



2025

# Legislative Priorities

The 2025 legislative session will be pivotal for Marylanders, educators, and students. Elected officials can continue to build on the strong history of commitment to our public schools by the governor and the legislature, while also facing a number of significant budgetary obstacles and uncertainty. MSEA's priorities for this legislative session focus on keeping our commitments to our public schools, improving the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and ensuring we have enough revenue to fund it, attracting and retaining educators as we continue to face staffing shortages, enhancing rights and wages for education support professionals, and improving school safety. We must take concerted actions to ensure that Maryland's students are set up for long-term success.

## **Keeping and Funding Our Commitment to Public Education**

The need for the Blueprint and its successful implementation have never been more imperative for the future success of our public schools, students, and economy. With any complex legislation, adjustments are identified and needed to fine-tune implementation. Amendments are necessary to the Blueprint not only to ensure that its goals are met, but also to address the current acute staffing shortages. Any changes to the Blueprint should not retreat from its core value of more comprehensively and more equitably supporting all students in Maryland.

While the state is going into this year's legislative session facing budgetary uncertainty, we must remain committed to our public schools and the services that directly impact our quality of life and economic future. For decades, wealthy corporations have manipulated the rules to avoid paying taxes, placing the financial burden for the things we care about—our schools, health care, and public safety—disproportionately on working Marylanders. Our public schools and public services can only be successful with sufficient resources to serve communities. In the current tax code Maryland gives away millions in business tax breaks, despite overwhelming evidence that they do nothing to boost our economy.

It's time to make the wealthiest 1% and big corporations pay their fair share. This is an opportunity to focus on eliminating loopholes and tax breaks that benefit special interests and fixing our upside-down tax code, which allows the wealthiest individuals to pay the smallest share of their income in state and local taxes. The state

must also give local governments the ability to raise additional revenue while also lessening the burden on working people. Some policies to raise additional local revenue may include raising the local income tax cap and allowing for variability in the application of the property tax to the benefit of working and middle class families.

## **Addressing the Educator Shortage, Retention, and Workload**

Maryland's educator shortages remain at crisis levels. While the legislature and governor have made progress on this front in the last few years, the pipeline of educators continues to be insufficient due to challenging working conditions and years of inadequate pay. The staffing shortage affects the academic achievement, emotional wellness, and safety of our students. We must continue to take steps to reduce excessive workload to ensure we retain our education workforce while making the profession more desirable and attainable—including through maintaining our commitment to the Blueprint, hiring more mental health professionals and support staff, and taking meaningful steps to improve school safety and climate.

## **Improving School Safety and Climate**

Since the pandemic, schools across the state have witnessed an increase in conduct that creates challenging learning and working environments for students and staff. Without a safe learning and working environment, students cannot achieve their full potential, and staff cannot deliver instruction and services in a manner that all students deserve. The answer to these challenges is not to go back to a punitive, zero-tolerance disciplinary approach that feeds the school-to-prison pipeline. Rather, our state must maintain its commitment to implementing

restorative practices in our schools, enhance mental and behavioral health services for students, and continue the development of wraparound support services for students.

Additionally, public employees need proactive, preventative training and planning to create and maintain safe working and learning environments free from violence. When those conditions are not met, public employers must be held accountable to ensure safe conditions for students and staff are immediately restored.

Finally, local school systems must ensure students' learning environments are free from distraction and disruption from electronic devices, such as smart phones and smart watches. The mental well-being of students and their academic success is placed at risk when learning environments are subjected to frequent interference from electronic devices and social conflict that may arise from the use of social media during the school day.

### **Holistically Measuring School Success**

Maryland educators have long been involved in the conversation about the role of assessments in measuring learning—and the shortcomings and negative ripple effects of an overwhelming focus on mandated standardized testing. In recent years, we have successfully advocated for more balanced school quality indicators that consider school climate and a well-rounded curriculum in addition to standardized test scores, plus guidelines to minimize the impact of testing on learning time.

This year, MSDE convened the Task Force on School Assessment and Accountability to review Maryland's school accountability system, with initial recommendations released in December 2024. As those recommendations become available, we will continue to advocate for holistic measures of school success that reflect students' overall experience rather than a myopic focus on test scores that narrows curriculum, student opportunities, and the joy of learning.

### **ESP Bill of Rights**

Education support professionals (ESPs) are essential to the success of our students and our schools. The goals of the Blueprint cannot be fulfilled without a high-quality, diverse ESP workforce. These essential workers transport our students to and from school, provide students with individualized instructional support, keep our schools safe and healthy, provide clerical and administrative services, prepare nutritious meals, and do so much more to support our students and schools.

For far too long the work of the 24,000 ESPs in Maryland public schools has been undervalued. Many do not make a living wage and struggle to make ends meet. We need to do more to ensure that a living wage and a secure future is achievable for all Maryland families. This includes passing a minimum starting wage.

ESPs should also be on decision-making bodies about education policy including the State Board of Education. The Board lacks the perspective of a non-supervisory, non-certificated education support professional. Such a member would bring a unique and essential perspective to the State Board.

### **Protecting Marylanders' Freedoms**

The incoming administration in Washington has the potential to undercut a wide range of policies that our union, public schools, and students have long depended upon. Accordingly, we will support proactive measures to protect our freedoms and our students, including but not limited to preventing destructive mass deportations, ensuring access to health care, including comprehensive reproductive and gender-affirming care, stopping any expansion of voucher programs, protecting our democracy and elections, ensuring that public and private employees have collective bargaining rights, and opposing the massive funding cuts and loss of anti-discrimination protections that would result if the U.S. Department of Education was closed.

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

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