

2022

# Legislative Priorities

The 2022 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly will serve as an opportunity to build upon the successful passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future while also addressing issues that were exacerbated by the pandemic, such as non-academic supports for students and escalating workloads and staffing shortages for educators. We must take action to build a strong road to recovery, equity, and greater opportunity for all Marylanders.

## Strengthening the Blueprint

The pandemic demonstrated the dire need for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and its implementation will be key to the future success of our schools and students. With any complex legislation, adjustments are needed to better perfect implementation. This is not a rewrite of the bill or changing the underlying principles of the Blueprint, but rather critical technical changes to ensure the spirit of the Blueprint as it is implemented.

These adjustments to the Blueprint can also position us to better meet the challenges of continuing to recover from the pandemic. We need to address existing and expanding inequities through better defining low-performing schools so that we can create stronger pathways to opportunity for our at-risk student populations. Strategic improvements to the career ladder structure will help support current educators and assist in the recruitment of future educators, including the mental health professionals who are needed more than ever by our students and educators. We also seek adjustments to reduce assessment requirements for new educators during a time when we are facing extreme educator shortages.

## Securing Class Size, Caseload, and Workload Improvements

Building on the successful passage of the Blueprint and the need to negotiate and win salary increases for all educators, now is the time to begin a multi-year campaign to strengthen educator voice around their workloads, working conditions, and need to increase stability in the profession.

While larger than manageable class sizes, caseloads, and staffing ratios were present before the pandemic, they have reached crisis levels in the wake of the pandemic. They are at the root of the challenging working conditions that are driving educators from the profession and hampering students from receiving the consistent individualized attention and services that they need. The Blueprint's emphasis on hiring thousands of additional educators has the potential to have a transformative impact on our professions and our schools. Winning the ability to negotiate on class size, improving caseloads and staffing levels, and other student-focused improvements will ensure that this impact can be a reality and will be felt well beyond the implementation of the Blueprint.

## Issues of Racial and Social Justice

All schools should be safe and supportive places for all students and educators and provide all students opportunities for success. MSEA will work with legislators and coalition partners to advance: the prioritization of community school expansion and the funding equity goals in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future; the transformation of school security policies to prohibit law enforcement personnel from acting in the school discipline process; expanding social-emotional and mental health support through adequately staffing counselors, social workers, nurses, and other professionals; the closing of the digital divide by making broadband internet access a public utility available to every community; the promotion of Black and Brown voices and racial justice in our schools including the recruitment and retention of educators of color, robust implicit bias, diversity,

equity, and cultural competency training, and the use of trauma-informed education practices in our schools; and social justice and equity for Black and Brown lives beyond the classroom, including in our judicial, housing, health, and economic systems.

Our schools must be a place where children from different backgrounds and races learn to understand the present and prepare for the future. But there has been a troubling effort by some politicians, built on false narratives, to push bans and whitewash our history, denying children an honest education that equips them to shape a better future. We must provide every child with an accurate and honest education, without excluding certain students or writing people who represent and look like our diverse student body out of our history books. We must not shortchange our students' education and ensure that they can develop critical thinking skills.

### **Increasing Wages for Education Support Professionals**

The historic shortages in support professional positions—whether bus drivers, nurses or health techs, paraprofessionals, or others—underscores the importance of attracting more individuals to fill these critical education support roles that make a difference for our students. A critical and achievable pathway to doing so is raising the wages and improving the collective bargaining voice of these tireless and often underappreciated essential workers. By doing so, we can ensure that our students receive consistent, adequate support every step of the way during their school day—from safe, healthy schools, to extra attention and support, to well-functioning technology and transportation systems.

### **Other Critical Issues**

**Safeguarding Virtual Learning:** As our students and educators return to fuller in-person instruction, it is imperative that we create guardrails around the virtual education that was utilized during the pandemic and may be a part of our public education systems moving forward. We must ensure equity and opportunity for all students and educators and protect quality and connectedness with local systems. These guardrails should include ensuring that virtual learning educators are employees of local school systems and oversight, operations, and curriculum are driven by local school boards.

**Ensuring Public Dollars Go to Public Schools:** MSEA supports the immediate discontinuation of the BOOST voucher program. Public dollars should not be diverted to private schools that have less rigorous accountability standards and frequently underperform in comparison to public schools. As we oppose vouchers, we will also fight to ensure that every school in the state that receives public dollars (public and nonpublic schools alike) cannot impose discriminatory policies on staff, students, or families based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability.

**Continuing Coalition Advocacy:** We are also proud coalition partners in advancing expanded and universal school meal programs, health care improvements, criminal justice reforms, protections for immigrants, and other measures to ensure fairness for every Maryland family.

**For more information, contact MSEA Government Relations at [mseagr@mseanea.org](mailto:mseagr@mseanea.org)**

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