

2021

Legislative Priorities

The 2021 legislative session will be hugely consequential for Maryland's students, educators, and families. From overriding the governor's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to prioritizing pandemic recovery and racial and social justice issues, we must take action to pave the road to recovery, equity, and greater opportunity for all Marylanders.

Override the Veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (HB1300, 2020) contains programs that unfold and expand over a decade to address longstanding inequities in education that disproportionately affect students in poverty. Now more than ever, we need the Blueprint to create strong schools in every neighborhood by providing additional support to struggling learners; hiring more educators and increasing their pay; expanding career and technical education; and delivering a more prosperous future for our state.

Overriding the Blueprint veto will also trigger the implementation of the Built to Learn Act (HB 1, 2020), which will infuse \$2.2 billion into new construction and school renovation efforts across the state. This will create jobs and help meet the safe and healthy building conditions needed for learning and educating.

Adjusting the Blueprint to Meet the Moment

The governor's veto has delayed the Blueprint when it is needed most. The General Assembly must override the veto and protect school funding in the budget. It is also necessary to pass companion legislation to recalibrate and make some adjustments to account for the governor's delay. This is not a rewrite of the bill or changing the underlying principles of the Blueprint, but rather the inclusion of critical technical changes to dates and timelines to reflect a revised funding phase-in.

This recalibration of the Blueprint can also position us to better meet the challenges of recovering from the coronavirus. We need to address existing and expanding inequities through the faster expansion of community schools and much needed mental health and wraparound services. With the increase in the need of virtual learning, there is an immediate need for reliable broadband for all students and educators. The exhausting workload of educators during the pandemic

requires us to redouble our efforts to recruit, support, and retain educators. Lastly, there is a dire need to prioritize the work of paraeducators, reading and math specialists, and other school employees to lead individualized and small group instruction to address damaging gaps in learning.

Issues of Racial and Social Justice

MSEA demands justice for Black lives and 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 student discipline process and apply a renewed focus on providing social-emotional and mental health support through an expansion of counselors, social workers, nurses, and other professionals; healthy and strong communities with a commitment to safe and healthy school buildings, the closing of the digital divide by making broadband internet access a public utility available to every community, and progressive taxation initiatives; the promotion of Black and Brown voices and racial justice in our schools including the recruitment and retention of educators of color, the development of teacher preparation programs that include implicit bias, diversity, equity, and cultural competency training, and the use of trauma-informed education practices in our schools; and justice and equity for Black and Brown lives beyond the classroom, including in our judicial, housing, health, and economic systems.

Equity is a bedrock value for our union. In addition to creating equity in K-12 funding, MSEA strongly advocates for a fair and just settlement with the state's four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as was sought through legislative efforts last session (HB 1260, 2020). The governor vetoed the bill, which would pay out \$580 million over 10 years to restore some equity and justice that has historically been denied to these institutions. This issue must be resolved once and for all.

Other Vetoes to Override

Essential to the Blueprint's success are the revenue streams to fund expanded education programs, either through the general fund or specially designated education funds. Legislators should override the governor's veto of the Tobacco, Sales and Use Tax and Digital Advertising Gross Revenues Tax (HB 732, 2020), and the 21st Century Economy Fairness Act (HB 932, 2020). The digital advertising tax collects revenue specifically for education by levying a new tax on large online advertising companies like Google and Facebook. The 21st Century Economy Act collects revenue from the sale of digital products, with the revenue going to the Blueprint for Maryland Future Fund.

Other Critical Issues

Fair and progressive tax policy: The programs outlined in the Blueprint can only succeed if policymakers back them with sufficient resources. 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.

Advocate for a Living Wage: The pandemic has highlighted the tireless and often underappreciated work of essential workers—along with the income inequalities that persist across our society. Whether it's the 24,000 education support professionals (ESPs) in Maryland schools who do not make a living wage or the thousands of essential workers and Marylanders whom

we depend on but who 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.

Reject vouchers and prohibit discrimination in our schools: MSEA supports the immediate discontinuation of the BOOST voucher program. As our public schools face billions of dollars in unmet needs, it is unconscionable that public dollars are being diverted to private schools that—have less rigorous accountability standards—while underperforming 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.

Expand collective bargaining rights: MSEA will work to expand collective bargaining rights to additional employees at Maryland's community colleges, while also working to expand and defend the power to allow all public employees the right to organize, clarify the oversight role of labor relations boards, and allow class sizes to be a permissible subject of bargaining.

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

For more information, contact MSEA Government Relations at 410/263-6600 or mseagr@mseanea.org

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