



MACo Testimony:

The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education

Date: November 29, 2018

From: Kevin Kinnally, Policy Associate, MACo

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) supports a multi-stakeholder review of education funding requirements and formulas, many of which could benefit from updating and reconsideration. MACo also appreciates the inclusion of two county representatives on the Commission, analogous to those on the “Thornton” Commission during the last major review.

Counties are the principal unit of local government in Maryland, and – unlike in many states – Maryland counties share responsibility with the State for funding public schools, libraries, and local community colleges. While local boards of education develop local school budgets and oversee education-related spending, they are dependent on financing from county governments. In fiscal 2018, local governments provided 49% of total revenues for local school systems.

In fact, in 2018, more than half of Maryland’s counties exceeded the required education funding, also called “maintenance of effort,” for a total of more than \$174 million in *additional* education funding. Further, each year counties spend millions on schools – money which is not accounted for in the “maintenance of effort” calculation – with commitments through their health departments, law enforcement agencies, after-school activities, and other programs not technically inside the school budget.

As the Commission sharpens its focus on education funding formulas, counties continue to be concerned with the lack of specificity regarding the pattern and role of county funding required to effectuate the Commission’s recommendations. These details are vital for counties and other stakeholders to fully understand the impact of any changes to State education aid formulas.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Commission to provide this information, as well as any underlying data necessary to independently evaluate costs and fiscal impacts, as soon as possible so that counties may provide feedback and insight on draft recommendations.

MACo advocates for a partnership approach to meeting the education needs of Maryland’s students, one that fairly balances state responsibilities with local obligations and seeks equitable and efficient solutions to meet current expenses and future goals. With this approach in mind, MACo urges the Commission to avoid creating a “winners and losers” situation for county governments. The Commission’s recommendations must be the proverbial “rising tide that lifts all boats.”

County governments share other concerns regarding current education funding law, including the State’s wealth calculation, funding of jurisdictions with declining enrollment, and the effect of nonrecurring costs on “maintenance of effort” calculations. MACo will continue to advocate on these issues through the county membership on the Commission.

MACo reiterates its willingness to provide testimony, data, and any other information requested by the Commission. Maryland’s counties appreciate and value this relationship and the Association looks forward to working with the Commission to ensure adequate, fair, and feasible funding for all of Maryland’s students.