



Education Advocate

April 2014

Take Action Now!

Did you tell your legislators to VOTE NO on tax dollars going to private and religious schools?

Legislators will soon vote on budget funding for private and religious schools. Have you asked your legislators to keep public dollars in public schools? They need to hear from you!

Public school systems are struggling financially to maintain teachers and programs, and to find the billions necessary to renovate decrepit school buildings.

Now is not the time to be giving away millions of taxpayer dollars in subsidies to private and religious schools!

[CLICK HERE to tell your Maryland legislators that public dollars should be used to support public schools.](#)

For years, the state has been spending millions each year on subsidies for books and technology for private and religious schools. Then last year, without public debate, millions were added to the state budget to pay for improvements to privately-owned buildings that house private and religious schools.

What's worse, the private and religious schools receiving public funds are not required to meet state education standards. They are not required to adhere to the same anti-discrimination laws as public schools. They are not required to demonstrate that taxpayer money is needed. And there is little accountability for how they spend the money. It's just a giveaway.

But the capital budget isn't final yet!

[Ask your legislators to say "no" to siphoning millions of state funds as a giveaway to private and religious schools.](#)

Baltimore's School Construction Program:
Valuable Lessons for Year 2 Schools
Wed., April 2

As schools in "Year 2" of the 21st Century School Buildings Plan head into

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the design process for new or modernized school buildings, join **City Schools at the Baltimore Design School (1500 Barclay St.) on Wednesday, April 2, 5:30-7:30pm** to hear from school communities where work is already underway. Principals, partners, architects and city staff will share their experiences and lessons learned from the "Year 1" school design process. The event will include a panel discussion and breakout groups. The entire school community - students, parents, school staff, partners, neighbors and representatives from civic and community associations - should plan to attend.

RSVP via email to betterbuildings@bcps.k12.md.us.

For more information about the 21st-Century Buildings Plan, call City Schools' Engagement Office at 410-545-1870 or **visit their website**.

State Begins Evaluation of Education Funding Formula

The ACLU's Education Reform Project has been working this legislative session to ensure that adequate funding was included in the state budget to support a rigorous, thorough, and professional reexamination of Maryland's education funding formula. Both the House and Senate have passed versions of the operating budget including a total of \$800,000 to begin the study. The State of Maryland has issued a Request for Proposal which is the first step in securing an expert to examine the state education funding formula. The expert is expected to begin work by July 1, 2014, and is directed to study:

- The current base funding level for all students and the additional funding provided for students from low-income families, special needs, and English language learners.
- The impacts of quality Pre-K on three and four-year olds and how to fund pre-k based on enrollment like the K-12 students.
- Alternative methods for identifying low-income/at-risk students besides the current Free and Reduced Price Meals form. This would allow districts to take advantage of a new federal free lunch program without penalty.
- How concentrated poverty impacts students and the ability to meet adequacy targets.
- How the state calculates the local share of education funding.
- The Geographic Cost of Education Index
- Gaps in student achievement and growth in achievement between groups across the state.
- The impact of school size and the potential benefits of smaller schools.

[To read the complete scope of work description in the RFP click here.](#)

The ACLU lawsuit, *Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education*, was filed in 1994 to ensure that Baltimore City students would receive an education that would allow them to succeed, including an "adequate" amount of funding to provide that education. Favorable court rulings led the state legislature to establish the Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence ("Thornton" Commission), which had the task of designing an education funding formula that would ensure adequate funding for all students statewide. The commission utilized an expert study to design a formula that resulted in the 2002 Bridge to Excellence (BTE) law.

The BTE law created a state education funding model based on the concepts of adequacy, equity, and fairness by establishing enrollment-based formulas to provide dollars to local school districts based on student need. The formula was designed to direct more funding to at-risk students - most notably, those that qualify for free and reduced meals, special education, and English-language learners. To ensure that the quality of education was not determined by a student's zip code, the state provides education funding at different levels to local jurisdictions depending on the characteristics of their students. Consequently, low wealth districts receive more state dollars per student than wealthy districts to equalize the resources available to districts across the state.

BTE anticipated the need to regularly update the education funding formula in light of changing academic standards and teaching norms. This reassessment was initially supposed to take place after 10 years time, but was delayed due to the economic downturn and the implementation of the new Common Core standards.

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Education Reform Project

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