

August 10, 2017

Dr. Karen Salmon, Superintendent
Andrew Smarick, President, State Board of Education
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Re: MD4CS Public Comment on Maryland's ESSA Plan

Superintendent Salmon and President Smarick,

The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS) is a cross-sector working group comprised of representatives from non-profit community organizations, institutions of higher education, the public sector, and education professionals that advocates for further implementation of the Community Schools model. We aim to work with state policy-makers and agencies to rethink the educational experience for Maryland's youth, and the current public comment period on the state's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) implementation plan provides us with such an opportunity.

We are pleased that the spirit of full-service community school implementation can be found within multiple sections in the draft. Specific elements inherent to full-service community schools include the indicators (section 1111(c)(4)(B)) for chronic absenteeism and school climate, school transitions including community agencies and local schools that "must collaboratively develop processes and procedures" (section 1111(g)(1)(D), and the proposed Maryland Family and Community Engagement (MD FACE) team. Community schools – regardless of jurisdiction – address chronic absenteeism and school climate by providing extended learning opportunities, integrated health and social supports, and authentic community and family engagement through a dedicated coordinator.

However, it was surprising and concerning, that MD4CS did not see a specific reference to full-service community schools within the current draft of the Maryland Plan—an absence also identified by the Maryland State Education Association in their comments on the plan. Current research has demonstrated the success of community schools as they "seek to mediate intervening factors, prevent student disengagement, and support student success" (Passarella and Bjorklund-Young, 1). Following the passage of ESSA through the US Senate, Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer stated "I am proud that this legislation includes a provision to encourage the expansion of the full-service community schools model for the delivery of wrap-around services for low-income families. Promoting full-service community schools has been a priority of mine for many years, and this legislation builds on earlier efforts to promote and expand this model."

Implementing a community school strategy for CSI (Comprehensive School Improvement) and TSI (Targeted School Improvement) schools would directly address the referenced Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement: A System Framework (2017) from Center for School Turnaround at WestEd on page 34 of the draft plan. The first step in implementing the community school strategy is conducting a needs assessment with input from key stakeholders which would organize and coordinate community partnerships that will "promote student achievement and overall student well-being."

MD4CS looks forward to seeing the full-service community school strategically and specifically identified in future drafts of the Maryland State ESSA plan as an effective model for closing the achievement gap by addressing students' academic and social-emotional needs through a community approach.

Sincerely,

The undersigned members of the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS):

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