



The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) 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 IN OPPOSITION TO SB 271 – CAPITAL GRANT PROGRAM FOR LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS WITH SIGNIFICANT ENROLLMENT GROWTH OR RELOCATABLE CLASS ROOMS – FUNDING

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During the 2015 session, the General Assembly established this program to make grants to local school systems that have high enrollment growth or that use more than 300 relocatable classrooms. SB 271 seeks to double funding to \$40 million annually. MEC opposes this bill because it fragments funding streams and elevates one particular type of valid need over others that may have equal validity.

The State is faced with a huge backlog of school construction needs estimated in the range of \$15 billion. Many students are going to schools that present unsafe conditions to students and staff, that are not conducive learning environments, that waste energy and cost too much to maintain, and that lack necessary academic facilities such as computer networks, labs, playgrounds and gyms, arts facilities, green space, and libraries. Jurisdictions possess varying levels of ability to fund their capital needs and that exert varying levels of effort to meet students' needs.

Any action on expanding the program in SB271 should wait until the report from the new commission which will be examining school construction policies and assessing progress toward the Kopp Task Force's goals.

The Maryland Education Coalition hopes that the State – starting with the General Assembly – will develop mechanisms to systematically examine all the capital needs in our State and make a determination as to how much of the needs should be met by local governments and how much by the State. We believe that such a process could lead to a formula for distributing State capital aid for public schools that is developed with similar principles to the one now enacted for operating costs and with similar requirements for local governments to maintain effort in funding school construction.

A formula for funding capital needs would take into account for each jurisdiction:

- The present condition of schools as to
 - Usable space per student
 - Conduciveness to learning and comfort (e.g., lighting, ventilation)
 - Safety and health risk factors
 - Presence and condition of specialized academic facilities (as listed above)
 - Accommodation of students with disabilities
 - Energy usage and operating costs
- Population and enrollment projections
- Cost of land and construction
- Ability to fund capital needs
- Demonstrated effort to fund capital needs.

We now have two programs (one in operating budget, one in capital) that set aside \$20 million each for special needs in specific jurisdictions. A comprehensive study of the problem is needed, not a piecemeal approach. Expanding this program or others will soon crowd out needs that may be more compelling. In addition, we are multiplying red tape by splitting where we should be integrating.

Therefore, we ask for an unfavorable report.