In 2020, a coalition of students, parents and teachers formed the Baltimore City chapter of the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS). Our first project is to ensure that decision-makers and candidates running for office to understand the concerns of those most affected by education policy decisions. We conducted 11 listening sessions with over 300 students, educators and families. People shared their thoughts about what is most needed to improve Baltimore City Schools. The outcomes from those conversations were organized into a draft platform of 14 items. Then 1194 stakeholders voted on these items at our mobile voting station pop ups at schools and community venues. Of the 1194 participants, 747 were students, 123 were staff, 223 were parents, and 100 were community members. As a result of this voting process, we were able to pare down the issues to the five highest priorities. Here are the top issues and the related policy recommendations:

More resource classes, cultural experiences and field trips
Though the state has a policy that dictates that all schools have arts education, it is currently an unfunded mandate. Similarly, whether a school can take field trips is too often contingent on whether families are resourced enough to pay fees for students to attend. Additionally, art, trips and cultural experiences are hampered by an emphasis on testing and a narrow and scripted curriculum that limits flexibility and innovation and discourages creativity in the classroom. We call on our leaders to commit the resources to allow schools to comply with the state mandate on fine art, create equity of access to field trips and create the flexibility needed for educators to give students the experiences that make curriculum come to life. This includes limiting standardized testing which defines too much of what happens in the classroom.

Fully Fund City Schools
According to the state’s own definition of “adequate funding” for public schools, City Schools were shortchanged by over 3 billion dollars more between 1996-2016. This definition of adequacy was calculated by independent consultants, codified into law by the legislature, and repeatedly upheld by the courts. The recent legislative process, which tried to address this concern (the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future), is admirable and still insufficient to meet the needs of our students and to address the racist historical underfunding of the district. Meanwhile, City Schools’ facilities have a 3 billion dollar backlog of essential maintenance work that we can’t afford to do because the State and City will not commit to adequate funding. We need leaders who aren’t satisfied with incremental progress from the current inhumane status and are willing to progressively raise revenue to meet student needs.

Schools that are emotionally, physically, culturally and academically safe
Many districts share a commitment to conflict prevention and resolution tools like Restorative Practices and Social Emotional Learning but lack the funding and training to adequately implement it. We call for the presence of staff dedicated to the coordination of restorative practices and a commitment to embracing all cultures and communities—including Black, Latinx, immigrant, LGBTQ students, Muslim students, and English Language Learners. This means creating a pipeline for more Black and brown educators as well as supporting a commission on multiculturalism to conduct curriculum reviews to identify and address gaps and errors that disadvantage, erase, demean, or otherwise harm Black, brown, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities. We also need to provide adequate training and support for this work.

Meet the needs of struggling and advanced students
While the recent education funding bill—the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future—does emphasize support for struggling students through supporting the needs of high poverty and special education (SPED) students, it is not yet clear if the amount
allocated is enough to meet the needs that exist, and there is no attention paid to advanced students. We need ongoing adequacy analysis in place to assess where the gaps are.

**Classes no larger than 20 and more counselors/providers**

Maryland is one of only nine states where it is illegal for the union to even bring up class size at the bargaining table. Teachers unions need the ability to bring this demand from the community to the table. In order to reduce class size, we also need more teachers. This means supporting and retaining those we have and doing more to recruit Black and brown teachers. Maryland lawmakers should also invest significantly more resources to improve the number of school psychologists, school social workers, counselors and nurses so schools are sufficiently staffed to address student needs. An analysis by [Hopeful Futures](https://www.hopefulfutures.org) found that Maryland schools do not have sufficient staff to ensure access to these necessary services.

The overarching concern is the fact that the funding for Baltimore City Schools has never been adequate, much less excellent since the district became majority Black, decades ago. This has been the source of lawsuits, independent adequacy studies and is well documented.

Beyond a lack of fully adequate funding, schools are suffering from a narrow curricular focus. Students express their concern by saying that they want resource classes, classes that make sense to their lives and culture and offer enriching experiences beyond the school building, where joy is present and real life concerns and questions are answered. Teachers describe this same issue as a lack of autonomy, a desire for small class sizes and a struggle to meet the diverse needs of students with limited support. Teachers are clear that it is hard to include more dynamic teaching within the curricular and testing constraints that exist.

These problems require our leaders to shift focus from holding poor districts accountable for the challenges that result...
from historic and racist lack of investment, and, instead, commit to equitable funding and active investigation of whether adequacy has been achieved. Our full report provides details of how we arrived at our stakeholder priorities, along with recommendations for how to fully fund the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, how to plug the gaps that still exist, a series of specific policy recommendations stemming from the 5 priority areas, and the need for vigilance in monitoring the impact of the funding formulas and whether they address the identified equity issues.

Who we are

Baltimore AROS believes all students have a constitutional, civil, and human right to a high quality, equitably funded, public education. We believe education should reflect the whole child and prepare students to deeply understand the roots of inequality and equip them to change our communities and classrooms.

