

LEGISLATIVE SESSION 2026 *IN REVIEW*



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Table of Contents

1

INTRODUCTION, THE START OF SESSION, AND OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

2

THREE B'S: BILLS, BUDGET, BLUEPRINT IMPLEMENTATION

3

THEMES AND STRATEGIES: DEEP DIVING INTO THE CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY #1: COUNTING LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

CASE STUDY #2: PROTECTING MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

CASE STUDY #3: MINIMUM SCHOOL FUNDING (MSF)

CASE STUDY #4: PREK ACCESS

4

THREE R'S: RESULTS, REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5

CONTACTS AND THANK YOU



THE START OF SESSION AND OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

For our team, the work for the 2026 Session started well before it officially began. During the interim, we took a close look at how each pillar of the Blueprint was being implemented, identifying what is working and where challenges remain.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS PROCESS:

Hosted
6
Monthly Education Huddles

Interviewed over
58
experts and community members

We analyzed disaggregated school data, hosted monthly education huddles, and connected with student, experts, educators, community members, and advocates to ground our understanding. At the same time, we knew this work was happening in a broader context of growing fiscal pressure, political tension, and ongoing implementation challenges.

From this, we developed a set of clear, pillar specific priorities, areas we needed to protect, and others that required adjustments to strengthen implementation and better meet student needs.

These priorities fell into 3 main categories.

DURING SESSION, TRANSFORMING OUR SCHOOLS BEGAN WITH A, B, AND C...



Advance accountability and transparency:

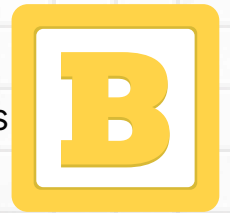
Marylanders deserve clear evidence that Blueprint investments are reaching classrooms and students.

1. Require clear, public, and disaggregated reporting.
2. Hold AIB, MSDE, and local education agencies jointly accountable.
3. Promote cross agency coordination.

1. Advance and sustain targeted implementation initiatives that improve equity and quality.
2. Promote innovation through scalable pilots, including dual-language immersion programs; and, proven educator initiatives.

Build better Blueprint implementation and supports:

The Blueprint's success depends on how well it's implemented and how strongly Maryland supports its educators.



1. Ensure poverty-counting adjustments strengthen funding equity and adequacy.
2. Deliver promised supports and protections for Black and Brown students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in poverty.
3. Protect every student's right to learn.
4. Amplify student voice.



Center equity and student voice:

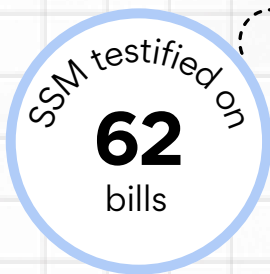
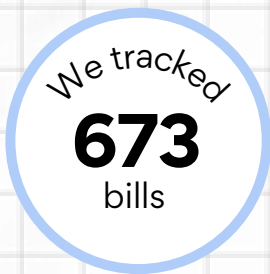
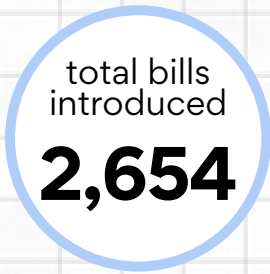
Equity is the foundation of the Blueprint and it must remain central as Maryland moves from policy to practice.



THREE B'S: BILLS, BUDGET, BLUEPRINT IMPLEMENTATION

This Session, like many before, brought a surge of education related bills. We supported about half and opposed the other half. From talking to legislators and advocates, it became clear that there wasn't much appetite for bills with large fiscal impact both in terms of investment and revenue.

While this helped protect the Blueprint from major cuts, it also made it more challenging to advance some of our key priorities.



A BILL BREAKDOWN:

IN SUPPORT **29**

6 SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

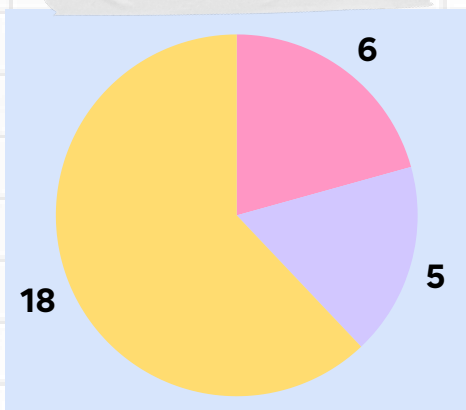
IN OPPOSITION **23**

2 INFORMATIONAL

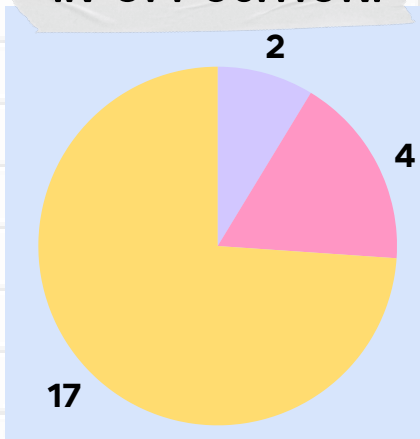
How did these bills break down into our legislative priorities?

For both the bills we supported and the bills we opposed, a majority of our time was spent trying to **center equity and student voice** in Maryland public schools. This included supporting bills that delivered promised supports and protections for Black and Brown students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in poverty. In the same vein, we opposed regressive bills that directly contradicted or negatively impacted these standards.

IN SUPPORT:



IN OPPOSITION:



KEY

Advance Accountability and Transparency

Build Better Blueprint Supports

Center Equity and Student Voice

While many bills were well intentioned, our analysis, grounded in engagement and research, raised concerns about how they would play out in practice. This led us to ask: **When intent and impact diverge, who was missing from the table when these policies were written?** Because gaps in impact are rarely accidental. They reflect whose voices were centered and whose were not.

3

THEMES AND STRATEGIES: DEEP DIVING INTO THE CASE STUDIES

Overall Themes of the Bills...

WE CHAMPIONED:

- Safe, supportive school policies
- Strong Blueprint Implementation
- Equity driven policy solutions
- Progressive revenue initiatives

WE OPPOSED:

- Discriminatory policies
- Diversion of public funds from public schools
- Bills excluding community voice
- Misalignment between intent and impact

Advocacy Strategies Employed:



The Weekly Legislative Newsletter:

To keep our network updated with what happened in Annapolis in the past week and highlight future hearings, meetings, and actions to take.



Blueprint Day: To gather, celebrate, and listen to our public school students and educators and demand that the promises made in the Blueprint are realized.

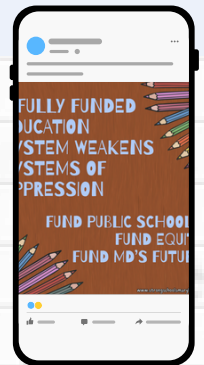
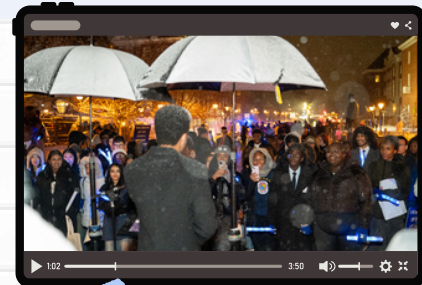


Targeted Actions: To directly connect our network with their legislators, so representatives can hear from their constituents.



150 people took action over the course of Session!

We had **29,267 views** on our Instagram page during Session!



Social Media: To connect with students and highlight information about the Blueprint, Session, and actions to take.

Different priorities required different strategies to move them forward. While some of our organizing was highly visible (*overt strategies explained above*), much of our impact came from behind the scenes work (*covert*).

As a result, our approach is best understood through the lens of our specific legislative initiatives. **The following case studies highlight where we started, where we ended, how we got there, and what we learned.**

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS #1:



A Methodology for Counting Low-Income Students

The Blueprint revisions bill requested by the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), SB 311/HB 490, included a hold harmless provision for Compensatory Education funding after multiple unsuccessful attempts to establish a new methodology for identifying students from low-income households. However, the bill did not require the development or adoption of a new approach. In recent years, there have been two efforts to address this issue, one led by MSDE and another by the Governor's Office for Children. Neither was seriously advanced as a viable solution. **As a result, Maryland still lacks an accurate and reliable method for identifying students living in poverty.**

THE GAP

There was no statutory requirement holding any agency to a clear standard or expectation to develop an equitable and adequate method for identifying low-income students. **Without a mandate in statute backed by strong guardrails, there was a risk that:**

- Impacted communities would be excluded, resulting in the developed methodology not reflecting real student need.
- Future funding decisions risk reinforcing existing inequities.

THE SOLUTION

To address this, we recommended comprehensive amendment language requiring the development of a methodology, with a focus on strengthening how it is created, not just what it produces by:

- Requiring engagement with key stakeholders including students families, community advocates, and local boards.
- Mandating public meetings and transparency.
- Ensuring the methodology applies to both compensatory education and community school funding.
- Creating a more structured, accountable, and inclusive development process with deadlines.

THE OUTCOME?

Both the House and Senate advanced different versions of our amendment language with House version being more comprehensive.

Once, the bill moved to conference committee, the Senate's more diluted version of our amendment language made it into the final version of SB 311.

MOVING FORWARD

We will focus on embedding community voice in the development process early as it...

- Leads to better policy outcomes.
- Reduces implementation challenges later.
- Strengthens trust and accountability.
- Makes future advocacy more effective and aligned.

TAKEAWAYS

Drafting Policy Sets the Standard: Being at the table when policy is written is critical. Instead of limiting our role to testimony in hearings, agency meetings, and budget discussions, we developed amendment language that set a clear expectation for meaningful community engagement in the development of this methodology.

This approach shifts communities from reacting to policy to shaping it, ensuring that the people most impacted have a direct role in designing the solutions that affect them.

Embedding Community Voice Strengthens Outcomes: Embedding community engagement into the policy process leads to stronger, more equitable design and more sustainable implementation.



Strong policy requires intentional design through community engagement.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS #2:



Protecting Mental Health Services:

The Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports is a critical component of the Blueprint, providing school-based mental health services to students across Maryland. **The Governor's proposed FY2027 budget included a \$20 million cut to the Consortium**, on top of a permanent \$30 million annual cut enacted last year.

THE GAP

The proposed cuts would have further reduced access to essential mental health services for students across Maryland.

- These reductions came on top of prior cuts, compounding the strain on school communities.
- There was a risk of weakening a system designed to respond to the growing mental health crisis.

THE SOLUTION

We advocated for the full restoration and protection of funding for the Consortium by:

- Highlighting the cumulative impact of repeated cuts.
- Elevating the urgency of student mental health needs so decision-makers understood the real-world consequences for students.

THE OUTCOME?

Both the House and the Senate rejected the proposed \$20 million cut!

Funding for the Consortium was protected, preserving critical mental health supports for students statewide.

MOVING FORWARD

We will work to sustain investments in student mental health resources as they support student well being, academic success, and strong school communities.

We will always work to protect public school student resources from budget cuts.

TAKEAWAYS

Breaking Silos Across Sectors Strengthens

Advocacy: Partnering with mental health advocates brought a broader, more unified voice to the issue. and helped build a compelling, well rounded case for these critical supports.

Cuts Compound, Funding Matters: Funding decisions do not happen in isolation. Legislators needed to be reminded that these proposed reductions would stack on top of prior cuts to the Consortium, deepening inequities and limiting access to essential resources.

Centering Student Need Drives Urgency: Cuts are not just numbers on a spreadsheet, they result in a real diversion of public resources from students. Grounding the conversation in the ongoing student mental health crisis and the essential role schools play helped clarify what is at stake.

Protecting progress requires vigilance, an acknowledgment of past cuts/historical context, and a realistic calculation of the harm the cuts would cause.



CASE STUDY ANALYSIS #3:



Minimum School Funding

Minimum School Funding (MSF) is a core Blueprint policy, requiring 75-100% of funds to be tracked to specific programs at the school level by 2028. This accountability mechanism was created to ensure that resources are equitably allocated and reach the students they are intended to serve, after decades of inequitable investment in Maryland public schools.

THE GAP

Our public school system has historically and systemically underfunded and marginalized at-promise communities, through policy and funding decisions. The Blueprint is designed to equitably reallocate these resources. That kind of shift requires large scale systems change and strong accountability. *MSF fills this gap. However, MSF implementation has been diluted over time as LEAs have had challenges with*

- The PowerSchool coding system which requires budgeting and expenditure tracking by Blueprint programming at the school level.
- Inadequate guidance regarding coding and technical assistance from State Agencies.

Ultimately weakening accountability and delaying resources allocation.

THE SOLUTION

We advocated that MSF is integral to the Blueprint as it is an accountability measure for equitable resource allocation. Therefore,

- The AIB should steward MSF implementation and provide support and accountability to LEAs in meeting these requirements
- If extensions are necessary, they should be limited and paired with clear transitional expectations for full implementation.
- Transparency should remain central to implementation.

THE OUTCOME

1. The State Board of Education (SBOE) and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) granted extension waivers and eventually extended the timeline by one year.
2. Both bodies then also removed key transitional benchmarks intended to ensure LEAs make progress towards meeting MSF requirements.

MOVING FORWARD

We will continue fiercely advocate for equitable resource allocation through Minimum School Funding policies as it:

- Prevents widening gaps between high and low resource schools.
- Reinforces accountability at every level of the system.

Messaging and communication about the promise of this policy with diverse communities is key to maintaining this provision in law.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Connecting Policy to Real World Impact is Critical: Advocacy makes the most headway when you can ground in real life impact. Blueprint implementation and policy can be super technical, and legislators and communities may not be able to easily grasp the impact of a policy until there are real life examples, excerpts, and data showing the impact.

