



Maryland Education Coalition

The Maryland Education Coalition is dedicated to raising the academic achievement of students in Maryland public schools by promoting adequate funding and systemic accountability for improving results.

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Testimony before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee In Support of Senate Bill 726 Education - State Funding - Operating and Capital Funds March 7, 2014

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) fights for adequate, equitable funding and systemic accountability because every child deserves a quality education and because achievement gaps must be closed.

Maryland's Constitution requires only one specific service – free and adequate public education. The quality of schools should not depend on race, class, wealth, or jurisdiction. Maryland's historic commitment to equitable and adequate funding of public schools has improved learning generally, reduced disparities, and brought national recognition, but inadequacies remain within and among school districts.

Fairness requires that the State aid formula is adjusted for the true cost of education. That is why the Thornton Commission went to great pains to calculate the additional cost to educate an economically disadvantaged student or a student who needs to learn English. The additional cost of education in higher cost jurisdictions of the State is no less real than those child-related types of factors and should have no less recognition in the mandated formula. To help alleviate this issue, the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI) was created to provide additional support to jurisdictions with higher educational costs.

The fiscal note recognizes that GCEI has been fully funded for several consecutive years. Any future failure to fund it would not be fair to the children who attend school in higher-cost counties. In years when the budget faced great strain, GCEI was often put up for elimination. SB 726 would solidify the importance and purpose of GCEI and help ensure all Maryland students receive a quality education regardless of location.

Additionally, MEC would like to see an increase in support for improving the public school buildings where our children learn, concentrating on areas of greatest need. Every child and school employee deserves a school building that promotes and protects academic achievement and occupant health, but unacceptable disparities persist. State capital aid has not been sufficiently focused on students' needs for healthy environments and learning facilities that match curriculum in addition to growing student populations in some jurisdictions. In order to provide more resources for public school construction, this bill would create a new school construction funding floor goal for FY 2016 set at \$403 million and links future school facilities funding to the increase in projected school construction costs as approved by the Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC). With billions of dollars in need in every jurisdiction in Maryland, an increase in school construction is sorely needed.