Baltimore AROS is a coalition of parents, educators, students, school staff, and community groups fighting for an equitably funded, quality public education system. We accomplish our goals of building community power through: political education, organizing, awareness-building, and developing community structures for accountability and solidarity. Participating organizations include: Organizing Black, Youth As Resources, Baltimore Teachers Union, AFT-MD, Students Organizing for a Multicultural and Open Society (SOMOS), ACLU-MD, Baltimore Algebra Project, Communities United, Teachers Democracy Project (TDP), Baltimore Movement Of Rank and file Educators (BMORE), Palestinian Youth Movement DMV Chapter, and Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE).
The People’s Platform for Education

Introduction
The Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS) is a national coalition of parents, students and educators. In 2020 we formed a local chapter in Baltimore. From November through December 2021, our coalition members conducted 11 listening sessions with over 300 students, educators and families in which they shared their thoughts about what works and does not work, and what would make the most difference for improving equity of access to opportunities, student success overall, and safety/wellness in Baltimore City schools. Those conversations were summarized and coded and then organized into a draft platform of 14 items.

We then used a voting process where all stakeholders picked their top three out of the 14 issues. The voting took place at 11 “voting stations” outside of schools and at 2 large events around the city from March to April 2022. In total 1194 people voted on their most deeply held priorities. As a result of this voting process, we were able to establish the top five priorities across all stakeholder groups. There was a strong degree of consensus across groups.

Our hope is that candidates running for Governor as well as other local seats will adopt this platform and commit to supporting the needs of those most impacted by what goes on in our schools.

The coalition is using the final platform to further engage community members as well as inform and influence education policy and the candidates running for office.

What We Did
Listening Campaign
The Listening Campaign was done virtually. Each session used the same set of questions to solicit input from participants. Participants recorded their answers online, but also had an opportunity to discuss what they felt strongly about as a way to understand the issues more deeply. We used a modified Participatory Action Research approach to this part of the study, which means that participants were engaged in not only giving their opinions, but also in how the results should be interpreted.

Voters want and need to see a real shift towards prioritizing the needs of the people. In order to get voters out they need to be addressing peoples issues and concerns.

Tyrone Barnwell, City Schools Parent
Several researchers from the Teachers’ Democracy Project entered all the comments into a database, and coded each comment by issue and by participant group. The coded comments were then sorted and shared back with the whole AROS group. Using feedback from the group, the researchers then summarized the results. Through a process of iterative refinement, and with feedback from AROS members, we came up with our 14-issue platform that was ready to be voted on.

**Voting Process**

At each voting site we set up a vertical banner that described each issue, and asked participants to sign in so we could keep in touch. Participants were then asked to pick only their top three issues and put their completed votes into a box. We used color coded tokens to distinguish the role of the voter (student, parent, staff or community). AROS members were available to assist and answer questions, but did not influence the vote.

The voting took place during March and April 2022 at 11 school sites in different parts of the city, at a Saturday farmers’ market, and at a public family event in Patterson Park. We made sure that there was adequate representation from different levels of school (Elementary, Middle and High), and from different cultural groups. At several schools we were able to include students in the voting process as a civics lesson during their school day. The students were shown a powerpoint that explained what the Governor has the power to do, how schools and our city is funded and who would hear about the results of their vote.

After each event, the results were recorded in a database. At the end of the entire process, researchers tabulated the results both by school, and by participant group.

**The 14 Issues**

1. **Schools that are emotionally, physically, culturally and academically safe**
   Schools that are emotionally, physically, culturally and academically safe. We need policy, training, programs and practices that ensure the wellbeing and safety of LGBTQ and students of all races and ethnicities. This means funding, training and time for: Restorative Practices; mindfulness and circles to address and prevent conflict; mentoring for students; and programs and practices that address trauma, build relationships, provide sex education, increase self esteem, help students make positive choices despite setbacks, build empathy, assess their own skills and strengths, and manage anger. Safety issues should be addressed alongside a grounding in cultural difference and systemic racism.

2. **Classes no larger than 20 and more counselors/providers**
   A cap on class sizes so that no class is larger than 20 students. This would allow students to have meaningful connections with educators and receive quality personalized instruction. Smaller caseloads for school counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists. Students need to understand their options post high school, to articulate goals and a plan to get there, and we need more related services providers who are full time in every school.

3. **Practical job and life skills**
   Students need viable career options after high school. This would require a return to effective trades and industry training that matches the 21st Century as early as middle schools, opportunities for internships and apprenticeship programs for all high school students, and up to date, computerized technical laboratories. We also need classes that prepare students for life in the real world in terms of financial literacy, basic civics including how to vote, the ability to be an engaged citizen, applying for college, and other skills related to seeking and gaining employment.

4. **More freedom for teachers to meet student needs**
   More autonomy and freedom for teachers to be creative in meeting student needs and meeting curriculum standards. Trusting teachers as capable professionals would also require a re-examination of the current punitive and arduous teacher evaluation system and its effectiveness in fostering excellent teachers and
student outcomes. We want a system that focuses on teacher growth and support. This would result in more joyful, hands-on, interdisciplinary/project-based, artistic activities which are a high priority for teachers, students, and parents.

5. A relevant social justice education
A relevant social justice education where there is increased emphasis on preparedness for global citizenship, critical examination of history and issues, language studies, environmentalism, and how to change and navigate systems and structures. Teachers and parents also want more critical thinking, collaborative learning, and time for self-reflection.