To help explain MSF, we developed and amplified our Minimum School Funding Initial Analysis, showing that high poverty schools are furthest from receiving equitable funding.

Implementation is Where Equity is Realized, or Lost: Strong policy must be matched by strong implementation, guidance, and accountability. Without accountability, the promise of equitable funding risks being diluted before it reaches students.

MSF is an key example that policy does not end at the passage of the policy.

Equity depends on follow through and implementation



CASE STUDY ANALYSIS #4:



Prekindergarten Access:

Under the Blueprint, Tier I funding ensures free access to full-day prekindergarten for students with the greatest needs. However, a clause in the original legislation that included certain multilingual learners and students with disabilities in a higher income bracket is expiring in July 2026.

THE GAP

- Maryland's most recent Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) data shows **students with disabilities and multilingual learners enter kindergarten with the largest literacy gaps.**
- **Without Tier I inclusion, some students with disabilities could be placed in more limited or half-day programs,** even when inclusive full-day settings would better support their development.

THE SOLUTION

We proposed an amendment to SB311/HB490, the Blueprint revisions bill and the budget to:

- Remove the sunset clause; and
- Permanently include students with disabilities and multilingual learners as Tier I.

This recommendation reflects the reality that these students require additional support regardless of income.

THE OUTCOME

1. Tier II eligibility was reduced from 301-600% FPL to 301% - 450% FPL
2. Permanent Tier I protections were not secured for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Navigating misalignment between policy and actual implementation phase in and progress is key:

The legislation created in 2020 and 2021 had an idea of how implementation roll out would go but it may not be aligned with reality. That means things like planned sunsets in funding and inclusion might actually be premature. Communicating *why* the misalignment is occurring to the legislature effectively is important to ensure limiting confusion and misinformation.

MOVING FORWARD

We will focus on ensuring access to high quality full day preK within the mixed delivery system in diverse, inclusive settings for our highest need 3 and 4 year olds as it:

- Supports early identification and intervention.
- Prevents long term academic disparities.

Access to free and low-cost full-day preK remains a critical area for continued advocacy to ensure the Blueprint provides a stable foundation for our youngest learners.

Advocacy makes the most headway when you can ground in real life impact: Blueprint implementation and policy can be super technical and legislators and communities may not be able to easily grasp the impact of a policy until there are real life examples, excerpts, and data showing the impact.



Strong policy requires intentional design through community engagement.

5

THREE R'S: RESULTS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RESULTS



FINAL STATS:

We Supported 29 Bills

11 bills passed



We Opposed 23 Bills

1 bill passed

The 1 Bill We Opposed that Passed:

SB960 creates a separate funding stream for charter school facility maintenance, inequitably allocating resources among public schools and public charter schools

Themes of the Bills We Supported that Passed: Safeguards and protections for students and communities, expansion of transparency measures, accountability frameworks, and increased accessibility of certain education programming.

Limited structural changes, large investments, and revenue initiatives passed this Session.

INTENT VS IMPACT: *WHO IS AT THE TABLE?*

The intent of legislation does not always translate to impact. While many policies were well intentioned, gaps in how the bill would be implemented or rolled out, often traced back to who was, and was not, included in the drafting process. **Ensuring that students, families, educators, and community advocates are meaningfully engaged is critical to drafting strong policy.** When impacted communities are not at the table, policies risk falling short or creating unintended harm.

POLICY VS. PRACTICE: *WHERE EQUITY IS WON OR LOST.*

Passing policy is only the beginning; **implementation is where impact is determined.** State agency, local agency, and public schools working in Blueprint implementation will ultimately shape whether the law delivers on its promises.

THE FISCAL REALITY: *A THROUGH LINE ACROSS SESSION.*

The Blueprint Fund is projected to be depleted by 2028, creating a 1.5 billion gap that must be filled by the General Fund earlier than expected, **yet the State has still not established sustainable, progressive revenue sources to fund our public schools.** As we fight for adequate and equitable public school funding, we must ensure sustainability through progressive revenue sources.

OVERALL REFLECTION

While this Session was not necessarily marked by sweeping cuts or investments, we learned a lot regarding how to navigate a complex landscape and find both overt and covert ways to influence decision making. We also recognize the challenges around the corner. **We know education funding cliffs exist. We know that we need sustainable revenue sources to fund public schools in our State.**

Students, community members, and advocates **must** be meaningfully engaged and our recommendations heard in the Interim in order to better Blueprint implementation in each pillar and secure funding to meet the needs of our public school students.

We are so grateful to the students, educators, community members, and advocates that partner with us to champion Maryland public schools. You move us forward, fuel our work, and drive our impact. **Thank you.**

-Kenzie Funk

6

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