

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor, City of Baltimore

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School Commissioners

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

January 16, 2019

Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan, Chair
Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education
c/o Office of Policy Analysis
Department of Legislative Services
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Kirwan,

As the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education prepares to finalize its next steps for the 2019 state legislative session, I am writing to provide you with an update on the work City Schools has undertaken over the past year to develop a plan for what a world-class education system would look like for Baltimore City Public Schools, as well as what it would take to provide such an education.

Please find enclosed our final report: [*Investing in Our Future: A World-Class Education System for Baltimore’s Students*](#). Should time permit, we would welcome the opportunity to formally present our priorities and rationale contained within to the Kirwan Commission.

As you will see, the report outlines services and structures that City Schools believes must be in place in order to build a world-class education system for Baltimore’s students. This framework was created with input from local and national experts, community activists, and community members – including City Schools’ parents, school leaders, and administrators – and is informed by research from leading national and international scholars in education policy and practice.

In creating the structure for this document, we adapted the building blocks identified by the Kirwan Commission to create seven categories of investment. Descriptions for each category include details of services that should be funded through a per-pupil foundation amount, with additional weights for students in specific subgroups (students with disabilities, low-income students, and English learners) and allocations for schools serving concentrations of low-income students.

It was always our hope that this report would serve as a valuable tool for you and your colleagues as the Kirwan Commission recommendations were brought to the General Assembly for debate in 2019. We believe the services we have outlined are essential to the success of our students and should be made available as soon as possible through adoption of a new state funding formula.

That said, the Commission’s recent announcement of a yearlong delay – a delay, it should be noted, that comes on the heels of last year’s delay – is both disappointing and alarming. It has

now been more than two years since APA Consultants first presented the final Adequacy Study Report to the Kirwan Commission, which revealed that City Schools needs an additional \$358 million annually to ensure an adequate education for Baltimore's students. Similarly, an analysis conducted by the state's own Department of Legislative Services found that if the inflation factor had not been eliminated from the current Thornton funding formula, an additional \$290 million per year would have been available to support an adequate education for Baltimore's children.

In addition to the dramatic underfunding of operations cited by both studies above, City Schools' capital challenges were fully documented in the 2012 Jacobs Report – a comprehensive facility condition assessment – which concluded it would cost \$2.5 billion to bring all City Schools buildings up to *minimally acceptable* standards. In 2019, adjusting for inflation, we estimate the overall costs at \$3 billion.

These findings of inadequate funding are particularly disturbing in the context of ensuring equity for non-white students and students from low-income households, populations that make up the majority of City Schools' enrollment. Outside education policy experts have consistently found Maryland's current education funding to be inequitably distributed:

- In its most recent 2018 analysis, the **Education Trust** found that most districts in Maryland do not receive the money the state says they need, and districts with the most students of color are shortchanged the most. Nearly half of Maryland's Black or Latino students attend schools in one of the three most underfunded districts in the state.
- As presented in the July 2018 **Hechinger Report**, the latest data from the federal government reveal that while in a majority of states students in the poorest school districts tend to receive more funding than rich districts, Maryland is one of six states where the wealthiest 25 percent of school districts receive more money than the poorest.
- In its 2017 analysis, the **Education Law Center** found that Maryland's funding system is among the most regressive nationwide for its failure to provide additional funding to school districts with higher concentrations of low-income students.
- In an examination of the disparities in local funding between high- and low-income districts, the **Urban Institute** ranked Maryland among the worst nationally (42 out of 50) for providing higher amounts of funding to non-poor students, with fewer dollars being allocated to low-income students.
- Recent findings from the **Maryland Center on Economic Policy** are especially concerning, revealing that as of 2015, more than half of black students in Maryland attend substantially underfunded schools. Specifically, 53% of black students attend chronically underfunded schools, compared to just 8% of white students in Maryland.

Given the overwhelming evidence documenting fundamental inequities in Maryland's public education system, City Schools feels strongly that any preliminary funding actions taken by the Kirwan Commission during Session 2019 should be prioritized toward districts with the most significant adequacy gaps. While \$325 million statewide pales in comparison to what would be required to address the overarching needs outlined above and in the *Investing in Our Future* document, any such funds nevertheless must be targeted toward students who have been the most underserved historically, and continue to be underserved in 2019 under the current state funding formula.

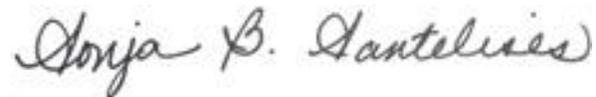
It is in this spirit that we recommend the Commission deploy the bulk of this year's initial funds toward addressing concentrations of poverty – specifically, implementing the per-pupil funding amount that the Commission has already established. Providing the per-pupil amount will mean schools have utmost flexibility in beginning to introduce the services, staffing, and programming that students need most. Similarly, the Commission should ensure that any special education funds disbursed in the initial year be directed toward districts serving the highest numbers of specialized learners, given that these districts typically experience the greatest funding gaps in this category. With regard to early childhood funds, it is critical that funds be prioritized to provide all additional weights in addition to the student base amount for high poverty districts.

In closing, for the past decade, Baltimore's young people have waited for resources while the state has systematically underfunded our schools. For years, our students, families, and staff have waited for what should have been received through the state's own funding formula. Year over year, it has grown harder to fund the programs that motivate students to learn, provide the enrichment that ignites their curiosity, offer the counseling, support, and services they need, attract and retain highly qualified staff, and repair our deteriorating buildings.

If Maryland is to continue its ranking as a national leader in education, the state must work collaboratively with local school districts to develop and implement innovative solutions that will provide adequate and equitable funding for all students, no matter their zip code, race, or socio-economic status.

As always, we greatly appreciate your consideration of our concerns. We look forward to working together in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sonja B. Santelises". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Kirwan Commission Members
Rachel Hise
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners