



Education Advocate

January 2014

ACLU of Maryland Education Reform Project
Priorities for General Assembly 2014
Join us in Annapolis!

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Full Funding of the Public Education "Thornton" Formula

The ACLU-MD's Education Reform Project will continue its advocacy to ensure that the state budget contains full funding of the education formula in the Bridge to Excellence Act (aka "Thornton") including a minimum 1% inflation factor and the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI). Both of these factors play an important role in helping school systems meet rising costs without cutting resources in the classroom. As the state again faces a substantial structural deficit, ACLU will oppose any efforts to decrease education funds as the budget moves through the legislative process.

Funding the Thornton Formula Adequacy Study in the Governor's Budget

The Education Reform Project has called on the Governor to provide appropriate funding in the MSDE budget to hire a reputable expert to conduct the required "adequacy study" of the education formula. The Bridge to Excellence Act (BTE) anticipated the need to regularly update the education funding formula in light of changing academic standards and requires a reassessment be completed over the next two years to determine if the level of funding is adequate for students to meet state standards. The BTE law specifically notes that the study should analyze the impact of concentrations of poverty on adequacy targets. The ACLU will advocate aggressively for an appropriate level of funding in the FY15 budget to support a thorough, robust examination of Maryland's public school funding model.

Creation of a Blue Ribbon Commission to Oversee the Evaluation of the "Thornton" Funding Formula

The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, enacted in 2002, requires the State of Maryland to assess the adequacy of the "Thornton" Funding Formula to ensure that all Maryland public school students have the resources to meet state education standards,

SAVE THE DATE!

Baltimore Education
Coalition's
Legislative Preview

January 29, 5:30-
8pm

Digital Harbor High
School

TAKE ACTION!

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about the issues and
actions in Annapolis](#)



regardless of the wealth of the jurisdiction in which they reside. The ACLU's Education Reform Project will push for the creation of a body comprised of legislators, stakeholders and advocates to review the results of any adequacy study and recommend executive and/or legislative remedies to achieve fair and equitable student funding.

Expansion of Pre-Kindergarten Education for the Most At-Risk Children

The current Pre-K program mandated by the Bridge to Excellence Act (half-day for children from families eligible for Free & Reduced Meals) was established to meet the needs of students most at-risk of entering kindergarten unprepared for school. The impacts of these efforts are clear: Maryland has seen an increase in Kindergarten Readiness scores from just 49% in the 2001/2002 school year to 82% in the 2012/2013 school year. The Education Reform Project will advocate for adequate state and local funding for the existing Pre-K programs (currently funded based on K-12 students rather than Pre-K enrollment) and that the state fund school districts that offer full-day programs.

Provide Equitable School Construction Funds for Baltimore City and Low-Wealth Districts

For more than a decade, the ACLU has pushed for more funding to improve school facilities for Baltimore City and other low-wealth districts with inadequate school buildings. The Education Reform Project will support several programs in the upcoming legislative session:

- 1. Support the Baltimore City School Construction and Revitalization Act of 2013 (HB860).** HB860 passed during GA2013, which is anticipated to provide approximately \$1 billion to renovate and rebuild approximately 35 city school buildings to be completed within 7 years. The ACLU and allies will monitor the program and oppose any efforts that would restrict or reduce funding for the program.

- 2. Support higher allocations for the State School Construction Capital Improvement Program (CIP).** Increasing the state funding available to address the dire needs of school systems across the state is necessary to provide healthy, safe work environments for students and staff, as well as support the new demands of Common Core standards and the PARRC assessments. The ACLU will support legislation that establishes a \$400 million capital budget floor for school construction to address severe structural maintenance and modern instructional needs. Additionally, the Education Reform Project will advocate that the State maintain a steady, average annual allocation of CIP funds to Baltimore City Schools to address urgent needs in the 75% of schools not affected by the new building program.

- 3. Support the Federal Qualified School Construction Bonds (QZABs) Bill.** QZABs provide approximately \$4.5 million for Maryland districts annually. The ACLU will continue to support the state maximizing the use of this federal program and ensuring that the funds are distributed to the most

needy districts.

4. Protect the Aging Schools Program. The ACLU was instrumental in creating the State's Aging Schools Program (ASP) to help low-wealth districts improve old and deficient buildings. In recent years, the state proposed discontinuing the program but instead maintained about half of its total funding - \$6.1 million - due to the ACLU's advocacy. The ACLU will oppose any cuts to ASP.

Advocate for Fair Treatment of all Students

The Education Reform Project will support legislation or executive action that reduces school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests for non-violent incidents. The State Board of Education has proposed new regulations to address real problems in disciplinary procedures and policies impacting thousands of students across the state of Maryland. The most recent data on suspensions in the state shows that African American students were three times as likely to be suspended as their white peers and students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended compared to their non-disabled peers. The Education Reform Project will continue to support implementation of the State Board's regulations aimed ending failed zero-tolerance policies and reducing out-of-school punishments for minor offenses.

Oppose Funding for Private and Religious Schools in the Operating and Capital Budgets or in "BOAST" Tax Credit Bills

The ACLU opposes Maryland's trend of increasing public dollars for private schools. Public funds for these schools, whether through reimbursements to parents or directly to the institutions, or as tax credits to contributing businesses, ignores the basic tenant of separation of church and state and funds institutions that are unaccountable to taxpayers. Public tax dollars should not be used to support schools that are free to discriminate against LGBT youth and families and children with special needs.

[TAKE ACTION! Click here to learn about the issues and ACLU action in Annapolis.](#)

Baltimore Education Coalition in Annapolis for the 2014 Session!

Save the Date! January 29, 5:30-8pm

The ACLU's Education Reform Project is working with the Baltimore Education Coalition to gear up for the 2014 legislative session in Annapolis, which begins today. Governor O'Malley will release his budget in the upcoming weeks, state lawmakers will be filing bills that will affect education for city students, and the gubernatorial candidates are seeking support for their plans for education reform.

How will the state budget deficit affect classrooms in Baltimore City?

*Is the 21st Century Buildings of Our Kids program on track?
How can Pre-K be fully funded?
Where do the gubernatorial candidates stand on BEC issues?*

BEC's Legislative Session Preview Night - Save the Date!

**Wednesday, January 29, 2014
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm (Dinner at 5:30 pm)
Digital Harbor High School, 1100 Covington Avenue**

BEC will discuss this year's challenges and plan actions in our effort to ensure that city students get an excellent education!

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Education Reform Project

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