



Maryland Coalition for Community Schools,
School Social Workers in Maryland & Sharon Rubenstein

**Maryland State Senate
SUPPORT AS AMENDED**

SB 871 / HB978- Education – Accountability

– Consolidated State Plan and Support and Improvement Plans (Protect Our Schools Act of 2017)

The **Maryland Education Coalition (MEC)** is made up of statewide parents, children special student populations, community and civil rights organization and individuals who advocate for adequate, equitable funding and systematic accountability for the over 880,000 public school students in Maryland’s public schools.

Although we help represent and advocate for all public school communities, many of us put extra emphasis on those school communities with high percentages of minority and at-risk students (Poverty, Disabled, Limited English and Gifted & Talented student groups) that are more likely not to have access to adequate, equitable educational and other student services required to be college or career ready. We are also very active in the public school arena including working closely with state and local education departments, boards of education, other public, education and non-profit professionals, parents, and community members.

MEC supports Protect Our Schools Act (SB871/HB978) as amended. WE believe it provides the right balance of broad accountability measures based on scientific evidence of what works to improve overall school performance. Research shows that the broad measurement, reporting and evaluation of school quality indicators have a very significant impact on how to improve student, educators’ and overall school success.

SB 871 also requires broad, meaningful stakeholder participation in the decision-making process consistent with one of the most significant parts of **the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which requires “timely and meaningful” consultation with stakeholders** on a variety of topics, mentioned at least thirteen (13) times. This means that state and local school systems and public agencies must engage a broad group parents, educators, community members and public officials in the decision-making process affecting each of our public schools.

MEC believes that the **overall goal of student assessments and testing programs must be to improve instruction and increase learning outcomes and opportunities for students.** This is backed by research. **Testing or assessments should never be used as the dominant or primary method of evaluating teachers and administrators, nor be punitive for students, parents or school communities.** Tests also must be independently evaluated for cultural and linguistic bias to more fairly and equitable assess achievement gaps.

Testing alone cannot be the only tool to measure the success of a school, which is why it is essential the state must include other School Quality and Student Success Indicators, as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act and the Protect Our Schools Act as amended. Significant research shows that this will provide a clearer picture of staff and student experiences in a school and which areas need improvement.

A thorough assessment of school performance and accountability for outcomes is essential to building public confidence in public schools, shown to improve teacher and student attendance and retention, which in turn can improve academic performance and lower achievement gaps.

MEC also supports the School Quality Indicators listed in this legislation and as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The intent of ESSA was to get away from a singular focus on standardized testing, empower states to develop more effective accountability systems, and to return control back to the communities who know their kids and schools best.

Research also shows that:

- A positive, school climate is critical to the success of a school community, its students and staff. Studies show that educators, administrators or support staff are more likely request transfers out of schools or school systems, become more frequently absent and less likely to perform at their maximum potential, if the school climate is less desirable. This indicator is by far more critical to overall performance than salaries.
- If a school climate is less than satisfactory, the academic results of the school are also more likely to be less than satisfactory.
- Measuring school climate, and working with a broad representation of stakeholders including educators, support staff, parents and even secondary students and other involved community members often has a direct, positive impact on overall school performance.
- High rates of chronically absent students are a proxy for future academic failure that schools must address.
- This often requires support from other public agencies, such as social or family services, health, housing, etc. to address and improve the root problems of why students are chronically absent.
- The amount of classroom time devoted to testing students should not exceed a point where it undermines instruction and learning, especially in school communities, programs and classrooms with high percentages of at-risk disabled, poor, limited English and minority student groups.

We strongly oppose any attempts that would create new or separate authorities or remove the existing authorities of state and local officials, and stakeholders. Overwhelming research shows this does not improve student achievement, and limits access by most At-Risk Students to a quality education and related services.

MEC also strongly opposes the use of any public funding at any government level for private schools and any attempts from inside or outside the state that would attempt to create separate authorities for the operation, evaluation or accountability of public charter schools. Most importantly, we object to any attempt that would transfer public schools to private operators.

MEC believes that the Governor, General Assembly, other public and community agencies must also understand and accept the findings in at least two reports on the adequacy of funding of Maryland public schools from federal, state and local resources, which has been found to be significantly inadequate, especially as it may impact our lower performing and least wealthy jurisdictions with high numbers of poor, disabled, limited English or minority students. This has resulted in less access to a high quality education, social, emotional and physical services required based on research to promote higher student success and lower achievement gaps.

Finally, MEC currently and historically works with all who are responsible for or support public education in Maryland, working closely and openly with our state and local public officials, professional educators and school communities as stakeholders critical to the decision-making process. We believe and it has been proven repeatedly over time, that when all stakeholders work openly and collaboratively toward goals that develop a consensus, that all benefit from the results.

Therefore, MEC urges the Maryland State Senate to support SENATE BILL 871/. HOUSE BILL 978- Protect Our Schools Act of 2017) as amended.

Rick Tyler, Jr. & Bebe Verdery, Co-Chairs