



2024 Annual Report

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Executive Director
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**Accountability &
Implementation
Board**

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BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND'S FUTURE

January 2025

Honorable Wes Moore
Governor of Maryland

Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate

Honorable Adrienne Jones
Speaker of the House of Delegates

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, Speaker Jones, and Members of the General Assembly:

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) is pleased to submit its third Annual Report as required by Education Article § 5-409(b)(3) (MSAR # 13171).

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 3rd graders are proficient in reading and more 10th graders are meeting the college and career readiness (CCR) standard. Progress is modest in this initial phase of implementation, but indicators are moving in a positive direction to show that we are on the right path.

The AIB's efforts over the past year to support Blueprint implementation are detailed in this report as well as Blueprint progress to date. In partnership with the State Board of Education, the AIB set targets for outcome measures that are aligned with the Blueprint's goals for the P-12 education system. The AIB will be monitoring the local education agencies (LEAs) progress toward the targets and implementation of their 5-year implementation plans (2023-2027) over the next three years.

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 earlier this 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.

On behalf of the AIB, we look forward to continuing to work with you to support successful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future with fidelity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Isiah Leggett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Isiah Leggett
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rachel Hise", with a stylized circular flourish at the end.

Rachel Hise
Executive Director

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Overview

This annual report is submitted to fulfill the statutory requirements specified in the Annotated Code of Maryland, §5–409(b)(3). In accordance with § 5–408(c) of this subtitle, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) shall report on or before November 1st each year for calendar years 2021 through 2031 to the Governor, the public, and, in accordance with §2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on:

- (i) Progress made on the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future;
- (ii) Recommended legislative changes, including any changes necessary to ensure that the implementations have adequate resources and measurements;
- (iii) The degree to which State and local agencies, as applicable, are carrying out their assigned roles in implementing the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future; and
- (iv) Whether the funds provided by the State and local governments are consistent with the Board’s estimate of what is necessary to fully implement the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

The major legislation to implement the Blueprint policies and funding was passed by the General Assembly in March 2020 just prior to the Legislature’s early adjournment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill was subsequently vetoed by Governor Hogan. The General Assembly overrode the Governor’s veto in February 2021, and it became law in March 2021 (Chapter 36 of 2021).

The AIB submitted its second annual report in February 2024, later than required, to ensure that the Board’s recommendations for potential legislative changes and updates to the Blueprint could be incorporated in the final submission. The February 2024 report specifically focused on AIB activities and Blueprint implementation progress from July through December 2023. This report covers activities and progress from January through December 2024 with additional information related to the Board’s recommendations for legislative changes to the Blueprint adopted in January 2025.

Introduction

The AIB was created to oversee implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future during the phased-in implementation of the law and evaluate whether the goals of the Blueprint are being achieved. The AIB was initially intended to start work July 1, 2020, which was later moved to July 1, 2021, and will terminate on June 30, 2032, unless the Governor and General Assembly determine that it should continue its work. The seven-member board was initially appointed in November 2021.

The AIB was required to create a Comprehensive Implementation Plan by December 1, 2022, to guide the work of all State and local agencies required to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Moving forward, the Board is to evaluate the data submitted to it by units of State and local government responsible for implementing any part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, assess the effectiveness of the Blueprint implementation, hold State and local governments accountable, and evaluate whether the Blueprint's outcomes are being achieved with fidelity. Any updates to the Comprehensive Plan must be approved by August 1st each year. The AIB has adopted two updated versions of the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, including most recently in August 2024. For further detail about the updated Comprehensive Plan, see Section 2.1 of this report.

The AIB is required to hire an outside consultant to conduct a program evaluation of the Blueprint's implementation and progress over the implementation period. The interim evaluation is due in December 2026 and an accompanying AIB report with recommendations by January 15, 2027. The final evaluation and the AIB report, which must include a recommendation as to whether the AIB should continue to monitor Blueprint implementation and/or whether structural organizational changes should be made, is due by December 2030.

