

Adequate Funding and Equal Educational Opportunity – The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate, equitable policies, funding, and transparent accountability statewide for the estimated 900,000 students in Maryland's public schools, regardless of their academic, cultural, economic, geographic, racial, or other demographic status.

We work to ensure that Maryland provides all students *"a thorough and efficient System of Free Public Schools; and shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance"* as defined in Article VII of the Maryland Constitution, so all students are prepared to graduate college or career ready. We believe this is also their civil right.

The State of Maryland and local governments with some support from the federal government must ensure that the State Aid for Public Education is fully funded and equitably distributed to all school districts as defined in state law. This includes the funding, accountability, and policy requirements within the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and public school facility needs. Other state and local agencies must support non-educational student services.

- **Core Academic Subjects** – All students must have access to quality instruction in all subject areas defined in federal or state law and regulations, including English Language Arts, Literacy, reading, mathematics, science, foreign languages, geography, the arts and Local, State, United States & World History. Additional emphasis is needed for quality standards-based Character Education, Civics, Cultural Diversity, Geography, Economics, Personal Finance.

Each course must be staffed with highly qualified educators, grounded in evidence-based and culturally responsive practices standards that are age, grade, ability, or program appropriate allowing academic growth. All courses must be regularly evaluated to ensure they are based on current expectations and standards and consistent with assessment content. We believe that each student must also have access to a well-rounded education including career technology, non-core subjects, or programs as well as courses or activities that promote healthy lifestyles.

MEC also believes that all students must be taught using evidence-based academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in post-secondary college and careers in with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); *to "ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the state and nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights."* MEC also believes that COMAR Regulations in Title 13 A, sections 1-8 & 10-18, must be funded with oversight.

- **Challenging Programs for All** - The State, in cooperation with local school systems, has a responsibility to meet the educational needs and interests of all students, including lower-income families, Students with disabilities, Multilingual students, Gifted and Talented, Twice-exceptional, military, homeless and foster-care. The abilities and talents of all children must be recognized and supported with challenging, appropriate academic options as defined by law or state regulation using evidence-based practices by appropriately trained staff.
- **Discrimination** – MEC opposes discrimination against staff, students, parents/guardians or visitors by age, culture, disability, economic status, educational/work background, , ethnicity, gender Identity, geographic location, immigration status, language, national origin, parental status, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other status.
- **Equity and Equality** – All education funding and public policy decisions must apply universally accepted equity principles of fairness that are culturally responsive, and reduce achievement, learning and opportunity gaps among all student groups regardless of their demographic, financial, geographical or other status.

- **Public Funds for Public Schools** - MEC supports adequate, equitable investment of public funds for public and approved nonpublic special education schools only 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 fairly funded and subject to the same rigorous teaching requirements, academic, and fiscal accountability standards as are traditional public schools without discrimination.

Child/Sex Abuse or Neglect - Schools must establish expectations and training with defined consequences for all staff, so they recognize and report abuse and neglect according to all laws in a timely manner.

Discipline – MEC works to eliminate the *"School to Prison Pipeline."* Evidence shows that too many children continue to be subjected to exclusionary discipline. These children are disproportionately students of color, lower-income, students with disabilities or gifted and talented. Once suspended, these children are often denied crucial instruction time and wrap-around services, creating a risk of disengaging from school, dropping out, acting inappropriately, or illegally.

Students enrolled in Pre-K through third 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 evidence-based practices reviewed and agreed upon by all responsible stakeholders (*administrators, guidance counselor, mental health staff, student advocate and 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 settings using meaningful trauma-informed techniques, such as restorative practices, bullying prevention, conflict resolution, peer mediation or Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), designed to keep kids in school and learning with trained staff, effective oversight, and regular reports to the parent(s). Mental, social, family and health assessments and services must be made available,

- **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 students of color, lower-income, students with disabilities or gifted and talented. Local school systems must develop and maintain high-quality career technology programs for students who are not college-bound, which allows opportunities for certification, internships, or employment.
- **Juvenile Services and Education** – MEC urges the state with local government support when applicable to ensure that the Juvenile Service Department is adequately funded with evidence base practices. resources with high-quality staff to appropriately manage, supervise, and treat youth who are enrolled in the juvenile justice system in Maryland. This includes overseeing and providing comprehensive educational services to all juveniles under Juvenile Services supervision, which is aligned with MSDE graduation requirements with access to counseling, Career-technology, GED completion, and post-secondary opportunities.

