



THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 46
BALTIMORE CITY

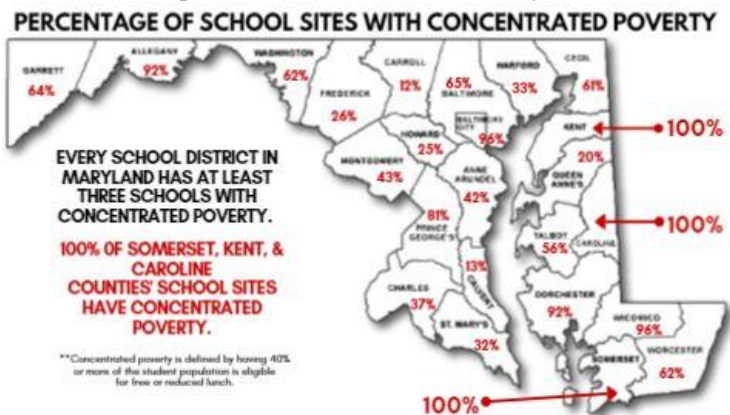
October 12, 2017

I address this distinguished Commission this evening as the representative of Maryland’s 46th District in the Maryland State Senate, but also on behalf of my delegation members in the 46th District – Delegates Luke Clippinger, Brooke Lierman, and Robbyn Lewis. Chairperson Kirwan and Commissioners, thank you for allowing me to testify, and thank you for providing Team 46 the opportunity to pass along the thoughts of those who represent 122,000 Marylanders who call Baltimore City home.

The task before this Commission presents a once in a generation opportunity to set a bold vision for a world-class education for all Maryland’s children. That is an awesome and grave responsibility with lasting consequences. We have not made substantial changes to the current funding formula since its enactment in 2002, and we likely will not take on such a substantial review for at least another 15 years. Therefore, your work product will almost certainly impact the educational trajectory for every one of our State’s current kindergartners through his or her graduation from a Maryland high school.

I ask you to imagine those kindergartners today, having learned just a few hours ago about shapes, colors, counting, and basic reading. Where is he or she in 15 years? Is he or she graduating with the skills and knowledge to succeed in a career? Is he or she leaving school without the need for remediation in post-secondary studies? Is he or she prepared to be an active and engaged citizen? Or is he or she facing a roll of the dice, dependent on the zip code in which the child was born to have the chance to live an economically independent life?

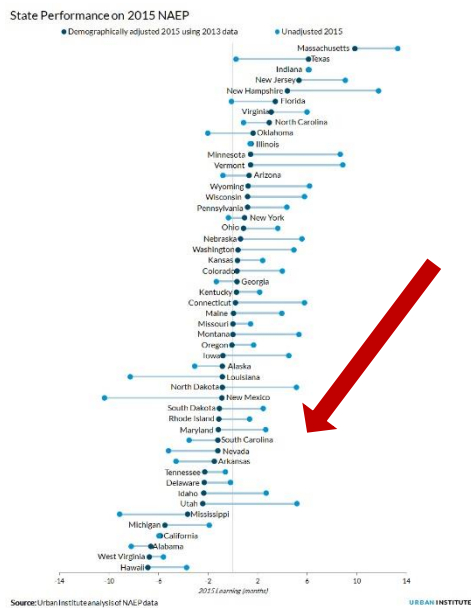
As a former Baltimore City teacher and parent of a Baltimore City Public Schools kindergartner, I deeply understand that the work you are doing is heavy, urgent, and immensely important. I have followed the Commission from the beginning and have seen the time and seriousness that each of you has brought into this work. I am immensely confident that each one of you will do what is right.



The Commission’s focus on the National Center for Education & the Economy’s Nine Building Blocks of a World-Class Education System serves a solid foundation for setting Maryland on a path towards educational excellence and equity. Within this framework, I trust that you will wisely use the testimony from experts, practitioners, advocates, and researchers that have come before this Commission to establish a clear vision that the General Assembly can debate and enact as quickly as possible. I know that you recognize the importance of this body’s work, and I have great faith in your commitment to this moment.

Education in Maryland has glimmers of excellence in our statewide system – wonderful schools that produce secondary and workforce ready students. However, access and success to those opportunities are not equitably distributed. Unfortunately, far too many of the over 880,000 students in Maryland are not afforded the same pathways to success.