The AIB is committed to transparency and providing ongoing opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement and feedback. Receiving, considering, and acting upon input from stakeholders and the public has been achieved through working sessions open to the public, surveys, [feedback forms](#), written and oral testimony, and email.

In addition to the website (discussed in Section 5), the AIB maintains a mailing list of interested individuals who receive regular email updates regarding AIB meetings, recruitments, feedback opportunities, and other important information. Individuals interested in signing up may email aib@maryland.gov or submit this [form](#). The AIB also has a presence on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to reach stakeholders and provide timely updates.

The Board

The AIB is composed of seven members appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, chosen from a slate prepared by the AIB Nominating Committee established under Section 5-403 of the Education Article. The members serve 6-year terms, initially staggered, and are eligible for re-nomination. Members are to consist of individuals who collectively reflect, to the extent practicable, the geographic, racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity of the State; and a high level of knowledge and expertise in:

- Early education through secondary education policy;
- Postsecondary education policy;
- Teaching in public schools;
- Strategies used by top-performing state and national education systems in the world;
- Leading and implementing systemic change in complex organizations; and
- Financial auditing and accounting.

The current members of the Accountability and Implementation Board are:

- Isiah Leggett (appointed Chair by the Governor) (term expires July 1, 2026)
- William Kirwan (elected Vice-Chair) (term expires July 1, 2030)
- Mara Doss (term expires July 1, 2026)
- Jennifer Lynch (term expires July 1, 2030)
- Joseph Manko (Term expires July 1, 2025)
- Justin Robinson (term expires July 1, 2030)
- Laura Stapleton (term expires July 1, 2025)

Biographies, terms, and other information regarding the AIB Members are available on the AIB website at: <https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/members.aspx>

The AIB Members meet regularly as a board at least monthly. Meetings are held in public and livestreamed. Archived recordings of meetings are available on the AIB's website at: <https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/meetings.aspx>. The AIB welcomes [public comment](#) at each regular Board meeting and reserves 15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting for oral testimony. Written testimony may be submitted at any time to aib@maryland.gov.

In 2024, the AIB and the Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) convened for two (2) in-person joint board meetings on February 27 and June 25, 2024. The boards will continue to meet jointly on a regular basis. In addition, leadership of both boards and the AIB and MSDE meet at least monthly to discuss Blueprint implementation successes and challenges, and to collaborate on strategies to support successful Blueprint implementation.

Section 1. Recommendations for Legislative Changes

The AIB is responsible for overseeing the Blueprint's successful implementation with fidelity. The AIB is committed to implementing the Blueprint law, holding state and local agencies that have a role in implementing the Blueprint accountable in making progress and meeting the Blueprint mission and goals, and proposing legislative changes as needed to fully implement the Blueprint. Since the Board's establishment, it has maintained that to recommend changes to the Blueprint law, it will look for evidence to show that either the Blueprint cannot be implemented as intended or faithful implementation is not yielding the results that the Blueprint anticipated. These criteria set a high bar for the AIB to recommend changes to the Blueprint.

As the AIB has been updating the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, reviewing LEA Blueprint Implementation Plans, monitoring progress, participating in regular meetings with Superintendents, Blueprint coordinators, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and other entities, and receiving feedback, and working with AIB's Technical Assistance partners, implementation challenges have been identified that may need to be addressed through changes to the law or policy. Where possible, the AIB has provided flexibility in Blueprint implementation within its authority. Some examples of this flexibility over the past year include, in collaboration with the MSDE, limiting the required July 1, 2024, Career Ladder submission to Levels 1 through 3 of the career ladders for teachers and adopting a joint policy for LEAs to meet the minimum school funding requirements over a three-year period. Where changes to the law are needed because implementation cannot occur as intended, the AIB has recommended legislative changes. The AIB has recommended limited changes to the law each year since 2022 primarily to address the alignment of Blueprint policies, timelines, and funding.

