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## **BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND'S FUTURE**

### **Accountability and Implementation Board**

#### **FY 2026 Operating Budget Hearing Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee**  
**Senator Nancy King, Chair**  
**Friday, February 7, 2025**

**House Appropriations Committee  
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**  
**Delegate Stephanie Smith, Chair**  
**Thursday, February 6, 2025**

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) appreciates the opportunity to appear before the budget subcommittee to discuss the Department of Legislative Services' (DLS) analysis of the fiscal 2026 budget and to respond to the requested comments. We thank our analyst, Laura Hyde, for her hard work once again in providing a thorough analysis. The AIB supports the Governor's FY 2026 allowance.

In the third full year of Blueprint implementation, we are pleased to report that progress is happening, and momentum is building across the State to support the systemic change that is needed to achieve the Blueprint's goals. We are seeing progress not only in inputs, such as the increasing numbers of 3 – and 4-year-olds enrolled in full-day pre-K, teachers becoming National Board Certified, and high school students taking dual enrollment courses, but we are also beginning to see the impact in improved student outcomes. More 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are proficient in reading and more 10<sup>th</sup> graders are meeting the college and career readiness (CCR) standard. Progress is modest in this initial phase of implementation but indicators, including the latest results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also known as the Nation's Report Card, show that we are moving in a positive direction and are on the right path.

The AIB has provided technical assistance grants to LEAs and the CTE Committee over the past two years to provide access to education experts to work directly with the LEAs/CTE Committee to support

strategic planning, innovative approaches, and thought partners as they develop plans and implement the Blueprint. In FY 2025, this includes targeted assistance to support strategic budgeting/resource allocation to meet the minimum school funding requirement, Pre-K expansion, career ladder development, and CCR pathways as well as continuing to support strategic facilitators.

The AIB remains steadfast in its commitment to implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future with fidelity. Recognizing that flexibility is also needed in implementing such a comprehensive plan as the Blueprint, the AIB will continue to work with the State Board of Education and Superintendent Wright, local superintendents, and other State and local partners to identify and, when possible, to address implementation challenges within the AIB's authority.

Recommending legislative changes is a key component of the AIB's responsibilities. The AIB acted last month to recognize the impact of the teacher shortage on the ability to implement a key aspect of the Blueprint that is scheduled to begin in the next school year. Collaborative time for teachers is a centerpiece of the Blueprint that supports teacher recruitment and retention and increased student achievement. While the AIB recommends that the timeline and dedicated funding to implement collaborative time be delayed, it is critical to invest in growing the supply of high quality and diverse teachers and pilot programs for LEAs to develop innovative approaches to implement collaborative time efficiently and effectively.

#### **Responses to DLS Comments and Recommendations**

**DLS Comment (pg. 5): AIB should comment on the reasons for the high vacancy rate of 37.5% (6 positions) of December 31, 2024. The agency should also comment on reasons for hiring delays, particularly hiring an accountability director.**

**AIB Response:** As a small agency, the AIB is challenged to simultaneously oversee the implementation of the Blueprint and recruit well qualified staff. AIB staff are expected to assume multiple roles, undertaking responsibilities beyond their primary role to meet all of the requirements of a State agency, which has made recruitment difficult. In addition, recruitments have yielded qualified applicants needing to be compensated above the budgeted salary. Positions that were budgeted to be filled at a step 11 or 12, have been hired or are estimated to be hired at a Step 19 or 20, just shy of the third quartile based on relative education and experience. Further, the AIB has 2 director positions that will need to supervise one or more staff, however the current classification did not allow them to, therefore reclassification was necessary prior to recruitment. The Governor's allowance includes \$50,000 to support these reclassifications and to hire positions above the FY 25 budgeted amount (after COLA and other adjustments).

- The Accountability Director position required a reclassification, which was recently approved. AIB plans to fill this position internally as soon as possible.
- Filling openings for a Pillar 1 analyst (currently covered by Pillar 2 and 4 analysts), Pillar 3 analyst (currently filled by a part-time contractual employee), and Pillar 5 fiscal analyst (initially recruited

for a data/fiscal analyst but unable to fill the fiscal analyst qualifications) are high priorities for AIB in Spring/Summer 2025. The initial recruitment in 2024 yielded limited qualified candidates.

- The remaining vacant position will be a Fiscal Administrator position to support the required financial and administration functions required by the State.
- As noted, a Government Relations Director recently started with AIB.

**DLS Comment (pg. 12) AIB should comment on (1) reasons for delays in the submission of the agency's annual report and when the annual update to AIB's comprehensive implementation plan will be posted to the agency website; (2) status of the teacher preparation workgroup, LEA technical assistance grants, and career counseling MOUs; (3) status of State agency implementation plans; and (4) anticipated changes to Blueprint leader training and/or funding if HB 504/SB 429 is enacted.**

**AIB Response:**

(1) Submission of the [annual report](#) was delayed in order to reflect the Board's legislative recommendations related to collaborative time. It is challenging to include legislative recommendations in the annual report due in November. In the future, AIB requests to report legislative recommendations separately from the rest of the annual report. AIB would also be open to an earlier annual report deadline that is aligned with the fiscal year, and a later deadline for the legislative recommendations.

(1) The published 2024 Blueprint Comprehensive Plan Update was [posted](#) on the AIB's website on the Implementation Plans page as soon as it was available; prior to the published version, a summary of the changes that the AIB adopted in August 2024 was posted on the website.

(2) At the teacher preparation workgroup reconvening in November 2024, educator preparation programs and LEAs discussed the large number of conditional teachers in the State and the urgent need to provide flexible paths for teachers to become fully licensed. The workgroup made recommendations for convenings in 2025 in addition to greater support for conditional teachers, including new teacher induction and mentoring, diversity in teacher candidates, professional learning and instructional support, educator recruitment and rebranding the profession, and innovative approaches to licensure that maintain high quality.

