



MARYLAND COALITION FOR Excellent Schools

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October 4, 2007

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor, State of Maryland
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor O'Malley:

Maryland students and schools have made substantial progress in recent years as the State government—through the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act—has moved to fulfill its constitutional obligation to provide a “thorough and efficient” education for all students. Yet we all know that we have a long way to go before we can say that every one of our young people is able to meet state standards and is adequately prepared to participate fully in the economy of the 21st century and in the civic life of our democracy.

The funding required by the Bridge to Excellence Act has been phased in over a six-year period; this is the first school year in which direct state aid has reached its fully mandated level. Most of the additional funds have come only in the past three years. Thus, many of the reforms and support systems designed to enhance student achievement are only now being implemented and can be expected to bear fruit in coming years. In addition, as you know, the Geographic Cost-of-Education Index—a key element of the Bridge to Excellence Act—has not been funded for the past five years, depriving numerous school systems of significant resources that they were promised under the Thornton plan.

The members of the Maryland Coalition for Excellent Schools recognize full well the difficulties you face in closing the state's fiscal gap and balancing the budget, and we applaud your willingness to confront this challenge directly and to consider bold measures to address it. However, your proposal to curtail the annual inflation adjustment in state school aid—even for a year—and subsequently to cap it would represent a breach of the promise made by state government in 2002 and an abandonment of the Thornton plan. The implicit price deflator measures school systems' *real increased cost of doing business*. It was included intentionally in the Bridge to Excellence Act so that Thornton funds would hold their value over time. Eliminating the inflation factor for two years, as you have proposed, means that school systems will have to absorb the rising costs of electricity, transportation, wages, and other necessities. For those systems more dependent on state aid, due to the low wealth of their jurisdiction, the blow will be particularly harsh. The result would be real and permanent cuts in state education aid (even if the GCEI was phased in over the next several years), something that was not done even in difficult fiscal circumstances under the previous administration.

American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Maryland Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals

Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals
Maryland Education Coalition
Maryland Parent Teacher Association
Maryland Retired School Personnel Association
Maryland State Teachers Association
Prince George's Business-Education Alliance

We urge you to use all reasonable means to raise adequate revenues to both close the fiscal gap and fulfill your constitutional obligation to Maryland's children. Such an opportunity to adjust the revenue stream to match fundamental state needs comes only rarely, and this may be your only chance for many years to guarantee that our school systems receive the money they need to educate our children to their fullest potential.

Thus, we believe that any package of proposals considered by the General Assembly should include:

- No cut in the direct state aid to local schools systems mandated under current law, including not reducing or eliminating the implicit price deflator or the Aging Schools Program.
- Full funding of the Geographic Cost-of-Education Index.
- Funding for school construction and modernization of at least \$400 million, as provided in the 2007-2008 budget.
- No shift of pension costs to local governments.

The State of Maryland, through the Bridge to Excellence Act, and the federal government, through the No Child Left Behind Act, have established high expectations for students and educators, and we readily embrace them. We have equally high expectations that you and the leaders of the General Assembly will ensure that our schools receive the resources they require to fulfill these mandates. Anything less would put at risk the futures of our children and the long-term health of Maryland's economy.

Members of the Maryland Coalition for Excellent Schools will be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters and to provide any additional information you request.

Sincerely,

Clara B. Floyd
on behalf of the Maryland Coalition for Excellent Schools

cc: The Honorable Anthony G. Brown
The Honorable Thomas G. Mike Miller, Jr.
The Honorable Michael G. Busch
The Honorable Ulysses Currie
The Honorable Norman H. Conway