6. More effective retention and recruitment of teachers
Effective and relevant training, mentoring and peer support for all school staff (including teachers, community school coordinators, counselors, PSRP’s, etc.) that helps them grow as professionals. Training should include: culturally relevant pedagogy; project-based, intersectional teaching; certification in various computer programs; trauma informed teaching; differentiation; and training for principals/admin in how to best mentor teachers. Improve working conditions by reducing teacher workloads to allow educators to build relationships with students and the school community, to engage with peers in professional learning communities and plan effective lessons.

Pay levels that help to retain teachers and paraprofessionals. Prioritize recruitment of teachers of color, and provide dedicated mentoring for them. Revisit outdated entry requirements (PRAXIS) that are proven to be ineffective and discriminatory. Create a pipeline to employment in school where parents (who understand the community) become paraprofessionals, substitutes and ultimately teachers.

7. Accountability and Democracy: Include us and be transparent
Democratic participation in rollout of new initiatives, authentic ways for teachers and students to guide and give feedback. District leadership and board members need to have skin in the game—send their kids to City Schools, have actual education backgrounds and/or spend significant time in schools. Transparent process for hiring and evaluating the CEO and higher level district staff.

8. A significant reduction in standardized testing
Replace standardized testing with classroom based measures that better support learning. Teachers know their students better than the state does. When we combine an excessive focus on testing students, a lack of teacher autonomy to meet curriculum standards, a lack of time for teachers to differentiate and connect the curriculum to life, and a punitive teacher evaluation, we devalue the teaching profession and make school a place driven by compliance rather than learning.

9. More resource classes, field trips and cultural experiences
Expanded classes in the arts, physical education and other dynamic experiences. Many schools have very limited resource classes and after school programming. We want all students to have access to a well-rounded education and set of experiences in art, music, library, physical education, assemblies, cooking, gardening and agriculture, computers, field trips and travel.

10. Commit to and strengthen Community Schools
We need a definition and standard of service for community schools so that schools get both more and better coordinated services. Schools across the district should have a system that includes referrals for behavioral and mental health, department of social services, department of juvenile services, homeless services, parenting and family resources, school-based health centers, parent leadership training, restorative practices, wellness tools, and pathways to higher education for family members. We also need a system for monitoring to ensure that these services are being adequately provided.
11. Partner with Parents and Students
Parents and students as full partners in school-based decision making, in the life of the school, and in student learning. An investment in trainers/organizers for parents through the Parent Community Advisory Board (PCAB) and/or district/school level positions including training in: budgets, School Family Councils, restorative practices, technology, curriculum concerns, as well as how to work with their own children at home. Training and time for teachers and administrators to welcome parents, communicate well with families, and be more flexible to accommodate parents’ schedules. Opportunities for students to organize together to improve their school and advocate for change.

12. Functional facilities
Facilities need sustainable heating and cooling systems, adequate wifi, bathrooms, drinkable water, functional windows, usable outdoor spaces with playgrounds, and sports facilities. We need the state to agree to a plan for an ideal portfolio of well-functioning schools instead of forcing the district to close schools despite the disruption, transportation and overcrowding issues created.

13. Fully fund city schools
City Schools are being underfunded by $350 million dollars a year. We need the district and the state to prioritize existing and new funding for: better pay for teachers and paraprofessionals; increase the number of educators so there are lower class sizes, more manageable caseloads, and higher teacher retention; materials and resources for every student in every classroom including working computers for each student, toilet paper, printer paper, water coolers and up to date books so that teachers and parents don’t need to supplement school supplies and trips using their own funds.

14. Meet the needs of struggling and advanced students
Staffing and programming to meet the needs of struggling and advanced students. This includes advanced classes for all students—honors classes, AP classes, and/or IB programming more broadly accessible to students to ensure students meet college requirements, and adequate staffing for Specialized Learning for SPED and English Language Learner students, including bilingual staff.

Results

The top five issues picked by voters were:

- More resource classes, cultural experiences and field trips
- Fully funding City Schools
- Safe and welcoming schools
- Meeting the needs of struggling and advanced students
- Smaller class sizes and more counselors/providers

Participants
A total of 1194 participants voted at 13 events. They each picked their top 3 priorities out of the 14 issues identified during the Listening Campaign.

Of the 1194 participants, 747 were students, 123 were staff, 223 were parents, and 100 were community members. The reason for the disproportionate number of student votes has to do with the fact that there are so many more students in schools than any other stakeholder group. Additionally, we were able to get whole classes of students to vote at several schools.
There was a broad consensus among stakeholder groups around the top four issues, and overall the top five stood out from the rest of the pack. Interestingly, parents' and school staff members' votes were in alignment across the top ten priorities. However, there were some differences between parent/staff priorities and those of students.

In terms of the issues they felt most strongly about:
- Parents and school staff members felt strongly that having smaller class sizes and more counselors/providers was the most important issue. Students did not pick this issue as one of their top five.
- Students, on the other hand, felt most strongly about the need for more resource classes (Art, music etc), more field trips, and other culturally relevant opportunities. Other participant groups also prioritized this issue, but not to the same degree as the students.
- Community members' votes were more evenly distributed across the top five issues without a distinct outlier.

