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Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education Releases Preliminary Report with Bold Vision for PreK-12

Commission outlines bold new vision to enable Maryland's students to perform at the level of the world's top education systems

Annapolis, MD – To ensure a vibrant economy and career advancement opportunities for all its residents, Maryland must take bold action and significantly improve the quality of its preK-12 system. This is the conclusion of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, a 25-member panel of State and county officials, education stakeholders, and members of the business community, chaired by former University System of Maryland Chancellor, Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan. The Commission was established by the General Assembly and Governor Hogan in 2016 and was charged with the task of making recommendations that would enable Maryland’s preK-12 education system to perform at the level of the best-performing systems in the world and updating the preK-12 funding formulas known as the “Thornton” formulas.

Since its formation in late 2016, the Commission has embarked on a rigorous and detailed study of preK-12 education in the State, comparing Maryland’s policies and practices to those in the best-performing states in the United States and the top performing systems around the world. Supported in this work by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) and, on school finance issues, by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, the Commission has held 21 public meetings to date during which over 200 people testified. Students, parents, expert researchers, advocates for special education, the arts, public health, childcare, teachers, superintendents, boards of education and others from around the State testified before the Committee and informed its work.

“The Commission’s challenge,” Kirwan said, “has been to identify changes in policies and practices that would enable Maryland to close the enormous gap between the quality of our system and the world’s best performing systems. Given the nature of the global economy now and into the future, how can we expect to have a competitive economy or to provide our young people with the knowledge and skills they will need for success in their careers, if we don’t have an education system on a par with the best systems in the world.”

The Commission report notes that Maryland students now perform in the middle of the pack nationally. According to the most recent results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), Maryland students rank 29th in 4th grade math, 25th in 4th grade reading, and 28th in 8th grade math. This middling performance nationally matches the country's mediocre academic performance overall compared to other nations; the U.S. ranks 39th in math, 25th in science and 23rd in reading, on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Based on these facts and its year-long research and listening effort, the Commission is today releasing its preliminary policy priorities and recommendations. These recommendations will serve as the basis for the second phase of the Commission's work to craft an implementation and budget plan for its findings.

The Commission's recommendations cut across five policy areas, which are fully described in the report:

- Invest in early childhood education so that all students reach kindergarten on track and ready to learn
- Provide significantly more support for at risk students
- Increase the standards, expectations and compensation of teachers to ensure an abundant supply of highly qualified classroom instructors
- Develop a more rigorous and better aligned curricula that enables graduates to be ready for college level work or earn an industry-recognized workforce credential
- Institute a governance and accountability system with the authority to ensure the Commission's recommendations are fully and faithfully implemented.

The full report is available at the Commission's website: <http://bit.ly/MDCCommission>

In its report, the Commission expresses the belief that the State can achieve its goal of delivering greater opportunity for all students and to match the performance of the best school systems in the world, provided that Maryland makes a sustained, statewide commitment to systemic change. Only then, can Maryland ensure a permanent place as a global leader in the innovation economy.

Norman R. Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin and current board member of the University System of Maryland Board of Regents, who testified before the Commission, said, "There is no issue of greater importance to our State than the one addressed by this Commission. If we fail to implement the type of recommendations it offers I fear for our State's economic future, its competitiveness and its ability to provide quality jobs for its citizens."

Dr. Nancy Grasmick, former State Superintendent of Schools, who also testified before the Commission, said, "Maryland must achieve a level of national and international excellence now and for the future in preK-12 education. It can be done through the kind of reforms that the Commission is recommending accompanied by strong accountability to insure success."

Now that its preliminary policy recommendations have been released, the Commission moves to the second phase of its work, which will focus on finalizing and costing out its recommendations and updating the funding formulas. The Commission will work over the coming months to produce its final report.

Reporters interested in speaking with Dr. Kirwan or members of the Commission may contact Katie Ryan at kryan@usmd.edu or (301) 509-0886.

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The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education was appointed in 2016 to review and recommend any needed changes to update the current education funding formulas in the state of Maryland and make policy recommendations that would enable Maryland's preK-12 system to perform at the level of the best performing systems in the world. Information on Commission meetings is available at the Commission's website: <http://bit.ly/MDCommission>