

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Restoring the Promise and Funding the Gaps

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Executive Summary

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

-Thomas Jefferson

The American experiment was built on a simple but fragile premise: that a government of the people can only survive if the people are equipped to run it. The Founding Fathers, from Jefferson to John Adams, championed public education not merely as a tool for personal advancement, but as the only reliable check against tyranny. They understood that without a well-informed electorate, power goes unchecked, democracies crumble, and the few exploit the ignorance of the many.

But the value of public education extends far beyond the ballot box. It is the economic engine of our state, and its erosion carries a price tag that every Marylander pays, regardless of whether they have children in the school system.

According to the *Economic Assessment of Kirwan Commission Recommendations* (Sage Policy Group), the cost of educational neglect is staggering. The study found that **57% of Maryland state prisoners under age 25 are high school dropouts**. The lifetime cost of public assistance for a dropout is more than **four times higher** than for a resident with a bachelor's degree (\$66,973 vs. \$15,695). Conversely, a single cohort of Maryland students, if properly educated to meet college and career readiness standards, would contribute an additional **\$3.6 billion** in state and local taxes over their lifetimes.

The **Blueprint for Maryland's Future** was designed as a landmark 10-year investment to transform Maryland's education system into a world-class model. It is not an all encompassing path forward, but merely a **bare minimum** of what is needed for our children and teachers to succeed.

Investing in the **Blueprint for Maryland's Future** is not charity; it is a calculation that builds hope and economic growth. By FY2046, if the Blueprint is fully funded and implemented, the state is projected to have fully recovered its investment through expanded earnings and reduced social costs, generating a net positive return for taxpayers in perpetuity. However, this future is currently at risk. While early results of the Blueprint are promising, including a **53% increase in full-day pre-K enrollment** and **4th Grade Reading surged from 40th to 20th nationwide**, fiscal concerns have led the legislature to signal a retreat from critical components. Most notably, the "60/40 split", a mandate reserving 40% of teacher time for collaboration and planning, has been delayed. When retreating from what's designed to be the bare minimum of a good foundation toward excellence, one may as well expect the entire structure to falter, as a foundation built with missing pillars cannot support the weight of a world-class system.

This paper proposes a strategic correction: the immediate implementation of a targeted **60/40 Collaborative Time Pilot Program** and a shift in professional development funding away from low-ROI credentialing (Master's degrees/NBC) toward **high-impact instructional coaching**, while fully investing in each of the other requirements contained in the Blueprint. By refining who qualifies for collaborative time and prioritizing high-ROI coaching, Maryland can and must fulfill its constitutional obligation to students, securing a world-class system without imposing a financial burden on working people.

Section 1: The Current Landscape: Progress and Retraction

The Blueprint's five "pillars" aim to ensure equity and performance. To date, Maryland has seen measurable wins, moving from 40th to 20th nationwide in 4th-grade reading and achieving significant growth in English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency in high-poverty schools.

However, facing a projected "fiscal cliff" in FY28 and a potential \$2.9 billion structural deficit by FY29, the General Assembly has delayed key provisions. The most significant casualty is the collaborative time mandate, which the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) and Governor Moore have recommended delaying until FY29, citing a need for 12,000 to 15,000 additional teachers.

Section 2: The Strategic Pivot: Implementing the 60/40 Collaborative Time Pilot

Rather than accepting a blanket delay, Maryland must implement a **60/40 Collaborative Time Pilot Program** immediately. This pilot proves the efficacy of the model while managing costs by strictly defining eligibility and implementation standards.

A. Eligibility: A Targeted Approach To maximize impact and address critical shortages, the pilot will not be a universal rollout. Instead, eligibility for the 60/40 split, where teachers spend 60% of their time instructing and 40% on planning and collaboration, is restricted to three specific cohorts:

1. **Educators in High-Needs Title I Schools:** Focusing resources where the achievement gap is widest to stabilize retention and improve outcomes in historically underserved communities.
2. **Special Educators (Any School):** Recognizing the disproportionate administrative burden on Special Education teachers, this benefit extends to all special educators statewide to prevent burnout and ensure IEP compliance.
3. **High-Needs Curriculum Specialists:** Designed as a recruiting tool for "second career" educators, this applies to teachers in shortage areas such as upper-level Math, Science, and Career & Technical Education (CTE).

