

TO: Washington County Board of Education
RE: Public Comments for the Business Session
DATE: January 21, 2025

Good evening Vice-President Mr. Guessford, Dr. Sovine, and members of the Board:

I am Carol Mowen, President of the Washington County Teachers Association.

Many competing voices use rhetorical strategies to influence viewpoints about many issues. One example is the rhetoric about Maryland's Blueprint law. To discern the truth can be difficult.

Since becoming state law in 2020, The Blueprint seeks "to transform public education" in order to improve the quality of education for all children in Maryland, especially those who have been historically underserved. This includes students who receive support through special education, students in poverty, and students who are multilingual learners and is the thinking behind the 75% rule that Mr. Proulx described during last week's Budget Work Session. We are now several years into the 10 year implementation plan.

The law has become integral to the work of our educators and students, and public discourse about the Blueprint ramps up annually for the budget cycles and Maryland's Legislative Session. In mid December, Governor Wes Moore delivered comments referencing Blueprint to the Maryland Association of Counties. According to ABC 7's report, Gov. Moore said that "We will pause the elements that need a closer look or require laying a stronger foundation for full implementation."

Please note that Gov. Moore did not say that Blueprint is going away or say that the goal for full implementation would change. But depending on the intent of the news outlet or individual providing a report of his comments, the rhetoric has relayed widely different views about the future of the Blueprint law.

The "pause" that the Governor has proposed slows the timeline for the Blueprint's collaborative time goal to provide teachers up to 40% of their working day out of the classroom to plan, grade, communicate with families, develop interventions, and collaborate. To achieve this goal, school districts will need to hire more staff, and with the current teacher shortage and funding challenges, this is going to be difficult.

Collaborative time is not a separate Blueprint line item, but is embedded in the Foundation of the school funding formula. There are several different proposals about how this pause will impact the funding for FY 26 and beyond, details to be worked out during the legislative session.

Locally, our teachers are working to meet many Blueprint mandates without adequate time in their work day. These include job-embedded training on a variety of topics, the use of new curriculum resources that are High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) as now defined by the Maryland State Department of Education, and additional small group instruction for students who are not on target in reading and math to meet state standards through a Multi-Tiered System of Support - commonly called MTSS plans. Our teachers have additional planning work to do for small groups of students and additional tracking of each student's progress toward identified objectives in a methodical and time-consuming manner that goes beyond the traditional classroom assignments and grading expectations before the Blueprint. And this is without additional planning time needed to accomplish the work.

Each month, our WCTA Representative Council meets to conduct Association business and share Common Concerns. Reps have shared concerns about workload and equity related to MTSS plans since last year. Depending on student load, grade level, and content, each teacher may or may not be impacted by MTSS, and expectations can vary school to school.

Our WCTA elected Board of Directors has shared these concerns with Dr. Sovine and the leadership team in our quarterly meetings, and we are working to address this issue, but so far, we have not been able to find resolution.

Whatever happens regarding Blueprint funding and the "pause" to collaborative time implementation, teachers need more planning time in the school day to do the work. Teachers needed more time even before Blueprint became law. We want our students to be successful, and we support the promises of the Blueprint. Regardless of the pause to funding formulas and delay of the promised time, we need a local solution.