For the 2025 Legislative Session, the AIB has one major recommendation that requires legislation. At its January 10, 2025, Board meeting, the AIB recommended modifying the timeline in the law for the implementation of "collaborative time" for teachers. Given the current shortage of fully licensed teachers in our schools, the AIB found that it is not feasible for LEAs to be able to hire additional teachers in the near-term to begin implementing collaborative time on the current 8-year timeline in the Blueprint beginning July 1, 2025. Adjustments to the timeline and potential strategies to help LEAs meet the 40% goal for all teachers will be needed.

Further, the AIB recognizes the urgent need to increase the teacher pipeline and will support the implementation of additional strategies to close the teacher supply gap and. Pilot programs to support LEAs implementing collaborative time on a small scale will be critical to identifying innovative and effective approaches to meet the 40% collaborative time goal for all teachers on a revised timeline.

Overall, in the US and in Maryland, teachers typically teach 80% of their time in front of the classroom and up to 20% of their time is planning time, typically individual time. The Blueprint

calls for all teachers to have additional time (increase from 20% to 40% of time) when they are not solely teaching in front of the classroom in order to participate in professional learning communities with their colleagues, analyze student data to identify students who may be falling behind, determine needed interventions, and work with students one-on-one and in small groups to get them back on track. This is called “collaborative time” in the Blueprint. Collaborative time is a critical component of the Blueprint that supports the overall goal for students to leave high school college and career ready and prepared for success. Collaborative time also supports the work in Pillar 2 (High Quality and Diverse Teachers and School Leaders) to improve teacher recruitment and retention by making the working conditions for teachers more aligned with other valued professions.

To implement the additional time for every teacher, the Blueprint recognizes that LEAs will need to hire additional teachers. Under the Blueprint, in order to provide collaborative time for teachers, approximately 12,000-15,000 additional teachers (approximately 25% increase in teachers) may be needed. These assumptions were used to determine the additional State and local funding that LEAs would need to implement collaborative time. The Blueprint phases in State and local funding for the additional time over an 8-year period beginning in FY 2026 (SY 2025-2026).

The growing teacher shortage was a concern when the Kirwan Commission made its recommendation for collaborative time based on the practices and higher student achievement of top-performing systems around the world. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly increased the teacher shortage to record levels. According to the MSDE data presented to the AIB in December 2024, over 6,500 positions were filled by conditionally licensed teachers in the 2023-2024 school year. This is more than three times the amount of conditionally licensed teachers before the pandemic and represents approximately 10% of all public-school teachers in Maryland. The LEAs also had over 1,600 vacant positions in the 2023-2024 school year, requiring existing staff to cover classrooms and teach outside their certification area. While the level of vacancies is slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, the number of conditionally licensed teachers is continuing to increase.

Recognizing the teacher shortage that existed before the pandemic, the Kirwan Commission recommended, and the Blueprint included investments in teaching scholarships and recruitment campaigns to attract prospective teachers into the profession, as well as providing comparable salaries and improved working conditions. The Governor and General Assembly have expanded those efforts, and the AIB has been working with the MSDE and higher education on strategies to provide additional pathways to teacher licensure and Grow Your Own programs to increase the teacher pipeline. However, it will take more time and likely additional strategies to significantly close the gap between the supply and demand for high quality and diverse teachers.

Section 2. Progress Towards Blueprint's Expected Outcomes

In the Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan adopted by the AIB in December 2022, the AIB identified the expected outcome of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future at full implementation to be:

Improve the quality and equity of Maryland's education system so that all Maryland students, regardless of where they live, household income, race, ethnicity, gender, language spoken at home, disability, and any other unique characteristic, can leave high school globally competitive and prepared for success in postsecondary education, work, and life.

The Blueprint and the AIB are focused on providing equitable learning opportunities across our State so that every student can become college- and career-ready before they graduate from high school. This goal is considered to be the North Star of the Blueprint. Improving outcomes for students who are currently not achieving college- and career-ready, which overwhelmingly includes students who are from low-income households and who attend schools with high concentrations of poverty, English learners, students with disabilities, and students with different racial/ethnic backgrounds is a focus of the Blueprint and the AIB. Closing the opportunity and achievement gaps between these students and their peers is critical to achieving the Blueprint's goal.

