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Business Executives - We Must Implement the Kirwan Commission Recommendations

We are business leaders whose lives have been committed to building the economy and providing jobs for Marylanders. Maryland employers and employees must compete with companies across the United States and across the world. To succeed in an ever increasingly competitive global economy, our state must have a world-class education system. Sadly, we don't have that now. Significant and immediate changes in our present system are needed or Maryland will slip and all Marylanders will pay a steep and avoidable price.

We have reviewed the recent recommendations for systemic educational reform put forward by the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (the Kirwan Commission). We strongly support the Commission's recommendations.

Our state's education system is in trouble. Just a few examples: fewer than 40% of our state's high school graduates are ready for either college or a career; almost half of our state's teachers leave teaching after two years; there is a substantial disparity in funding of schools attended by most African-American students compared to schools attended by white students; and the racially and economically identifiable achievement gap amongst Maryland students is undeniable.

The Kirwan Commission's recommendations provide a solid framework to address these and other deficiencies. The Commission's recommendations are based on proven best practices from the highest performing education systems in the United States and in the world.

As the recommendations make clear, a successful education system is, indeed, a system. The present system lacks strategic coherence. We must link early childhood education, outstanding teachers, and high standards for students to obtain the desired end result of college/career ready graduates.

To date, the public discussion of the Commission's recommendations has focused almost exclusively on its call for increased funding. That narrow focus obscures the need for true accountability which is central to the Commission's analysis and recommendations. We need – and the Commission strongly urges – increased accountability as the predicate for increased funding. As Maryland taxpayers and business executives, we recognize no one wants to pay more and then get more of the same.

Seemingly, no participant in the current system, the state, school districts, or school leadership, is held accountable for high and consistent standards. The Commission, by contrast, has recommended strong and unprecedented accountability measures. The Commission recommends, for example, the important structural change in the state system of a new Oversight Board to be comprised of seven very distinguished Marylanders with a staff of 15 individuals specifically responsible for supporting and holding districts accountable to implement these recommendations. The Oversight Board will have responsibility *and authority* over the entire system. The purpose here is to break down "silos," to overcome the weight of the education bureaucracy, and, ultimately, to require adherence to performance objectives in exchange for increased funding.

The Commission's recommendations also require that a substantial portion of new funds be spent on specific education practices for which there is actual proof of effectiveness. These practices include prekindergarten, community schools, tutors for struggling students, Judy Centers, Family Support

Centers, teacher compensation increases, college of education/school district partnership grants, and teacher recruitment scholarship programs.

Another important accountability tool is the Commission's recommendation that expert review teams conduct comprehensive visits in 10% of Maryland's schools every year, with emphasis on those schools that are struggling. These teams will then work with the schools to implement appropriate measures to correct signs of lagging performance.

Is Kirwan affordable? Yes. The Sage Policy Group's recently released return on investment analysis confirms that investing in education is money well spent. Better educated workers are higher paid, higher tax-paying citizens, and they are citizens who place fewer and lower demands on state funding for the costs, fiscal and social, for things like prisons and Medicaid. Before all of the very first of those who start pre-k on day one finish their education, the entire program will have paid for itself and will have cost the taxpayers nothing.

The currently projected annual increase in state revenues is 3.2%. Funding the Commission's recommendations requires an increase of only 2.3%, obviously less than the state's projected revenue growth. There are multiple avenues to fund a 21st century school system for all of our students. We can already count on \$500 million annually in the Education Trust Fund from casino revenue and we encourage the Governor and leaders of the General Assembly to find a path that is sustainable and allows for the full funding and implementation of these recommendations.

This is not truly a question of "can we afford Kirwan?" The real question – and the true challenge for our state, its citizens, and the state's political leadership – is where are we going to be as a state if we fail to enact the Commission's recommendations?

States in our country and other countries across the globe are doing a better job of educating their young people than we are. Those states and countries are moving ahead of us. Maryland, its economy, and, most importantly, its citizens are going to be left behind if we don't get to work now on the problem of public education in Maryland. By both tangible and intangible measures, the cost of inaction here exceeds the cost of action. To protect and enhance the standard of living and the quality of life we all want for all Marylanders, we need to act.

The General Assembly, at its upcoming session in January, will be called upon to address the challenge of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations. We plan to urge our elected representatives to put in law what the Commission recommends. We urge all Marylanders to join us.

Signed,

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