B. Implementation: Structuring the 40%

The "40%" non-instructional time is not unstructured free time. It is a rigorous professional period divided strictly to drive student outcomes:

- **60% Lesson Study:** Collaborative analysis and refinement of instructional materials.
- **20% Expert Coaching:** Direct observation and feedback cycles (see Section III).
- **10% IEP-Specific Planning:** Dedicated time for individualized education program development.
- **10% Attendance Interventions:** Targeted outreach to reduce chronic absenteeism.

C. Phased Rollout

- **Year 1:** Pilot launch in select high-need schools with low vacancy rates, and should focus on critical foundational classes only (K-3 Literacy and 5-8 Math).
- **Year 2-3:** 20% Expansion to all eligible cohorts listed above.
- **Year 4+:** Data-driven expansion based on pilot efficacy.

Section 3: Redefining Professional Growth: Coaching Over Credentials

Current professional development models incentivize Master's degrees and National Board Certification (NBC) through career ladders. However, research suggests that **instructional**

coaching offers a significantly higher Return on Investment (ROI) for teacher excellence and student achievement.

A. The Evidence: Coaching vs. Credentials

We propose the adoption of the **Maryland State Teaching Residency (MSTR)** (detailed in section IV) to prioritize a robust coaching program over traditional salary bumps linked to advanced degrees.

- **The "Paper Tiger" of Master's Degrees:** Studies consistently show that teachers with Master's degrees are, on average, no more effective in the classroom than those without them. Moreover, the Blueprint's current model ignores the massive disparity in credentialing costs. For example, a first-year Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) student at Johns Hopkins University costs **\$39,096**, compared to just **\$16,320** at the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC). Despite this **140% premium** for private tuition, research from the Brookings Institution indicates that these expensive degrees result in 'little or no evidence' of higher student achievement. We are paying luxury prices for a credential that yields no measurable gain in classroom performance. As a side note, the taxpayers of Maryland should not be reimbursing teachers for degrees obtained anywhere else other than one of the fine accredited state schools which were founded solely to teach teachers (i.e. Towson and Coppin State Universities).
 - *Source:* [Brookings Institution: Who Profits from the Master's Degree Pay Bump?](#)
- **NBC as a Signal, Not a Solution:** While National Board Certified (NBC) teachers often show higher effectiveness, research suggests the certification process *identifies* already-good teachers rather than *improving* average ones. The certification acts as a signal of quality, but the process itself does not reliably generate large-scale instructional improvement. Of the 2,279 NBC qualified teachers currently employed in Maryland, only 264 currently teach in a high-needs school. A requirement for a teacher in a high-needs school to obtain an NBC to advance up a career ladder in effect creates more of a *paper ceiling*, than teaching excellence.
 - *Source:* [Center for Education Data & Research \(Goldhaber & Anthony\)](#)
- **The High ROI of Coaching:** In contrast, meta-analyses of teacher coaching show *dramatic* results. Coaching has been found to improve the quality of instruction by as much as **0.49 standard deviations**, a larger effect size than the difference between a novice and a veteran teacher. Unlike one-off workshops or degree programs, coaching is job-embedded and directly impacts daily practice that meets the individual needs of each jurisdiction. A standardized Master's curriculum **cannot** distinguish between the trauma-informed triage often needed in a high-density Baltimore City classroom and the resource-scarcity management required in rural Allegany County. Only a present, adaptable coach can bridge those distinct gaps.
 - *Source:* [Kraft & Blazar: Taking Teacher Coaching to Scale](#)

- Source: [Annenberg Institute: Improving Teaching Practice with Instructional Coaching](#)

B. Policy Recommendation

The current career ladder portion of the Blueprint should be replaced with The Maryland State Teaching Residency, explained next.

Section 4: Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Investing in Human Capital

To move beyond a "recruitment-only" model, Maryland must adopt a strategy that prioritizes long-term stability.

