



PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Workgroup to Study State, County and Municipal Fiscal Relationships

November 5, 2009

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland represents the twenty-four local school system superintendents. As the president of the organization for 2009/2010, I am here today to testify regarding our efforts to ensure that state and local tax dollars are being spent in an efficient and effective manner. Two recent national recognitions that identify Maryland public schools as number one in the nation are examples that support our application of state, local and federal dollars to provide our students with high quality education programs and learning opportunities.

Members of the Legislature made a significant decision in 2002 to provide over \$1.3 Billion over five years to ensure that all students attending Maryland public schools had access to an adequate education. The MGT of America, Inc. report published in 2008 affirmed that the public school systems in Maryland used this increase funding to improve the quality of education that resulted in an increase in student performance. As the superintendent of one of our state's poorest jurisdictions, I see everyday the impact of this funding. For the first time, Caroline County elementary students have a gifted program; middle school students are able to take Algebra, Geometry and Spanish; high school students can choose from a variety of advanced placement courses historically only available in wealthier counties; and, career and technical students are training for 21st century jobs. For those of us in the poorer jurisdictions, Thornton support began to truly provide an equitable program, regardless of the income within a county. The General Assembly deserves recognition and our considerable appreciation for this support. Superintendents understand as you do that the increase in state aid contributed directly to the recognition by *Education Week* that our schools are the best in the nation. Again, we appreciate your wisdom to fund the Thornton Commission recommendations.

During the Special Session of 2007 and the subsequent 2008 Session, the Bridge to Excellence legislation was amended to modify the cost-of-living factor commencing with fiscal year 2012. In addition State public school funding for FY2009, FY2010 and FY2011 limited the application of the funding formulas guaranteeing a minimal increase to local school systems of one percent (1%) if the formulas calculations did not provide at least that level of increase. At the same time a portion of the increased costs of funding the teacher pension program was included in the calculation of the overall increase in state funding to each jurisdiction. This resulted in significant decreases in state funding to local school systems.

The proposed State budget for FY 2010 that Governor O'Malley presented in January 2009 included significant reductions in aid to local school systems. The state stabilization federal stimulus dollars were used to replace the reductions in that budget to the levels that the law stipulated. In addition Governor O'Malley recommended that the increased costs for the teacher

pension program for FY 2010 and FY 2011 be covered by the application of federal stimulus dollars.

School systems are receiving additional stimulus funds in the areas of Title 1 and Special Education that are restricted in nature and do not provide superintendents and boards of education with much flexibility.

To this point in my comments I have not addressed the decrease in local governments funding that is being experienced in every county. Point being made is despite comments from many, public education has experienced reductions in school funding and we are making critical decisions that our impacting our ability to deliver high quality services and opportunities to students attending our schools.

We will continue to be collaborative in our efforts to work with Boards of Education, Local County Government officials, and the Legislative and Executive Branches of State Government to ensure that school funding is being applied in an efficient manner while addressing the learning needs of the 840,00 students attending our schools. There has never been a more critical time in our history to ensure that we provide all our students, our future citizens and leaders, with the very best education possible. You know the challenges that face our students, our state and our nation. No one will deny that a highly educated populace is an essential component to the solution to successfully resolve the impact of the current economic environment and in insuring a strong, viable democratic society in the future.

We are partners in creating the solutions to this current crisis. With public education, it is not simply a matter of reducing the funding by a percentage or an amount. The potential consequence of the reductions must be considered. It is not simply a matter of balancing a budget; it is a matter of securing our future.

Public school superintendents in Maryland look forward to working with you. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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