(2) Phase I of the Technical Assistance Grants is nearing completion, with only five (5) LEAs currently in no-cost-extensions through May 30, 2025. Phase II of the Technical Assistance Grants expanded on Phase I and is providing targeted support for continued Blueprint implementation including Resource Allocation and Strategic Budgeting, Career Ladder for Educators, College and Career Readiness Pathways, and Pre-K Expansion in fiscal 2025. To date, the AIB has awarded \$3.5 million to 24 LEAs and the CTE Committee in one or more focus areas. The majority of grants (\$1.8 million) were provided to assist LEAs in allocating resources to meet the Blueprint's goals, including the minimum school funding requirement.

(2) As of January 2025, 18 LEAs have submitted revised Career Counseling MOUs and AIB has approved these MOUs. The remaining 6 LEAs did not need to revise their multi-year MOUs this year.

(3) State agency plans were originally due on June 15, 2024; however, following the AIB's decision to give LEAs additional time to submit their Part II LEA plans from March 15 to May 15, the AIB extended the timeline for State agency submissions, to August 15, 2024, to give the State agencies additional time similar to the LEAs and to balance the workload in Summer 2024. JSEP's 2024 plan submission was then

extended to October 31, 2024, in the Updated Blueprint Comprehensive Plan. AIB staff have provided initial feedback to all agencies and continue to meet with them to provide additional feedback and discuss necessary revisions to be recommended for approval. AIB staff review updated components of plans as they are submitted.

- MSDE (submitted 8/15/24)- AIB staff provided initial feedback on their submission on 11/12/24. In January 2025, MSDE submitted four sets of updated responses that are currently under review. MSDE staff are currently revising elements of their plan related to Pillar 3, as well as their joint plan on meeting new teacher preparation program requirements with MHEC, and will submit these updated elements to AIB as soon as possible.
- MHEC (submitted 8/15/24) - AIB staff provided initial feedback on their submission on 11/14/24. AIB staff have reviewed updated elements of MHEC's plan that have been submitted on a rolling basis. AIB staff is waiting to receive updated responses for two more elements in MHEC's submission, in addition to the updated joint MSDE-MHEC plan related to new teacher preparation program requirements. MHEC staff have indicated that AIB staff should receive these updated elements no later than 2/14/25.
- Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports (submitted 8/15/24) - AIB staff provided initial feedback to the Consortium staff on their submission on 11/1/24. The Consortium submitted an updated plan on 12/11/24. After promptly reviewing the updated responses, AIB staff recommended their plan for Board approval. The Board approved the updated Consortium plan during its public meeting on 12/19/24.
- CTE Committee (submitted on 9/3/24) - AIB staff provided initial feedback on their submission on 11/15/24. AIB staff have continued to meet with CTE Committee staff to discuss their plan updates. AIB staff have received some updated elements of the CTE Committee's plan through their CTE framework and the CTE Committee's 2024 annual report. AIB staff will continue to meet with CTE Committee staff as needed and will review the rest of their updated plan once it has been submitted.
- JSEP (submitted 11/13/24) - AIB staff provided initial feedback on their submission on 12/19/24. AIB staff will continue to meet with JSEP staff as needed as they revise their original 2024 Blueprint plan submission. MSDE will review JSEP's comprehensive literacy plan and provide feedback.

(4) HB 504/SB 429 includes a "Maryland School Leadership Academy" that is similar to the Blueprint school leadership training in current law. The academy specifically includes school leaders in addition to principals, including assistant principals, instructional coaches, and other school-based staff. Under current law only principals are expressly included in the training. The academy consolidates the training under fewer subjects and adds an optional mentoring component, which may require additional funding.

**DLS Comment (pg. 15): AIB should comment on the status of each outcome measure in progress and a timetable for finalizing baseline data and goals.**

**AIB Response:**

Metric	Anticipated Timeline for Available Baseline Data	Anticipated Timeline for Setting Joint AIB/MSBE Target
Percentage of kindergarten students demonstrating readiness on a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)	Fall 2025	Spring/Summer 2026
Percentage of Maryland students who met the college and career ready (CCR) standard by the end of grade 10.	Winter 2025	Spring/Summer 2025
Percentage of Maryland students who met the college and career ready (CCR) standard before high school graduation.	Winter 2025	Spring/Summer 2025
Percentage of high school students who completed a post-CCR pathway.	Fall 2026 (earliest)	Spring/Summer 2027
Percentage of teachers participating at each level of the career ladder.	Winter 2025 (Level 2 and 3) Winter 2026 (Level 4)	Spring/Summer 2025 Spring/Summer 2026
Percentage of schools with one or more school psychologists or school social workers.	Winter 2025	Spring/Summer 2025

AIB and MSDE staff proposed a target for the aligned metric of school counselor-to-student ratio of 290:1. The two boards (AIB and MSBE) will have an opportunity to adopt this recommended target in Spring/Summer 2025.

**DLS Recommendation (pg. 16): Adopting committee narrative requesting that AIB submit a report summarizing the agency's progress on all deliverables and actions associated with the agency operations and oversight of Blueprint implementation.**

**AIB Response:** AIB concurs.

**DLS Comment (pg. 16): AIB should discuss the reasons for setting LEA goals at 75%, rather than 100%, for measures of LEAs increasing the numbers of NBC teachers, students enrolled in prekindergarten and apprenticeships, and students with access to SBHCs.**

**AIB Response:** For the initial implementation phase, the AIB wanted to set feasible goals, knowing that each LEA had a different starting point. Now that we have several years of data, the AIB will consider increasing the target percentage as appropriate, while recognizing that it may not be sustainable to expect every LEA to see growth year after year.