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Education Advocate

April 2013

Dear Advocate,

This year's legislative session wrapped up last Monday with some very exciting accomplishments for the children of Maryland! After countless hours of meeting with elected officials, e-mailing or calling legislators, writing testimony, testifying to committees, rally planning, and anxiously awaiting floor debates and votes, we can now reflect together on our enormous success and plan toward implementation of the Baltimore City school construction bill!

Maryland State Education Budget

State Budget Increases Aid to Education

Thanks to a recovering economy, this year's budget discussions were more routine than in recent years. The General Assembly passed a budget including a 1% inflation factor, which means that local school districts will receive a base per pupil allocation of \$6,829 this year, a roughly \$122 million increase in statewide aid to schools. Also included in the General Assembly's final budget was full funding for the Geographic Cost of Education Index. This \$130 million grant program helps account for the higher costs of educating students in certain jurisdictions.

A "Fix" for the Net Taxable Income Calculation for State Aid

Net Taxable Income (NTI) is an important component of the "Thornton" formula enacted in the Bridge to Excellence Act which measures the comparative wealth of the 24 local jurisdictions in Maryland to determine the appropriate level of state aid. This year, the budget included \$8 million in additional funding to change when the calculation of wealth is computed and ensure that all jurisdictions are held harmless in the process. This will allow all jurisdictions to receive the level of state support originally intended under the state aid to education formula. For more information about NTI, please see our article in this [Education Advocate](#).

Baltimore City School Construction and Revitalization Act Passes!

In This Issue

[State Education Budget](#)

[Baltimore City School Construction](#)

[Taxpayer funding for Private Schools](#)

[School Safety](#)

[Join us May 6th!](#)

Join Us on May 6th!

Transform Baltimore and the Baltimore Education Coalition will be gathering at 6 pm on May 6th at a location to be determined to celebrate the historic passage of the Baltimore City School Construction and Revitalization Act! Please save the date and plan on attending.

More details will be available soon.





General Assembly Approves \$1 Billion in School Construction Funding for Baltimore City

Adopting the ACLU-MD's proposal to leverage funds using a third-party entity to build schools in a short timeline, the General Assembly passed the [Baltimore City School Construction and Revitalization Act of 2013](#).

The ACLU, Baltimore Education Coalition (BEC), and the Transform Baltimore campaign worked tirelessly during the session to bring thousands of students, parents, teachers, and community leaders to Annapolis to gain support for the bill. The bill will provide the funding and financing structure to rebuild and renovate an estimated 50 city school buildings (Phase I). The historic passage of this bill represents the largest investment in Baltimore communities ever! In coming years, Baltimore children will go to school in 21st century school buildings that are healthy, safe, and technologically appropriate for a modern curriculum and education. The Maryland Stadium Authority and City Schools will construct 15 new replacement schools and major renovations on another 30+ schools.



ACLU staff with Baltimore Education Coalition members in the House Gallery for the vote.



Students gathered at Cross Country Elementary Middle School on April 4th to write thank-you letters to state legislators who voted for the bill. These students were joined by classmates across the city in writing to elected officials to let them know just how much new schools mean to city children. ([Click here](#) to watch the news coverage of the event.) These letters were then delivered by students from Bay-Brook Elem/Middle, City Springs Elem/Middle, and Roland Park Elem/Middle on the last day of the legislative session.

Please see this [Education Advocate](#) for details about the bill. Contact the Education Reform Project if you have questions - 410.889.8555, education@aclu-md.org.



Bebe Verdery, City Springs teacher Nick West with his students, Bay-Brook teacher Joe Francaviglia with his students, BEC's Yasmene Mumby, Jake Cohen, Sherrell Savage, and Molly Amster gather with Senator Verna Jones-Rodwell after delivering thank-you letters on Sine Die.

State Funding for Private Schools

Governor's Supplemental Budget Adds Taxpayer Dollars to Private School Textbook Program

This year's proposed budget increased by \$1.1 million the funding provided to private schools across the state for textbooks and other materials, despite the fact that these private, mostly religious, schools are not required to comply with all state and federal non-discrimination provisions and do not have to meet federal requirements for student achievement. The Governor also chose to direct an additional \$500,000 above the initial increase in his supplemental budget, for a total \$1.6 m. increase. This represents a 34% single year increase for aid to private institutions. ACLU contends that as local school districts attempt to manage the more than \$700 million shortfall in state funding compared to the original Thornton formula, funds should not be diverted from the constitutionally-mandated free public school system to private schools.

Private Schools Added to Aging Schools Program

In a last minute maneuver during the conference committee on the Capital Budget, \$3.5 million of taxpayer supported debt was added for those private schools eligible for the textbook program via the existing Aging Schools Program. This is the first time since this program's inception in 1997 that public capital dollars will be allowed to flow to private buildings. The program was originally established to address some of the most dire facility conditions in Maryland schools and is based on the percentage of square footage each district has in use that was built prior to 1970. Traveling further down this "slippery slope," the combination of added funding for text books and aging schools has more than doubled the amount of taxpayer dollars used to support private and religious schools.

School Safety

The New Maryland Center for School Safety

The tragic events of Newtown, Connecticut were on the forefront of everyone's mind at the start of the legislative session. In response to

concerns surrounding Maryland's school safety procedures and preparedness the General Assembly passed legislation establishing the Maryland Center for School Safety at Bowie State University. This center will work with a broad coalition of partners to identify strategies to improve school climate and school safety.

Bill Criminalizing Cyber Bullying Passes

A bill making improper use of electronic communications with the intent to harass, alarm, annoy, inflict "serious emotional distress" on a minor, or place the minor in "reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury" a misdemeanor offense with a penalty of up to one year in imprisonment or a \$500 fine, or both, passed the General Assembly this year. The ACLU worked with the committees to address issues with the bill that conflict with the right to free speech, but these issues remain outstanding.

General Assembly Resists Arming School Personnel and Requiring School Resource Officers

The General Assembly refused to approve several proposals that would allow school staff or designated "guardians" to carry handguns in schools. Proponents of the proposals claimed arming staff and other adults, even those with incredibly limited training and lack of security expertise, in schools would make children safer, despite the evidence to the contrary and without apparent concern for the added risk to students that loaded firearms in a school building could pose. Additional proposals that would have allowed tasers in school buildings were also defeated.

Other proposals would have mandated a police officer be present in every school building in the state. These officers, referred to as School Resource Officers, are already present in many buildings across the state at middle schools and high schools with mixed success. Education advocates across the country, including the ACLU of Maryland, question the wisdom in continuing to expose children to police officers within schools when routine discipline problems regularly end up with citations, arrests, court appearances, and ultimately, records for a growing number of students across the state and the country. (To read more about this issue, see this recent article in the [New York Times](#) about police officers in schools in Texas.)

Now that the intensity of the legislative session has come to a close and we have \$1 billion in school construction funding in Baltimore City to look forward to, the ACLU along with Transform Baltimore and the Baltimore Education Coalition would like to celebrate with you! The coalition will be hosting an event at **6pm on May 6th at a location to be determined** to bring together all the wonderful people who have worked so hard for many years to make healthy, safe, and modern schools a reality for Baltimore children. You have written letters, called legislators, gathered at War Memorial, spent days visiting legislators in Annapolis, testified at committee hearings, and, of course, rallied 3,000 strong in Annapolis! Now its time to enjoy some refreshments among friends and colleagues!

Thank you for making a difference!

Bebe Verdery
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