

2026

Legislative Priorities

The 2026 legislative session will be pivotal for Marylanders, educators, and students. Elected officials can continue to build on the strong history of commitment to our public schools by the governor and the legislature in the final year of their terms before November's election. However, legislators are also facing a number of significant budgetary obstacles and uncertainty fueled by the chaotic and harmful federal actions which have negatively affected Maryland families and have created an unexpected state budget deficit. MSEA's priorities for this legislative session focus on keeping our commitments to our public schools, improving the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and ensuring we have enough revenue to fund it, attracting and retaining educators as we continue to face staffing shortages, advancing the Education Support Professional Bill of Rights, and expanding workers' rights. In the face of federal uncertainty, educators and legislators must stand together to protect investments in our public schools, students, and communities.

Keeping and Funding Our Commitment to Public Education

The need for the Blueprint and its successful implementation is imperative for the future success of our public schools, students, and economy. With any complex legislation, adjustments are identified and needed to fine-tune implementation and to account for shifting student populations and demographics. We must not retreat from the Blueprint's core value of supporting all students more comprehensively and more equitably. Educators should be at the table for any conversations regarding Blueprint implementation, leading on what will make the biggest impact for our students.

While the state is going into this year's legislative session facing budgetary uncertainty, we must remain committed to our public schools and the services that directly impact our quality of life and economic future. Unfortunately, Marylanders and Maryland's economy are seeing the consequences of short-sighted decisions from the federal government. This is leading to higher costs for the state, schools, and all Marylanders, and reducing the amount of revenue the state has to provide essential services to its residents. Our public schools and public services can only be successful with sufficient resources to serve communities. We applaud the work the legislature did last year to raise revenue and ensure everyone is paying their fair share and encourage continued consideration of progressive revenue improvements.

The state must also work with local governments to help them raise additional revenue while lessening

the burden on working people. Policies to raise additional local revenue may include allowing for variability in the application of the property tax to the benefit of working and middle class families.

Holistically Measuring School Success

Maryland educators have long been involved in the conversation about the role of assessments in measuring learning—and the shortcomings and negative ripple effects of the overwhelming focus on mandated standardized testing. In recent years, we have successfully advocated for more balanced school quality indicators that consider school climate and a well-rounded curriculum in addition to standardized test scores, plus guidelines to minimize the impact of testing on learning time.

This year, MSDE convened the Accountability Advisory Committee to review Maryland's school star rating system. The committee continued the work of the 2024 Task Force on School Assessment and Accountability, which made initial recommendations in December 2024. As part of this ongoing conversation, we will continue to advocate for holistic measures of school success that reflect students' overall experience rather than a myopic focus on test scores that narrows curriculum, student opportunities, and the joy of learning. Meaningfully incorporating student growth into the state's star rating system is important, but firm guardrails must remain in place so there continue to be clear statutory protections to prevent a return to an overwhelming focus on standardized testing.

Protecting Vulnerable Marylanders

Marylanders face the impacts of deepening poverty, immigration crackdowns, food insecurity, and potential federal government shutdowns. We will support policies that protect families, students, and communities. Accordingly, we will support proactive measures to protect our freedoms and our students, including but not limited to: preventing destructive mass deportations and traumatizing ICE actions at our schools, ensuring access to reliable health care, protecting our democracy and elections, providing protections for LGBTQ+ students, educators, and community members, and opposing the massive funding cuts and loss of anti-discrimination protections that would result if the U.S. Department of Education was closed. The sweeping cuts and disruption to the Department of Education make it all the more critical that we protect at-risk students in Maryland, including ensuring that students receiving special education services are getting the support and staffing they need.

Technology in Education

Local school systems must ensure students' learning environments are free from distraction and disruption from personal electronic devices, such as smart phones and smart watches. The mental well-being of students and their readiness to learn is placed at risk when schools and classrooms are subjected to frequent interference from electronic devices and social conflict that may arise from the use of social media during the school day. MSEA will also engage in conversations about guardrails around the use of AI in our school systems; better guidance needs to be in place to protect and clarify expectations for educators and students.

Protecting and Expanding Union Rights

From fighting for the ESP Bill of Rights, to expanding organizing protections, to ensuring educators have a meaningful voice in decisions, strengthening worker power remains central to our mission. MSEA supports ensuring that educators have a right to strike without sanctions against their licenses or their unions—as educators in many other states do and as private employees do. We also support expanding bargaining rights to public sector workers who currently lack those rights and binding arbitration for state employees.

Standing Firm Against Vouchers

With federal proposals like the new Trump voucher plan in the “One Big Beautiful Bill,” the threat of diverting public dollars to private schools is real. MSEA will continue to oppose any voucher scheme or expansion that drains resources from public schools.

Continuing to Address the Educator Shortage, Retention, and Workload

While the legislature and governor have made progress on addressing educator shortages in the last few years, the pipeline of educators continues to be insufficient due to challenging working conditions and years of inadequate pay. The staffing shortage affects the academic achievement, emotional wellness, and safety of our students. We must protect funding for programs that are working, such as Grow Your Own and teacher apprenticeships, while looking for new opportunities to reduce excessive workload and sustain our education workforce.

For more information, contact MSEA Government Relations at mseagr@mseanea.org

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