Early Intervention, Pre-Kindergarten through third grade - 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, multilingual and students with disabilities with options for all others. Pre-school education programs must be coordinated with state approved child-care and other services as needed. Part C of the IDEA must be fully funded and fully implemented to ensure appropriate interventions for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Pre-K to grade 2 students are prohibited from suspension/expulsion with exceptions.

Pupil Transportation – The State must provide substantial support and base its grants on the current needs for and costs of providing adequate transportation, staffing, and training with safety and health as a priority.

Family and Community Involvement - MEC supports federal and state education policies requiring “*meaningful stakeholder consultation staff in the decision-making process*” with parents, educators, and others. Every school district and school must have effective and supportive policies to welcome, inform, involve, and support parent groups, families and students using best practices. Promoting an environment in which parents are valued partners is essential.

- **Community Schools** - The State and local education departments must support the full implementation of the essentials for community school transformation including school-based, community and government linked services, which meet each school community student and family academic, social, emotional, and physical health needs through collaboration among all stakeholders. All community, summer and before/after-school programs must be in qualified community-based centers, adequately funded with quality staff and resources.

Healthy Lifestyles – MEC supports healthy lifestyles for staff, students, and families including physical activity, behavioral/mental health, and instruction. All students must have access to social-emotional education and services as well as character development. We expect all schools to meet National School Nutrition Standards. All policies must include stakeholders in the decision-making process. All student health records must be kept updated according to all federal, state, and local law, and secure according to all student and health privacy laws.

School Construction – MEC believes all public-school facilities must meet 21st century standards for enrollment, and academic program needs within a safe and supportive learning environment. The State with local support must allocate ample funds for school construction, renovation, maintenance, systemic replacements, health, and safety in a way that prioritizes needs fairly by district and major category.

MEC also supports early education, career-technology programs, and smaller learning environments within larger school facilities with appropriate program offerings, facility modifications, and staffing.

School Performance and Accountability – MEC believes the overall goal of student assessment and testing programs must be to improve instruction and effective learning 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. Multiple criteria, not testing alone, must be used to measure the success of a school, staff, or student.

It is essential that the state uses School Quality and Student Success Indicators, defined in the ESSA, to provide a clearer picture of the student and staff experiences, knowledge, or skills within a school that shows defined areas in need of improvement. All assessments or tests must be independently evaluated for cultural, economic, linguistic, and racial bias using evidence-based practices. The amount of classroom time devoted to testing students must not undermine instruction, learning or overall student development.

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, benefits, services*) is competitive with those offered to other professionals with comparable levels of education, professional licenses and responsibilities by region.

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

All college preparatory high schools must have credited Teacher Academies or CTE programs to recruit future teachers using evidence-based instruction and firsthand experiences with financial assistance if they attend college, graduate, and work in a public school for 3-5 years.

- **School Leaders and Central Office Staff** - Quality school leaders are essential to the academic performance and safety of schools. Therefore, they must be 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.
- **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 the development of 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.

School Safety and Climate - MEC supports the use of proven technology and adequate allocation of funds that will help to improve the school climate, health, and safety, as determined school-by-school. We also do not believe there is enough evidence or the right solution to always deploy School Resource Officers (SROs) to maintain safe schools. Local decision-makers are in the best position to create safety plans designed to develop positive school climates, keep kids learning in school, while avoiding 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 of all administrators, SRO's and security personnel must include identifying and appropriate actions with students with student service referrals based on evidence-based practices. School administrators, not security personnel, must address all non-public safety discipline matters.

Special Education - The State, in cooperation with local systems, is required to meet the educational needs of all children, including those with learning, physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities. The State with sufficient federal support must provide adequate funding, leadership, direction, guidance, and monitoring of local systems to ensure that all students with disabilities are provided with a high quality, free, and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and prepare them for post-secondary education, career, and independent living. Adequate instructional and support resources must meet the needs of each identified student

*** MEC Public Policy Statements are not an endorsement of specific legislation, regulations, or other policies. MEC membership does not necessarily imply endorsement**