Nationally, concentrated poverty is defined by having 40% or more of the school population qualifying for free or reduced priced meals. Today in Maryland, every single school district in our State has at least three schools with concentrated poverty, and in 14 of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions, a majority of the schools in the county have concentrated poverty. Three counties – Kent, Somerset, and Caroline – have 100% of their schools with concentrated poverty. Given the changing demographics of Maryland and the widening income equality gaps we see growing all too quickly, this issue is not just a Baltimore City issue, it is a Maryland issue.



Furthermore, Maryland is the only State in the nation where average scores in math and reading at grades 4 and 8 dropped between 2013 and 2015 on the NAEP exams. This brought Maryland’s overall ranking to 23rd in the country – far below many peoples’ perceptions of a state with the greatest wealth in the nation. What is more disheartening, Maryland’s rank fell from 23rd to 37th among states when student subgroups were compared and averaged. The implication of this dramatic statistic: despite the good in our system, we are not sufficiently serving our highest need populations, most acutely with regard to English-language learners, special needs students, and lower-income students.

Yet, the work before this Commission is not just an education matter, it is also about the future of Maryland’s economy. We live in a time of deep economic uncertainty and anxiety. By 2020, two out of three jobs created in Maryland will require more than a high school diploma and at least some post-secondary credential as a minimum qualification. Whether students immediately join the workforce or attend postsecondary education – or both, it is our responsibility that they are prepared to succeed. Today, in our highest income communities and our lowest, we are not meeting this standard. Moving forward, our funding formula and the policies it represents must

offer a new vision based in core beliefs about the potential that all children possess and the coherent governance systems that ensure their success is achieved.

Fundamentally, our students must be able to graduate ready to pursue a postsecondary education, if they choose, without remediation. They all must graduate with the knowledge & skills to succeed in a career in which they can find satisfaction & earn a living wage. And all students must graduate having the knowledge & skills to be an effective citizen to safeguard that we are able to compete in an ever-changing, global economy in the decades ahead.

An organization has emerged, Strong Schools Maryland, that supports the work you are doing to encompass the 9 Building Blocks for a World Class Education into Maryland's education formula. Strong Schools Maryland believes that, with public will and political resolve, the knowledge and skills exist to provide our students with every opportunity to succeed in life. Their grassroots organizing effort across the State is meant to support the Commission and keep its focus on the needed outcomes for Maryland.



The beauty of this Commission is that it has the opportunity to ignore the politics of a legislative process and set forth a report that is right for Maryland's children, families, and economic future. I urge you not to dwell on what you believe will be politically feasible. The time for politics will surely arrive, but now is not that time. Permit the elected leadership of our state to own that burden. Instead, I urge you to produce a report to the Governor and General Assembly that:

- Creates real partnerships with Maryland's employers so that we establish clear career pathways for all students;
- Makes bold investments in high quality early childhood education opportunities for all families so that all children and their families enter the schools ready to succeed;
- Includes genuine accountability and transparent goals that educators, parents, and the community can fully appreciate and understand;
- Incentivizes targeted investments in educator career ladders throughout the State so that the best and brightest professionals lead all of our children's classrooms every day; and,
- Revises our wealth equalizing funding formula to realistically and predictably target more resources to the students and schools that need them most.

I conclude this evening by bringing your attention back to those five year olds across Maryland's classrooms. The world ahead of them is limitless. With the right opportunities, their potential knows no bounds. They will embark on careers in jobs that we cannot even imagine today, in a world that will look remarkably different and more advanced than ours does right now. In a state like Maryland, with its rich geography, enormous economic prowess, deep intellectual capital, and innovative business community, there is every reason to believe that each

of those 5 year-old children in our State's classrooms will live a productive, economically independent, and engaged life for decades to come.

Commissioners, you have the opportunity set Maryland on a path towards making that a vision a reality – not just for those kindergarteners, but for all of Maryland's students and families to come.

You were each selected because of your unique talents, valuable contributions, and dedication to Maryland. Do not lose sight of why you are sitting on this Commission. We ask that you keep working tirelessly to set out a bold vision for education in Maryland that inspires us all. We in District 46, know you will do the very best you can, as the future of our State's families, its workforce, and its economic future is in your hands.

Sincerely,



Bill Ferguson
Senator, District 46



Luke Clippinger
Delegate, District 46



Brooke Lierman
Delegate, District 46



Robbyn Lewis
Delegate, District 46