Note: In the chart below, we corrected for the disproportionate number of student votes (747/1194; 63%), by using the percentage of the group’s total vote across each issue, rather than the actual total number of votes.
Detailed Analysis of Each Priority Area

In this section we provide a detailed analysis of the top five priority areas: what our participants said, how they voted, and the policy implications. (For other related policy implications see Appendix A)

Priority #1: More Resource Classes, field trips and cultural experiences

What stakeholders said:
The overall message of the listening session comments about school curriculum and funding priorities was that students need a much broader education—one that exposes them to languages and the Arts, to the world outside their current experience, and one that is culturally relevant. We had a different platform item for job and real world skills that was also highly rated by students which came out in 6th place in the list of priorities. For students these two things seem related—learning practical things like cooking, financial literacy, or interview skills is related to the demand for learning that is engaging, active, and relevant. The message is that they want reasons to feel excited about coming to school:

- We have a policy that says that the Arts are a core subject but the resources don’t match. Make the money match the policies. (Community partner)
- Fully funded after school programs and fun trips outside of Baltimore (Teacher)
- We need to have all of the important extra-curricular activities that create a balance in education (Teacher)
- We need to recognize indigenous knowledge and celebrate it by adding selected reading pieces from indigenous writers from around the globe (Ex: Chimamanda Adichie, Susan Abulhawa, Lee Maracle) (Student)
- I want scholars to be able to know and appreciate all the areas of the cities and not limit themselves to the areas they are raised in. (Teacher)
- I want our scholars to have the opportunity to open doors they previously thought didn’t exist. This is done by giving ALL seniors a class on post high school opportunities such as trade school, college, skilled jobs, Scholarships, grants, military, etc. (Teacher)

How the different stakeholder groups voted:
The chart shows the percentage of each stakeholder group’s vote that went towards this priority. Almost 18% of all student votes went to increasing access to the Arts, Languages, field trips, and cultural experiences, which is almost double the percentage that went to their next highest concerns.

Priority #1 "More resource classes, field trips and cultural experiences" (Total votes = 523)
Policy Implications:
This requires a commitment to dedicated funding for arts, after school programs, and other cultural experiences. Arts education is currently an unfunded mandate. We call on the next Governor to limit standardized testing and other initiatives that narrow the curriculum and commit the resources so that schools can comply with The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) guidance on fine art.

Field trips are typically paid for by parents or through local fundraising efforts, which means richer districts have greater capacity to fund field trips. Maryland state lawmakers could look to Delaware’s HB 282 from the 2017-2018 legislative session for an example of state policy that ensures all students have access to field trips and cultural experiences. The Delaware bill would have required the state to provide $25 per student in high poverty schools for the purpose of educational and enrichment field trips.

Students who see themselves in the curriculum have an increased sense of belonging, and legislators in several states have taken action to try to ensure that all students have that opportunity. In Minnesota, this year, legislators are advancing HF 3434 to add an Ethnic Studies course to the social studies curriculum. Last year, legislators in California passed AB 101 that required a semester of ethnic studies and allowed districts to create a year-long course.

Priority #2: Fully Funded Schools

What stakeholders said:
The comments that stakeholders made about funding range from the need for basic supplies and technology, to funding that will attract and keep the best people, to funding to fix our aging school buildings.

• Need adequate space and facilities for regular classroom, science, arts, outside play (Teacher)
• Prioritization of this [funding for facilities], we can’t celebrate incremental progress when half of our students still don’t even have AC! (Teacher)
• Facilities that are up to date (heating, cooling, toilets working, no leaks, no mice) (Student)
• The basic resources of a school should not have to rely on unpaid labor. And this goes for the out of pocket spending educators and families must do just to keep a school functioning. We have to demand better of our lawmakers! (Parent)
• Cut that check! We need it. Give the City its power back. Fund us the way we deserve and the way we need to be. If you want good people you gotta pay good people. We need people who are actual experts and practitioners in the content they’re teaching. (Teacher)
• My local school needs more funding. You must fully fund the Blueprint and more! Maryland is a rich state and corporations and the super wealthy can and should pay their fair share. Some of Maryland’s largest employers pay no taxes. That makes no sense. (Teacher)
• Better school supplies (textbooks, tech, shouldn’t have to share basic materials) (Student)

How the different stakeholder groups voted:
There was broad agreement amongst stakeholder groups that we need to fully fund City Schools.

Policy Implications:
We know that the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future funding is resulting in an influx of resources, but it is still not enough. City Schools should have received over 3 billion dollars more from the state alone between 1996-2016 according to the state’s own definition of adequacy. This definition was calculated by independent consultants, codified into law by the legislature, and repeatedly upheld by the courts. The most recent studies commissioned by the General Assembly show that City Schools would need $350 million in additional dollars every year for our students to meet state academic standards. Maryland’s current funding formula is regressive, meaning students in richer districts receiving higher per pupil funding than students in poorer districts. Schools in our state will see annual increases in funding, slated to reach nearly four
billion dollars by 2030 under the 2020 Blueprint law. But it will take 11 years for the state to actually reach a non-regressive formula, and even then it won’t be progressive. Meanwhile City Schools’ facilities have a 3 billion dollar backlog of essential maintenance work that they can’t afford to do. The recent legislative progress is admirable and still insufficient to meet the needs of our students and address the historical and racist underfunding of Baltimore City Schools.

