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Testimony before the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

In SUPPORT of

Senate Bill 661-Primary and Secondary Education-Community Schools-Established

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March 6, 2019**

Senate Bill 661 is a costless effort to define the components of a true Community Schools Strategy in the state of Maryland. SB 661 does not seek to limit the autonomy of or impose unreasonable restrictions on the state department of education, county boards of education, individual school leadership, staff, students, or families.

The passage of this legislation is critical now. Without it, a major component of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations, those focused on students living in areas of concentrated poverty, will go into effect without an empirically proven framework. Without the framework provided by SB 661, governance and accountability efforts won't be effective, crucial funding may not be allocated in the most efficient way, and Maryland's most vulnerable student populations will not benefit from the state and local investments they were intended to. **SB 661 must pass the Maryland General Assembly this year.**

In the 2016 legislative session, this body passed SB 1139, which required the state department of education to notify county boards of education that federal Title 1 funds could be utilized to fund the position of a Community Schools Coordinator (CSC) in a school. It also asked the department of education to encourage county boards of education to apply for federal Title IV funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act to aid with expenses related to out-of-school time programming, CSCs, and overall school-community partnership support. Baltimore City, as well as Baltimore, Prince George's, and Montgomery Counties took advantage of this legislation and are each operating at least one Community School and share resources, training opportunities, and best practices through their participation with the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools. **SB 1139 expires this year on June 30th.**

The Kirwan Commission recommends the implementation of a new concentration of poverty grant to place a CSC and health services practitioner to be made available to every school with 55% or more of its students coming from low-income families. The Commission also recommends an additional \$3,265 per low-income student be given to qualifying schools for the explicit purpose of serving all the school's students during the day, before and after school, and/or during the summer.¹ A lot of funding is available to meet the unique needs of students living in concentrated poverty, but no real infrastructure recommendations are made to

¹ Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education. "Interim Report" January 2019.

support the effectiveness of the proposed CSC and health services practitioner. **A Community School is not just putting a person in the role of a CSC and calling it a day.** If we operate that way, we should not be surprised to see a limited return on this major investment.

Community Schools are an evidence-based national best practice educational strategy that utilizes a whole-child approach to interrupt cycles of intergenerational poverty and maximize the potential for student success. While each individual school looks different and offers a different range of services based on the needs of the students and communities they serve, certain pillars must be upheld to truly constitute a Community School:

- Strong & Proven Curriculum
- High-Quality Teaching & Expanded Learning Opportunities
- Inclusive, Distributed Leadership & Accountability
- Positive Behavior Practices & Integrated Student Supports
- Family & Community Partnerships
- Community Support Services²

Community Schools are not a new type of school that would “compete” with traditional public schools for student enrollment in the way that charters and other nonpublic schools do. The concept of Community Schools has existed in the American mainstream since at least the early 20th century. **Community Schools are a student-centered strategy, complete with a range of programmatic and services offerings that can be tailored to suit students’ specific needs.** This educational model is one that mitigates as many non-academic factors as possible (hunger, homelessness, familial dysfunction, poverty, poor health, new arrival status, etc.) to ensure that students are able to fully access and engage with their course material and maximize their success.

Community Schools are a physical hub of service delivery for students, staff, and the surrounding community. This place-based approach to education is empirically backed, has the support of the National Education Association, and was even adopted throughout all of Oakland Unified School District in California. National findings reveal that when implemented with fidelity, Community Schools: (1) are an evidence-based intervention under ESSA, (2) meet the needs of low-achieving, high-poverty students, (3) produce positive student outcomes in attendance, behavior, and academic achievement through supports like counseling, medical care, and transportation assistance, (4) increase trust and relationships among students, parents, and staff, (5) reduce racial and economic achievement gaps, and (6) are an excellent return on investment of up to \$15 in social value and economic benefits for every dollar spent on school-based wraparound services.²

Every jurisdiction in Maryland is impacted by concentrated poverty and stands to benefit from the adoption of a robust Community Schools Strategy, through funding the Kirwan Commission’s recommendations. **In Somerset, Kent, and Caroline counties, 100% of schools are serving student populations where at least 40% of students live in poverty.**³ In Baltimore City and Wicomico County that becomes 96% of schools. In Allegany and Dorchester, that’s 92% of schools. Poverty isn’t a proxy for race—it’s a consequence of rising income stratification and serves as a measure of the need faced by increasing numbers of children and youth throughout the state. Ensuring the success of all Maryland students now, regardless of the circumstances they come from, must remain our top priority. To that end, **ACY strongly and respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 661.**

² Learning Policy Institute. “Community Schools and an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence” December 2017.

³ Strong Schools Maryland. 2018.