

**Maryland Education Commission Releases Final Recommendations:
Plan Will Enable Maryland K-12
Students to Compete with the Best in the World**

Annapolis, MD—Maryland’s Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education today released a report intended to transform Maryland’s education system into one of the world’s best. Key recommendations include raising academic standards to match those in the top-performing countries, measures to attract highly qualified high school graduates into teaching careers, building a first-class career and technical education system, and providing the resources that low-income and special needs children will need to perform far above current levels.

Known as the Kirwan Commission after its Chair, William “Brit” Kirwan – the Commission was tasked by Governor Hogan and the legislature in 2016 with making policy recommendations that would enable Maryland’s students to perform at the level of students in the best performing systems in the world. It was also tasked with revising the State’s school funding formulas to support its recommendations.

“When the Commission began its work,” Kirwan said, “we assumed that we had one of the top state education systems in the country if not the world. However, the reality we discovered is that Maryland students perform in the middle of the pack in multiple grades and subjects on the National Assessment of Education Progress. What’s more, even the best students here in the U.S. underperform those in top-performing countries as proven by results from the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment. In many of these countries, students routinely leave high school two to three years ahead of ours.”

It was against this backdrop that the Commission of State, county, and local officials; education stakeholders; and members of the business community, with support from the National Center on Education and the Economy, conducted two years of research into how Maryland’s policies and practices compare to those in the top-performing U.S. states and international systems. Over the past two years, the Commission has held some 75 public meetings and work sessions during which several hundred people testified and debated the final policy recommendations released today.

“Having heard from stakeholders across the State, it is clear the seriousness of our task resonates with all Marylanders. The future of our families, our communities, and our shared economic vitality hinges on lifting our whole education system to the levels of performance achieved by the world’s best,” Kirwan said.

The Commission report emphasizes that success requires not just greatly raising average student performance to match global benchmarks but substantially closing what are already very large gaps in performance based on income, race, and disability. The Commission concluded that this cannot be done by making modest changes to the current system.

The Commission's recommendations include:

1. expanding full-day preschool that is free for all low-income three- and four-year-olds;
2. assuring an abundant supply of the highly qualified and diverse teachers and school leaders it will take to get our students to these standards by raising licensure standards, bringing pay up to the level of high-status professions, implementing a statewide framework for teacher career advancement, and organizing teachers' work the way work is organized in highly professional modern work places;
3. setting a standard for College and Career Readiness at the level required to virtually guarantee success in the first year of a community college program and then tasking Maryland's schools with getting most students to that standard by the end of tenth grade and almost all there before they leave high school, a very large increase over current achievement levels;
4. providing substantially increased financial support and a wide array of additional services for students who will need a lot of support to achieve the new standards, including special education, low-income, and non-English speaking students, with particular attention to children growing up in concentrated poverty; and
5. creating an Independent Oversight Board to implement, monitor, and report out on the progress of schools, districts, and State agencies and hold all State and local entities involved accountable for carrying out their assigned roles.

The recommendations have received acknowledgement and support from leaders both within and outside of Maryland.

"Our State's future well-being depends on the quality of education we provide today's students," Ed Brown, founder, chairman and CEO of Brown Capital Management said. "We must ensure that every child, no matter their zip code, has access to a world-class education. This includes offering pre-K, supporting struggling students and those needing extra help, providing highly qualified teachers in every classroom, and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to graduate fully career and college ready. That's what the Kirwan Commission recommendations would enable and I believe they deserve the support of all Marylanders."

Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin Corp, echoed Brown's statement. "There is no topic more important to the quality of life of Marylanders than that addressed by the Commission," Augustine stated. "Maryland's preK-12 education system today is average among the states and failing among the nations with which we most often compete for jobs. The Commission's recommendations, if implemented, provide a means to reverse the current pattern of decline."

“There are very few states that have been able to put together a cogent plan that brings together the major levers that could result in substantial improvement in student achievement, respect for educators, opportunities for young children, and career needs for high school graduates,” Former Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts David Driscoll said. “Throw in coordinated provisions for governance, attention to at-risk kids, and school leadership opportunities and you have a real chance at true reform in education. That is what the Maryland Commission is presenting and I hope State leadership will move boldly to implement their recommendations.”

The recommendations have also received strong endorsements from two former State superintendents.

Former State Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick said, “The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has issued a call to action for the adoption of policy frameworks that would significantly elevate teaching and learning in Maryland. Our students deserve a world-class education. I urge every Maryland leader to answer this call.”

“Over more than 40 years, I have worked with governors, legislators, educators, and corporate leaders in 22 states to develop specific policies and funding to promote systemic education change. Without a doubt, the Kirwan Commission’s recommendations are the best. ” said David Hornbeck, former State Superintendent and former Superintendent of Philadelphia Schools.

The estimated cost to implement the Commission’s final policy recommendation calls for an average increase of less than 3% in total education funding each year over the next 10 years. The Commission’s 10-year funding and implementation plans are available for the public on the Commission’s website (<http://bit.ly/MDCCommission>). The Commission has called for the Governor and General Assembly to endorse the Commission’s policy framework and make a first-year down payment of \$325 million to begin implementing the recommendations in fiscal 2020.

The next and final phase of the Commission’s work will be to incorporate these funding and implementation plans into the broader structure of the State’s school funding system and determine the appropriate distribution of costs between the State and local jurisdictions. This work will be done by a select working group of commissioners who will make recommendations to the full Commission later this summer. The full Commission will consider these recommendations and submit a final report to the Governor and General Assembly this fall.

Reporters interested in speaking with Dr. Kirwan or members of the Commission may contact Julia Banks at (202)-888-2536 or jbanks@ncee.org.

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