When, as a State, we place the emphasis on processes for holding schools accountable for standardized tests as a way to improve academic outcomes, we fail to acknowledge the root cause of the achievement problems in City Schools. Out of school factors such as housing, jobs, healthcare, transportation and others have six times as powerful an effect on test score results as classroom teaching. It has been shown in numerous studies that it costs far more to adequately educate children with problems associated with poverty and other out of school factors. There is only so much that better teaching and more frequent testing can do to improve academic achievement without fixing the level of staffing required to provide the necessary support to students.

Legislators should support the Maryland Fair Funding Coalition Fair Tax Plan to build a stronger, more equitable revenue system so our state has the resources it needs to fund our schools. The plan calls on state lawmakers to close corporate tax loopholes that only benefit large, multi-state corporations and their shareholders so that these companies contribute to the services they rely on.

Too many Baltimore classrooms are without sufficient heat in the bitter cold and without sufficient air conditioning on hot days. It’s so bad that some Baltimore City Public Schools have had to close during the winter because of frigid conditions. Temperature is just one of many air quality problems, many classrooms also have inadequate ventilation. HB 665 from the 2022 session, which was introduced but ultimately not enacted, would have been a step forward by requiring boards of education to conduct indoor air quality testing and to make those results available to the public. Even better, lawmakers should consider New Jersey’s example and enact an indoor air quality standard requiring schools to have a designated person to monitor and maintain ventilation systems.
Priority #3: Safe and Welcoming Schools

What people said:
All stakeholders felt passionately about the need for students to feel safe—emotionally, physically, and culturally.

- I always dreamed of having decompression rooms, quiet spaces for students who needed them. Instead of just kicking kids out of school or some other punishment for rowdy behavior. (Counselor)
- A safe environment. Knowing that your child will be safe. When you drop them off, they’ll be as well when you pick them up. (Parent)
- Learning environments where students are (and feel) safe to be, learn, express, and make mistakes (Teacher)
- A space that encourages and celebrates cultural diversity where difference is affirmed (Student)
- More mentoring programs for students. (Parent)
- Less emphasis on disciplining small behavior, and more on fixing the root of the problem, or what’s going on. (Teacher)
- Understanding safety in the context of community (e.g., safety for immigrants, state surveillance of Muslims/ Palestinians, undocumented people, more policed communities, etc.) (Caregiver/community member)
- Have laws and policies in place to address racism, xenophobia, and prejudice. These laws should specifically address in schools incidents where minority students face discrimination/harassment/intimidation (Student)
- If they [students] don’t feel safe & cared about they are not ready to take academic risks. (Student)

How the different stakeholder groups voted:
For the 3rd highest priority, there is again broad agreement amongst stakeholder groups that the issue of ensuring safe, welcoming and supportive schools is important. Roughly 10% of each stakeholder group’s votes went to this issue.

Policy Implications:
Many districts share a commitment to Restorative Practices and Social Emotional Learning but lack the funding and training to adequately implement. Safety also requires a commitment to embracing all cultures and communities—including Black, LGBTQ students, immigrant students, Muslim students, ELL students, etc. We need a commission on multiculturalism to conduct curriculum reviews to identify and address gaps and errors that disadvantage, erase, demean, or otherwise harm
Black, brown, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities. This was proposed in the legislature under SB662 and needs to be passed. As part of this commission, we need across-the-board (all grades, all subjects) standards for holistically educating Black and other students of color in a meaningful way from PK-12 and beyond. This goes beyond making sure that Black students and other student groups are represented in the curriculum, but needs to also ensure that the curriculum and pedagogical approaches are actually designed in the best interest of these student groups, and that teachers are fully trained to understand and embrace these practices.

Priority #4: Support for Struggling and Advanced Students

What the stakeholders said:

- For the growing ESOL population we need more ESOL teachers. Not just for hispanic students. Full time is needed (Teacher)
- Language should not be a barrier for students to advance in their education and achieving their dreams (Student)
- Better literacy curriculum with books that are more relatable, accessible and engaging for students. Wit and Wisdom is awful. (Teacher)
- AP and or Honors classes at every school. (Caregiver)
- We need flexibility for teachers to meet all student needs. My student complains she doesn’t learn anything new in school and is bored all the time. (Parent)

How the different stakeholder groups voted:

For the 4th highest priority, there is again broad agreement amongst stakeholder groups that the need for dedicated funding and a policy emphasis on meeting the needs of both struggling and advanced students is a shared priority. Roughly 10% of each stakeholder group’s votes went to this issue.