1. The Maryland State Teaching Residency (MSTR)

To solve the teacher shortage crisis, we must move beyond simple recruitment and invest in rigorous, state-led training. The **Maryland State Teaching Residency (MSTR)** will effectively scale the successful models of *The New Teacher Project (TNTP)* and the *Baltimore City Teaching Residency* into a statewide initiative, specifically designed to staff high-needs schools and classes across all 24 jurisdictions. Beyond supervising teacher recruitment, retention, and licensing, MSTR will incorporate an **Instructional Coaching Corps** made up of proven teachers from each district. This creates a support system that keeps a teacher with their students where excellence is built daily in the classroom, not in a graduate lecture hall.

- **A "Public-Path" Residency Model:** Currently, many districts rely on expensive private institutions for alternative certification. The MSTR will shift this training to public partnerships (e.g., UMGC), ensuring that taxpayer funds support public assets.
 - **The Fiscal Argument:** Using the previous example of the Hopkins vs. UMUG, this shift dramatically reduces the cost of entry.
 - **Certification Requirements:** Teachers hired under a Resident Teacher Certificate (RTC) or Conditional Certificate (COND) will be mandated to complete their MAT coursework through these designated state-school partnerships to qualify for tuition reimbursement, ending the subsidy of private tuition premiums with public funds.
 - **Support, Flexibility, & Real Expectations:** Each resident teacher will be assigned a support coach within their jurisdiction who understands the needs of individual classrooms and can help mitigate the challenges faced by new teachers in tough environments.

- **Accountability & Retention:** To stop the "revolving door" of educators, the MSTR requires a tangible commitment in exchange for subsidized training.
 - **The 5-Year Contract:** Participants will sign a five-year agreement consisting of **2 years of residency**(training/induction) followed by **3 years of required service** in a high-needs school with an assigned coach. All residents will be enrolled in the 60/40 pilot program. The commitment is transferable to a different jurisdiction within the state so long as service is done in an eligible cohort as listed in Section II.A of this plan.
 - **Asset Protection:** The program includes strict recoupment clauses for early departure to protect state investment. Teachers who break their contract early will be liable for tuition repayment, ensuring that state resources generate long-term classroom stability rather than short-term vacancies. Hardship breaks in contract should be taken into consideration.

2. "Work Where You Live": Educator Homeownership

Leveraging the Maryland Smart Buy 3.0 infrastructure:

- **Direct Support:** Up to \$20,000 down payment grants for educators in high-needs schools purchasing a home within their teaching district. This would require an additional five-year contract that cannot be transferable to other districts, but teachers should be free to move to other high-needs schools within the district during their contact period.
- **Retention Lock:** A 10-year tiered property tax credit valid only while the educator remains in a high-needs school within the district.

3. Turnover Reinvestment Fund

Approximately 44% of educators leave the profession within their first five years, contrasting sharply with the 6% annual attrition rate for teachers with a decade or more of experience.

Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

This fund is built on the projected savings from lowering teacher turnover, specifically targeting the "five-year burnout mark". Currently, Maryland loses approximately 8% of its 63,000 teachers annually (about 5,000 teachers) which costs the state roughly \$125 million in lost training and recruitment, estimated at \$20,000 to \$30,000 per replacement. By reducing this turnover rate to 5%, the state could effectively save \$100 million per year.

During years six (6) through ten (10) of teaching, these savings will help augment aggressive pay raises for teachers in one of the three cohorts as listed in Section II.A of this plan. The plan structures these as annual retention stipends: \$5,000 in Year 6, \$7,500 in Year 8, and \$10,000

in Year 10. Crucially, these benefits would be transferable between high-needs schools within the state and would help transition experienced teachers into advanced roles, such as teaching and residency coaches or supervisors.

Section 5: The Right to Strike and Community Safeguards

Maryland currently prohibits public school educators from exercising the most fundamental tool of labor negotiation: the right to strike. To truly secure a world-class education system, we must recognize that a teacher's working condition is a student's learning condition.

When educators are empowered to advocate for their schools, the results benefit the entire community. Across the nation, teacher strikes have been a proven catalyst for securing the resources necessary for high student achievement and teacher retention. During the landmark Chicago Teachers Union strikes (2012 and 2019) and the Los Angeles strike (2019), educators struck not just for wages, but for "the common good." These actions successfully secured hard caps on class sizes, guaranteed full-time nurses, and mandated the hiring of school counselors and librarians, which have been proven to directly improve student outcomes. Furthermore, recent economic studies demonstrate that teacher strikes increase educator compensation by an average of 8% over five years and significantly reduce pupil-teacher ratios. This also directly addresses the turnover crisis that currently costs Maryland roughly \$125 million annually in lost training and recruitment.

