



Education Advocate

April 2014

How Did Education Fare in General Assembly 2014?

Minimal State Budget Increases to Education

The FY15 state budget increases education funding by \$124.5 million to local school systems, based on enrollment increases and inflation. The included inflation factor gives only a 0.5% increase in per pupil funding over last year's funding, leaving many school systems struggling to make ends meet as the cost of running schools continues to increase. The final budget did include \$132 million to fully fund the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI) which is a critical component for districts with higher costs of educating students based on their geographic location and other factors.

Baltimore City Schools Facing Difficult Budget Decisions

Baltimore City schools will receive only a \$6.3 million increase in state funding in the upcoming school year. The vast majority of this increase, \$4.3 million, is due to an increase in the Compensatory Education funding program which is based on the Free & Reduced Meals count. Unfortunately, this increase for Baltimore City schools is smaller than in recent years (compare to the \$28 m. increase last year) and does not keep pace with the continued costs of running the district. City Schools likely will have to make cuts to balance its budget. The lower increase in state funding this year is due to a slowing of enrollment growth and only a .5% inflation factor increase in per pupil funding.

Last week at the Baltimore school board meeting, the FY2015 budget was introduced with a \$31 million deficit. City Schools initial draft budget identifies \$4 million in cuts and takes \$27 million from the fund balance to cover cost increases. The draft budget would increase funding to individual schools to cover salary increases in an attempt to avoid painful cuts at the school level. ([Read more about the school board meeting.](#))

Small First Step Towards Pre-K Expansion

The General Assembly included \$4.3 million in the budget to establish a competitive grant program aimed at increasing the number of seats available for Pre-Kindergarten. [SB332](#) allows private providers and local school systems to request funding from the Maryland Department of Education to add half-day seats for families up to 300% of the poverty line, to expand current half-day programs to full-day, or to create new Judy Centers which offer wrap-around services to Pre-K families.

While a small expansion, the bill kept the conversation about Pre-K in the eyes of policymakers. The ACLU worked to get an amendment added that will require state agencies in an upcoming study to count the number of 3-

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year-olds from low-income households who could be eligible if Pre-K - which currently serves only low-income 4-year-olds - were to be expanded.

Maryland Will Re-examine Education Funding

After over a decade of funding under the current Bridge to Excellence formula, the state is starting a long overdue comprehensive re-examination of the current funding formula. The ACLU advocated for, and the General Assembly included, \$800,000 to begin the work of hiring experts to conduct the study. The request for proposals has been released and a firm will be selected to start work this summer. ([Click here to read the scope of work](#))

Improving Public School Facilities

The ACLU's Education Reform Project has worked to increase state funding for public school construction for more than a decade so that all children, especially those most at-risk, attend schools that are safe, healthy, and properly equipped to support a quality education.

Baltimore City's School Construction Program on Track!

The Baltimore Education Coalition and *Transform Baltimore campaign* brought enthusiastic students from John Eager Howard and City Springs to Annapolis to show support for Baltimore's 21st Century school construction program. They attended as the MOU Executive Committee - Baltimore City Public Schools, the state's Interagency Committee on School Construction, the City of Baltimore, and the Maryland Stadium Authority - updated the House and Senate budget committees on the program's progress. Schools in Phase I of the city school construction program are moving forward, with over 20 schools currently in the design process. More information can be found on [City Schools'](#), the [MSA's](#), and [Transform Baltimore's](#) websites.

Statewide Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

The CIP is the state program for providing school construction funding to local jurisdictions for building new and renovating and repairing old schools. ACLU supported the governor's budget of **\$275 million** in capital funding to Maryland school districts. This amount is similar to recent years allocations, but is below last year's amount of \$325 million. Distribution of CIP funds will be available on the [state's Public School Construction website](#).

Aging Schools Program (ASP)

ASP was designed to address deficiencies for the oldest school buildings in the state. The ACLU supported \$6.1 million in ASP funds for school districts this year. ASP is a very popular and needed program as it does not require local matching funds and it addresses urgent issues with old and potentially dangerous systems in schools.

Federal Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB)

The state will have \$4.6 million in federally subsidized bonds to distribute to local school districts through the QZAB program this year. While supporting the program, the ACLU asked for these funds to be directed to the projects that will support the most needy and low-wealth districts, as the federal program intended.

Nonpublic Aging Schools Program - Funding to Private School Buildings Continues

The ACLU opposed the Governor's inclusion of \$3.5 million in funding for facility upgrades to private and religious schools, an allocation that had been slipped into the budget by the Senate for the first time last year. Public school facilities, which are in dire need of resources for facility improvements (with a backlog totaling billions), are required to meet state educational standards, and must abide by anti-discriminatory practices, unlike private and religious schools. [See ACLU's Fact Sheet on Private Schools, Discrimination, and the Law.](#) Despite objections from the major educational organizations in the state and hundreds of emails and calls from ACLU supporters, the funding stayed in the budget. For this year, private and religious schools will get state money to improve their privately-owned buildings.

Two Bills to Study Alternative Financing


Inspired by Baltimore City's effort last year to use alternative financing for school construction, a bill that would have devoted \$20 million/year in state funds for Montgomery, Prince George's, and Baltimore county schools was introduced. Another bill also addressed alternative financing issues. Neither bill passed. However, Governor O'Malley is expected to issue an executive order to direct that a study examine the use of alternative financing for school construction throughout the state.

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