Policy Implications:

While the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future funding does emphasize support for struggling students through supporting the needs of high poverty and SPED students it is not yet clear if the amount allocated is enough to meet the need. We should require the Maryland State Department of Education and the Department of Legislative Services to provide an adequacy analysis of the Blueprint formula that employs a similar cost methodology used by APA Consulting in their study, to provide an accurate analysis of the formula, with stakeholder involvement.
Priority #5: Reduced Class Size and Caseloads

What the stakeholders said:

- Class sizes need to be smaller to allow for safety and quality. We want the governor to change the law that prohibits unions from fighting for small class size and just plain having a law for class size by grade band. We know this demand is tied to lots of $. (Teacher)
- I would like to see a decrease in classroom overcrowding. 40 students in a third grade classroom with one teacher is too much. (Teacher)
- We say we are supporting mental health, but it needs to be a priority and needs to not be added to already overburdened teacher workloads. We are cramming so much into each day and not making time to prioritize mental health - needs to be a part of the school day. (Teacher)
- Resources specifically for students experiencing youth homelessness (Teacher)
- Coordinate resources available through the Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Services, homeless services, and funding for health services (Parent)
- School social workers have way too much on their plates. It’s not an attractive position. Their duties need to be defined and not pulled into other lanes. We need more people and we need to keep the people. (Teacher)
- More school nurses and other supports so teachers can focus on teaching

How the different stakeholder groups voted:

This chart shows that the issue of lowering class sizes and providing schools with more counselors and other service providers is very strongly favored by school staff, with 22% of all staff votes going to this issue, which is more than double the percentage that went to their next highest concern. This issue is also strongly favored by parents.

Policy Implications:

Maryland is one of only nine states where it is illegal to even bring up class size at the bargaining table. Teacher unions need the ability to bring this demand from the community into negotiations, and school districts need the resources to meet this demand without cutting from other essential needs. Maryland Senate Bills 962 and House Bill 890 from the
2022 legislative session would have made class size a negotiable subject for collective bargaining, the process by which school employees come together through their union to reach a written agreement about teaching and learning conditions. Because there is a legal prohibition on bargaining over class size, school districts can ignore employee demands to improve class sizes even when those demands are backed by parents, students and communities. Next session, lawmakers should reintroduce stronger versions of these bills, making class-size a mandatory subject of bargaining between school employees and districts.

In a 2017 study, before COVID, over 30% of Baltimore youth felt sad or hopeless. 19% have seriously considered suicide and 16% planned out how they would do it. This is compared to a Maryland statewide average of 8.2% of young people who have seriously considered ending their lives. 58% of students in Maryland reported struggling with their mental health during the pandemic. An increase in commitment to increasing the number of counselors is essential.

School psychologists, social workers, counselors and nurses (who together are often referred to as Specialized Instructional Support Personnel or SISP) provide a range of necessary health services in schools; however, an analysis by Hopeful Futures found that Maryland schools do not have sufficient staff to ensure access to these valuable services. On average, across all Maryland schools there is:

• One school psychologist for every 1,198 students. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio 1:500;
• One social worker for every 2,324 students. The National Association of Social Workers recommends a minimum ratio 1:250, or an even lower ratio of 1:50 for students with intensive needs;
• One school counselor for every 362 students. The American School Counselor Association recommends a minimum ratio of 1:250.

In addition, based on the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics, every school should have at least one full-time licensed school nurse and each secondary school should also have one full-time health aide to work under the direct supervision of the Licensed School Nurse.

All schools should be staffed based on the minimum ratios outlined above. However, some students require more supports than others, and the individual needs of each child should be considered when determining staffing levels for schools. The National Association of School Psychologists outlines the steps school staff can use to complete an assessment that can be used to link services to student needs. They suggest that districts should adopt a workload assessment tool to be used to determine actual caseloads and realistic workloads for SISP.

We also need retention and recruitment efforts for all staff including Black and Latinx teachers. Immigrant families are the only growing population in city schools yet we have no pipeline for recruiting staff who speak the various languages of our students. The MD Teaching Fellows Scholarship currently relies on standardized test scores for eligibility, thus reproducing the racial and economic demographics of the current teaching force. We need to expand eligibility to include graduating in the top 15% of one’s class, expanding the opportunity to segregated Black and brown high school students as well, who’ve been underinvested in and therefore may not achieve at the level of their more affluent peers despite having the ability to thrive as future teachers. The scholarship program should also be extended specifically to attract Black and brown teachers who are either on conditional certificates or are paraprofessionals.

**Conclusion**

Baltimoreans who are most affected by public schools have a clear set of priorities. While this listening and voting process has narrowed down our collective concerns to the top 5, it was also clear from the comments and discussion in the listening sessions that all 14 concerns are interrelated. The overarching concern is the fact that the funding for Baltimore City Schools has never been adequate, much less excellent since the district became majority Black, decades ago. This has been the source of lawsuits, independent adequacy studies and is well documented. The historic disinvestment and racist policies have resulted in needs, both in the communities in general and in education in particular, that cannot be met without an equal commitment to redressing this history. This problem is felt by all who are involved in City Schools. From facilities
that no one would want to work or learn in, to academic and health needs that go unaddressed because of a lack of staff, the system is failing far too many students. Despite the progress that the Blueprint represents, what is needed next is for legislators to: a) find the funds to fully fund the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future in the long term; and, b) to recognize and fully fund the gaps in the Blueprint.