The AIB has also identified the expected outcome(s) for each of the five (5) Blueprint Pillars:

Pillar 1 - Early Childhood Education

- All students enter kindergarten ready to learn (i.e., developmentally ready for kindergarten, including physical and social/emotional health).

Pillar 2 - High Quality and Diverse Teachers

- Maryland has a high-quality and diverse teacher and leader workforce that approximates the diversity of Maryland students statewide and by district; is sufficient to fill all needed positions and roles in schools and districts across the State.
- Maryland provides teachers with professional learning opportunities to improve student outcomes and additional responsibility, authority, status, and compensation as they gain expertise.

Pillar 3 - College and Career Readiness

- Maryland has: 1) an empirically based College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard that reflects readiness for postsecondary education and training; and 2) an education system designed to ensure that all students who enter school ready to learn can reach this standard by the end of 10th grade, and no later than high school graduation.

- Students who reach the CCR standard prior to high school graduation move on to a choice of high-quality post-CCR pathways that: prepare students for college, offer college credit in high school, and provide high-quality CTE training that culminates in an industry-recognized credential with the high-school level of a registered apprenticeship as the primary credential.

Pillar 4 - More Resources to Ensure All Students are Successful

- Students who are from low-income households, attend schools with high concentrations of students who are from low-income households, who are English learners, and/or who require special education services receive the additional resources and services they need to achieve success in school and overall health and well-being. With full Blueprint implementation, these students will meet the CCR standard at the same rate as other students.
- All students who need behavioral health services can access them.

Pillar 5 - Governance and Accountability

- Maryland has a sustainable, statewide continuous improvement structure in place for planning, monitoring, and supporting ongoing Blueprint implementation across the entire P-20 education and workforce preparation system.

The expected outcomes describe the intended impact of the Blueprint on students, educators, and schools at full implementation. The pillar-specific expected outcomes are available in the [Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan](#), which is discussed in more detail below.

2.1 Blueprint Comprehensive Plan Update

The Blueprint law requires the AIB to adopt a Comprehensive Implementation Plan by December 2022 and to update the plan by August 1st annually. For the 2024 plan update, AIB solicited public feedback on potential changes to the comprehensive plan via email or through a Google feedback form. Staff compiled public feedback and posted it on the AIB website for review. Feedback focused on:

- Changes to funding/funding structures, particularly for charter schools
- National Board Certification
- Implementation of the Science of Reading
- Deployment of Expert Review Teams
- Incorporation of the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) and Pyramid Model
- Virtual education program expansion
- Integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum and implementation

Some of these suggestions required legislative updates that could not be realized through changes to the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, and others fell under the Maryland State Department of Education's scope of work. Relevant insights and recommendations were shared with MSDE staff for their consideration.

Changes to the 2024 Blueprint Comprehensive Plan largely incorporate changes resulting from the 2024 legislative session. The AIB reviewed these changes and adopted the updated plan during a public meeting on August 1, 2024. The updated Blueprint Comprehensive Plan is available on the [AIB website](https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/Blueprint-plans.aspx) at: <https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/Blueprint-plans.aspx>.

