning, physical, emotional, and mental disabilities. The State must provide adequate funding, leadership, direction, guidance, and monitoring of local systems to assure that all students with disabilities are provided a high quality, free, and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment with post-secondary opportunities. Adequate instructional and support resources must meet the needs of each identified student.