Beyond a lack of fully adequate funding, schools are suffering from a narrow curricular focus. Students express their concern by saying that they want resource classes, classes that make sense to their lives and culture and offer enriching experiences beyond the school building, where joy is present and real life concerns and questions are answered. Teachers describe this same issue as a lack of autonomy, a desire for small class sizes and a struggle to meet the diverse needs of students with limited support. Teachers are clear that it is hard to include more dynamic teaching within the curricular and testing constraints that exist.

The concerns about safety reveal a system that does not address prejudices, embrace culture, nor address the effects of trauma. The physical and mental health needs students bring into the building outweigh the current staff capacity to address those needs, leading to reactive responses that do not focus on the root cause of problems.

Voters across the city are clear about what is required to fix these problems: a funding formula that provides enough staff (educators, counselors, social workers and others) to provide for learning and mental health supports for all students who need them; smaller class sizes that allow for individualized attention to both struggling and advanced students; less of a focus on and testing a narrow set of subjects and, instead, a fully funded mandate for more Arts, field trips, and relevant out-of-school experiences; fully renovated or new school buildings across the whole city; a commitment to making all schools places where emotional, physical, and cultural needs and differences are respected and addressed; and schools where adults have the opportunity to build deep, trusting relationships (which are a prerequisite for realizing a safe, dynamic, creative and relevant education).

The 9-month deep engagement process of building The People’s Platform for Education demonstrated to Baltimore AROS chapter members that there exists a tremendous amount of overlap in what students, parents, staff and community members want to see in our public schools. Despite this interest convergence, the people directly impacted by education policy decisions continue to feel as if their voices do not matter and that they lack true decision making power, with shots being called by those with the least skin in the game. True stakeholder engagement would include those directly impacted from the start of the policy making process. Baltimore AROS is committed to working with any legislator willing to help translate these platform areas into legislation that can tangibly build the schools our students deserve.
Appendix

The following is a list of related bills and policies from around the country that would be useful for legislators to consider.

A Teaching Workforce that is Reflective of the Student Population

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs is plummeting—dropping 28 percent nationally between 2009 and 2017. We are losing the teacher diversity battle as well. An analysis by the Brookings Institution found America’s teaching workforce, which is disproportionately white, is growing less reflective of those they teach, who are now a majority students of color. A number of states have taken positive steps toward expanding and diversifying their teacher workforce. Grow Your Own Illinois is a teacher training program that assists community members in becoming certified teachers in their neighborhood schools. It has created a pipeline of highly qualified teachers of color, with 123 teachers in 88 schools across Illinois. In New York City, The Success Via Apprenticeship program prepares career and technical education high school graduates to become CTE teachers and boasts one of the highest training and retention rates for teacher preparation. New Mexico earmarked $2.5 million in 2019 to fund a program that provides para-educators with scholarships to become teachers.

State lawmakers can help support and retain new teachers of color by providing funding and support for new teacher induction and mentoring. Mentor teachers should be provided training and compensation as well as time during the school day to teach, support and evaluate beginning teachers. In Washington, the Legislature funds competitive grants for school districts participating in the Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) mentoring program. Districts that are fully engaged in the BEST mentoring program retain new educators at a four percentage-point higher rate than other school districts. Lawmakers can support teacher residency programs to provide an alternative pathway to teacher certification. These residencies are grounded in deep clinical training wherein teacher residents apprentice alongside an expert teacher in a high-need classroom for a full academic year. California earmarked $75 million to create and expand teacher residency programs in 2019.

Revenue

Legislators must support the Maryland Fair Funding Coalition Fair Tax Plan to close corporate tax loopholes that only benefit large, multi-state corporations and their shareholders so that these companies contribute to the services they rely on.

Two recent proposals include:

• The throwback rule to close a loophole that shields some corporate profits from taxation. Maryland’s corporate income tax is calculated using a formula that considers how much of a company’s sales are located in Maryland. This system helps to prevent multiple states from taxing a business’s profits. However, when a company located in Maryland makes sales into another state, this income is sometimes not taxed by any state and it becomes “nowhere income.” Proposed legislation would ensure that every dollar of corporate income in Maryland is subject to taxation.
• Elimination of the pass-through/LLC loophole so businesses that organize as S-corporations, LLCs, or other so-called pass-through entities won’t be able to avoid paying corporate income tax. There is a growing national trend of very large businesses choosing these business structures specifically to avoid corporate taxes. This legislation would partially offset special tax treatment for pass-through entities by levying a 4 percent tax—just under half the corporate tax rate—on the largest pass-through businesses. This reform would continue to protect small businesses by allowing all companies to deduct their first $1 million in profits and exempting sole proprietorships.

Legislators should also remove special interest tax breaks that give away millions to large corporations. Maryland currently spends millions on special tax breaks for businesses in hopes of spurring economic development, despite growing evidence that these subsidies do not work and primarily benefit large businesses that have the resources to collect the credits. Lawmakers should support legislation to eliminate those programs that state analysts have found to be deeply flawed, including the Enterprise Zone Tax Credit, the Biotechnology Investment Incentive Tax Credit, the state level Opportunity Zone tax credits, and the One Maryland Economic Development Tax Credit.

