

2023

Legislative Priorities

The 2023 legislative session will create exciting and important opportunities for a new governor to be a true partner with legislative leaders to build on the legislature's strong record of commitment to our public schools with policies to meet this moment and ensure that no Marylanders are left behind. Educators are focused on helping students get back on track after the pandemic yet are doing so in the face of excessive workload issues which are exacerbated by staffing shortages in every school building. We must take concerted actions to address this staffing crisis while continuing to lay the groundwork for long-term success, support, and opportunities for Maryland students.

Addressing the Educator Shortage, Excessive Workload, and School Safety

Maryland's public schools were facing educator shortages before the pandemic, and it has unfortunately only worsened since. The pipeline of educators continues to be insufficient while challenging working conditions and years of inadequate pay make it hard to retain the outstanding professionals whom students and families depend on. At the same time our students require more support and services than ever. This session all legislation must be considered through a lens of reducing excessive workload to combat educators leaving while making the profession desirable and attainable.

While the Blueprint for Maryland's Future has begun to make great strides in teacher pay, we must do all we can to get significant raises to educators as soon as possible to ensure they are able to stay in their positions. The state must focus on retaining its current teaching force while continuing to build the pipeline of high-quality, diverse educators through paid student internships and removing culturally biased barriers to the professions.

The staffing shortage affects the academic achievement, emotional wellness, and safety of our students. Students and families are faced with more trauma, unaddressed social emotional needs, societal divisiveness, and high levels of stress. These have contributed to more disciplinary issues that too often lead to violence between students and sometimes against staff members. To provide additional student support, targeted interventions, trainings, and restorative practices, our schools need more qualified mental health professionals and support staff. Schools must be the safe and supportive learning and teaching environments they are meant to be, and that students, educators, and families deserve.

Strengthening the Blueprint to Meet the Moment

The need for the Blueprint and its successful implementation has never been more obvious for the future success of our schools and students. With any complex legislation, adjustments are identified and needed to fine-tune implementation. Amendments are necessary to the Blueprint not only to ensure the spirit of the bill is implemented as intended, but also to address the current excessive staffing shortages.

The amendments educators seek are intended to address inequities across job categories in the career ladder and target educators who are working in shortage areas. 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.

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Improving Educator Voice and Workers' Rights

As workers and unions across the country highlight the need for a meaningful seat at the table, enhanced transparency, and improved fairness, we can take important steps this session to advance these values for educators. Maryland's collective bargaining law for public employees is a mishmash of laws that have been created piecemeal over the decades. Educators and public employees seek to merge those laws into a single, standardized, and modernized framework for public employee collective bargaining.

Maryland has three separate labor boards: the State Labor Relations Board, the State Higher Education Labor Relations Board, and the Public-School Labor Relations Board. In their current forms, these Boards are ineffective, understaffed, and unduly divided. This limits labor and management's ability to have fair and timely resolution of disputes over contracts, unit clarifications, unfair labor practices, and bargaining. Unifying the existing boards into a single Public Employee Relations Board will make for a more effective board, in line with labor law modernization legislation adopted in many neighboring states.

Giving educators a voice in class size is a key component of this strengthening of labor rights. While larger than manageable class sizes, caseloads, and staffing ratios were present before the pandemic, they have reached crisis levels since and are another factor contributing to the educator shortage. Providing the ability to negotiate class size will give educators a seat at the table to discuss how class sizes impact learning and working conditions—a discussion which is currently illegal in Maryland and only a handful of other states across the country.

Honest, Accurate, and Inclusive Education Policies

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, honest, and inclusive education, without excluding certain students or writing the stories, hardships, and achievements of people who represent and look like our diverse student body out of our history books. And we must ensure accuracy in all curricula that does not marginalize or erase students of different gender identities or sexual orientations. We should not shortchange our students' education and need to ensure that they can develop critical thinking skills.

Implementing Full Bonuses 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 educational support roles that make a difference for our students. The General Assembly passed legislation to give a retention bonus to those hard-working employees last year, but unfortunately it was not fully funded in Gov. Hogan's budget. The General Assembly and Gov. Moore should work together to make those employees whole through a deficiency appropriation in this year's budget.

Other Critical Issues

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.

Safeguarding Virtual Learning: The General Assembly passed thoughtful and necessary legislation last session that created guardrails around virtual education to 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. The 2022 bill was vetoed and should be brought back and passed this year.

Continuing Coalition Advocacy: We are also proud coalition partners in advancing expanded and universal school meal programs, quicker implementation of minimum wage standards, criminal justice reforms, protections for immigrants, and other measures to ensure fairness for every Maryland family.

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