

Maryland Education Coalition - 2023 Public Policy Platform*

md.education.coalition@gmail.com *** <http://www.marylandeducationcoalition.org/>

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 public school 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 the Maryland Constitution, so all students are prepared to graduate college or career ready. We believe this is also their civil right.

MEC also believes that all students must be taught to evidence-based academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers in conformity 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.

Core Academic Subjects – All students must be access to quality instruction in all subject areas defined in federal or state law and regulations, including English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, history, geography, and the arts. Each course must be staffed with highly qualified educators, grounded in evidence-based 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 range of career technology, non-core subjects and programs.

- **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, Twice exceptional, military, homeless & 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 successful practices by appropriately trained staff..

- **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.

- **Equity and Equality** – All education funding and public policy decisions must apply universally accepted equity principles of fairness that are culturally unbiased, using equality principles that reduce achievement, learning and opportunity gaps among all student groups regardless of their demographic, financial or geographic status.

- **Public Funds for Public Schools** - MEC supports adequate, equitable investment of public money for public and approved private special needs 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 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 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 often denied crucial instruction time and wrap-around services, creating a significant 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 techniques, such as restorative practices, bullying prevention, conflict resolution, peer mediation, 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 lower income, special needs, students of color or Gifted & Talented. Local school systems must develop and maintain high-quality career, technology or vocational programs for students who are not college-bound, which allows opportunities for internships, certification, and quality post-secondary employment.

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 with options for all others. by qualified professionals using evidence-based practices-. Referrals must be made available for all students with screening deficiencies or 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.

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 for all eligible public-school children throughout Maryland.

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 an effective and supported policies to welcome, involve, inform, 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 four pillars of Community schools including school-based, community and government linked services, which 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 other nonprofit or government agencies, including adequately funded community, summer and before/after-school programs in qualified community-based centers.

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

School Construction – MEC believes all public school facilities must meet 21st century standards, and that a safe and supportive learning environment is essential to ensuring equal educational opportunities. 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. All children must be assured adequate, attractive, physically accessible, environmentally comfortable, technologically appropriate, and well-maintained spaces for instruction and family/community services that promotes 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 – MEC believes the overall goal of student assessment and testing programs must be to improve instruction and increase 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 or student. It is essential that the state use 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 to define areas for needed improvement. All assessments or tests must be independently evaluated for cultural, linguistic, and racial bias using evidence-based practices. The amount of classroom time devoted to testing students must not undermine 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, benefits, services*) is competitive with those offered to other professionals with comparable levels of education and professional licenses by region.

Recruitment and Retention of School Personnel (continued)

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 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, firsthand experiences with financial assistance if they attend college, graduate, and work in a public school 3-5 years.

• **School Leaders and Central Office Staff** - Quality school leaders are essential to the 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 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 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 including cultural competency, behavioral interventions, and safety.

School Safety and Climate - MEC supports the allocation of funds that will help to improve school climate, health, and safety, as determined school-by-school. We also do not believe there is enough evidence that the 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 of all administrators, SRO’s and security personnel must include identifying and appropriate actions with students and student service referrals. School administrators, not SRO’s or security personal must address 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 mental disabilities. The State with sufficient federal support 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 and administrated by high qualified educators and support staff.

* **MEC Public Policies are not an endorsement of specific legislation, regulations, or other policies.**

MEC membership does not necessarily imply endorsement of all MEC policies or positions