We need to improve Maryland’s upside-down tax code that has the wealthiest 1 percent of households paying a smaller
share of their income in state and local taxes. This imbalance in our tax code further concentrates wealth and power in a few hands while doing nothing to reduce the economic barriers that hold back many Marylanders, especially people of color. Lawmakers should support the following proposals to ensure everyone is paying their fair share:

- A fair income tax which reduces income taxes for low- and moderate-income households while raising them for the wealthiest Marylanders. This includes restoring a higher 7% tax bracket for annual income above $1 million.
- A 1 percent surtax on capital gains income to offset the special treatment of capital gains embedded in the federal tax code. The top federal tax rate on capital gains income is 23.8 percent, far below the 40.8 percent top rate on income from work. Capital gains accruing to households with accumulated wealth, that’s why the wealthiest 1 percent of tax filers get two-thirds of all capital gains income. The special treatment of capital gains is also an important driver of racial and ethnic inequity, because the wealthiest 10 percent of white households control nearly two-thirds of all wealth nationwide.
- Tax the income of investment managers at the same rate as other income earners. Like thousands of other Maryland workers, from authors to restaurant servers, private equity and hedge fund managers are paid partly on the basis of their performance. Unlike other workers, wealthy fund managers pay a special, low tax rate on their income. This special treatment violates core principles of effective tax policy by taxing similar activities at different rates, shifting tax responsibility away from those who can best afford to pay, and costing the state millions of that could be used to support our schools.
- Restore the millionaire estate tax. In 2014, the General Assembly increased the estate tax exemption from $1 million to over $5 million, handing a windfall to a small number of ultra-wealthy heirs and making it harder for the state to invest in essential services like schools. This change was misguided to begin with and, because of changes made by the 2017 federal tax overhaul, even its stated goal of matching the Maryland estate tax to the federal exemption no longer applies. Lawmakers should reverse the flawed choice made in 2014 and restore the exemption to $1 million.

**Protections for Immigrant Children.**

Schools should be able to focus on helping and teaching children. To that end, Massachusetts legislatures passed S2963 to forbid school resource officers and school department personnel from disclosing certain student information to law enforcement officials, except where written consent is obtained from the student, parent or guardian, or to comply with a court order or subpoena.

**Access to Health Services.**

In 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance to state Medicaid directors that clarified which services can be reimbursed by Medicaid in a school-based setting. This **guidance** allows school districts to expand their school-based Medicaid programs to cover more students and bring in additional federal funding. Unfortunately, Maryland state law limits school districts to billing only for school health services included in a student’s IEP. Maryland lawmakers should adopt state legislation to reflect the latest CMS guidance so school districts can draw down additional Medicaid funding for school health services to expand access to school-based health services.

**Make all Baltimore Schools Community Schools.**

Schools must be places where kids are welcomed and wanted and safe. But too many Baltimore schools have to deal with the damaging effects of poverty—including hunger, toxic stress and untreated medical conditions that undermine children’s well-being and their ability to learn. **Community schools** represent a strategy for coordinating supports and services through our schools to address students’ academic, emotional, social and health needs. Community schools are meant to serve the unique needs of individual students, families and communities. While the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future embraces this strategy, even upon full implementation not all schools will receive the funding for a community school coordinator, nurse practitioner and school-based health clinic. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution, a panacea or a single answer to address these needs. Some of the **fundamentals** include:

- Community schools provide a variety of services to students and the community, including academic services like tutoring, community-based learning and other enrichment activities; medical services like primary, vision, dental and nutritional services; mental health services like counseling and psychiatrists; and adult education classes.
- Community schools support and enable a strong academic curriculum. Strong ties with the community lead to more
partnerships and programs outside the classroom, which in turn can be utilized to directly support instruction and empower students to learn. Examples include project-based learning and service learning activities.

- Community schools partnerships are coordinated and purposeful. The community school infrastructure enables the coordination and integration of programs that enrich and support learning and instruction, while meeting the needs of students, families and the community.

**Supports For Parents**

**Home Visitation Services.** Home visiting by skilled practitioners is an evidence based way to support child health and preliteracy. A variety of federal, state and local funds are being used to provide these services and legislatures play a role in expansion and improvement. For example, Oklahoma has more than 30 different programs that provide visitation for parents with young children. In 2016, that legislature passed **OK H 2157** which created pathways for coordination and allowed state agencies to create rules governing the programs. In 2018, the New Jersey legislature created a pilot program **NJ Stat. 30:4D-17.39** to use Medicaid funds to expand home visitation services. Minnesota has a comprehensive statute **MN Stat. 145-A.17** that establishes requirements for training, technical assistance and a continuum of services.

**Grants For Parental Involvement.** Colorado has a program to provide schools with resources to improve parental involvement, see CO stat. **22-7-305.** Schools make applications, with awards being prioritized for schools with more at risk populations, including larger percentage of English Language Learners. Grants can be used for family-to-school liaison positions, parent leadership training, parent education programs, and school-based parent information resource centers

**Expansions of Paid Leave for Parental Involvement.** Colorado lawmakers passed **CO H 1057** in 2009 to allow employees to take leave to attend parent teacher conferences.