That said, teacher strikes also have an immediate negative impact on working families, mostly affecting Black and Brown communities. In Baltimore City, over 84% of students traditionally qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs), with the city guaranteeing at least two free meals a day to nearly 77,000 students. When schools close, the burden of emergency child care falls disproportionately on working mothers. In Maryland, which consistently ranks among the most expensive states for child care in the country, unexpected closures can be financially devastating. For a typical Baltimore family earning the median household income, the combined costs of basic child care, housing, food, and taxes already consume over 100% of their earnings. The realities of poverty mean that an abrupt school closure is not just an academic pause, but a sudden collapse of the essential social safety nets that our most vulnerable residents rely on to survive.

To ensure Maryland's educators have the leverage to advocate for their students without unnecessarily disrupting families, we must pass legislation that both legalizes the right to strike while instituting rigorous community safeguards to protect children and working mothers.

A. Establishing the Right to Strike and Worker Protections Currently, Maryland punishes educators who strike with the threat of union decertification. A modern, equitable labor policy must eliminate these punitive measures to retain top talent.

- **Legal Authorization:** The state must explicitly grant certificated and non-certificated public school employees the right to engage in a strike.
- **Removing Decertification Penalties:** We must repeal the authority of the Public Employee Relations Board to revoke or deny a union's exclusive certification simply because they execute a work stoppage.
- **Anti-Retaliation Protections:** Public school employers must be strictly prohibited from permanently replacing or discriminating against educators who participate in a legally authorized strike.

B. Mandatory Exhaustion of the Bargaining Process: A strike must remain a measure of last resort. To protect the continuity of education, the legislation should mandate a structured, timeline-driven mediation process.

- **Structured Mediation:** If an impasse is reached, the labor board will order both parties into mediation, which must conclude within 30 days of the first session.
- **Proposed Settlements:** If no agreement is reached, the mediator will issue a written proposed settlement. Both the school employer and the union will have five days to accept or decline before proceeding.
- **The "Cooling-Off" Period:** If the settlement is declined, a mandatory 15-day cooling-off period will be required before a strike authorization vote can legally take place, forcing both sides to remain at the negotiating table as long as possible.
- **Secret Ballot and Strike Notification:** Before any strike can be legally authorized, the union must conduct a secure, secret ballot election. This ensures that every educator can vote their conscience regarding their livelihood free from internal peer pressure, union coercion, or employer retaliation.

C. Protecting Families and Students: Child Care and Food Security

- **Mandatory Advance Notice for Child Care:** Unions will be required to provide a strict, mandatory 14-day advance notice of their intent to strike following a successful authorization vote. This guarantees parents adequate time to coordinate child care, adjust work schedules, or form neighborhood co-ops.
- **Continuity of Nutrition Plans:** Because public schools are the primary source of reliable meals for thousands of Maryland students, all school districts must have a pre-approved emergency food distribution plan on file with the state.
- **Grab-and-Go Distribution:** Districts will be required to keep centralized cafeterias or localized pick-up sites open for grab-and-go breakfast and lunch distributions during any strike. These sites will be managed by non-striking personnel or contracted community partners (such as local food banks or the YMCA), ensuring that a labor dispute never results in child hunger.

Section 6: The "Maryland First" Funding Model

To bridge the \$853 million gap projected for FY27, we propose revenue strategies that protect working families while targeting corporate and luxury sectors:

1. **Data Center Fair Share Act:** Earmarking 50% of data center fees (\$78m–\$150m annually).
2. **Discretionary Consumption Act:** A tax on luxury goods/services to raise ~\$500 million.
3. **Infrastructure Realignment:** Pausing highway expansion until 2030 to redirect ~\$530 million to schools.

Conclusion

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is a constitutional obligation that demands courage and strategic investment. By implementing a focused 60/40 Pilot for our most vulnerable schools and prioritizing high-ROI coaching over hollow credentials, and by adopting the 'Maryland First' funding model to protect working families, Maryland can and must deliver on its promise of a world-class education system.

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