2.2 Blueprint Outcome Measures

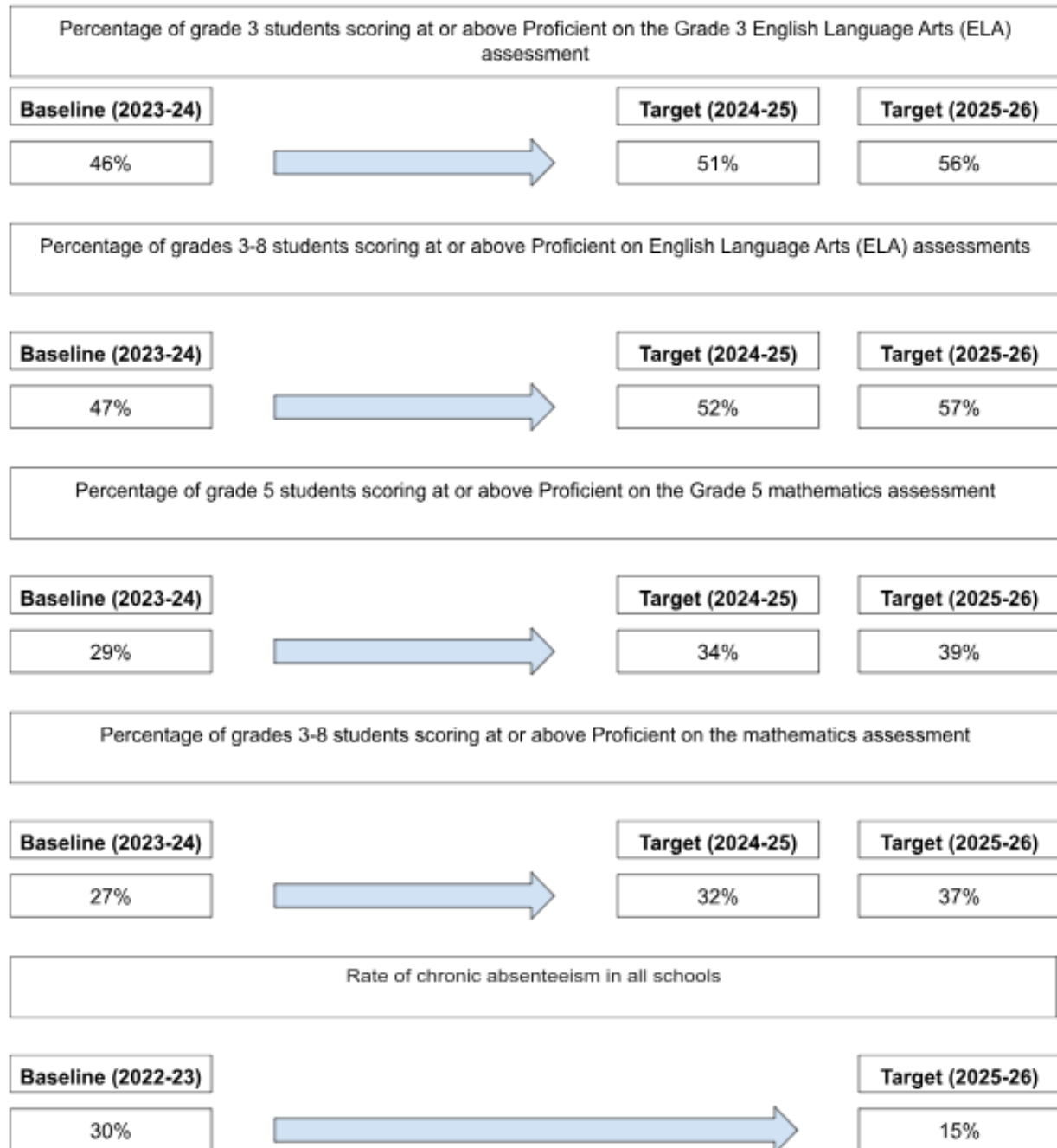
The AIB's Outcome Measures Workgroup, which is co-chaired by AIB Members Stapleton and Manko, and also includes broad representation from State agencies, local education agencies (LEAs), higher education, advocacy organizations, data experts, and AIB's equity consultant, met intensely during 2023 to develop outcome measures tied to the Blueprint's expected outcomes. These measures were finalized in July 2023 and included in the 2023 Blueprint Comprehensive Plan Update. The workgroup continued to meet periodically to advise the AIB on outcome measures, data collection, and target setting, including the alignment of metrics related to Blueprint implementation across the AIB's Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, the State Board of Education's Maryland Transforms Strategic Plan, and the Moore-Miller Administration's State Plan.

Aligning Metrics and Setting Targets

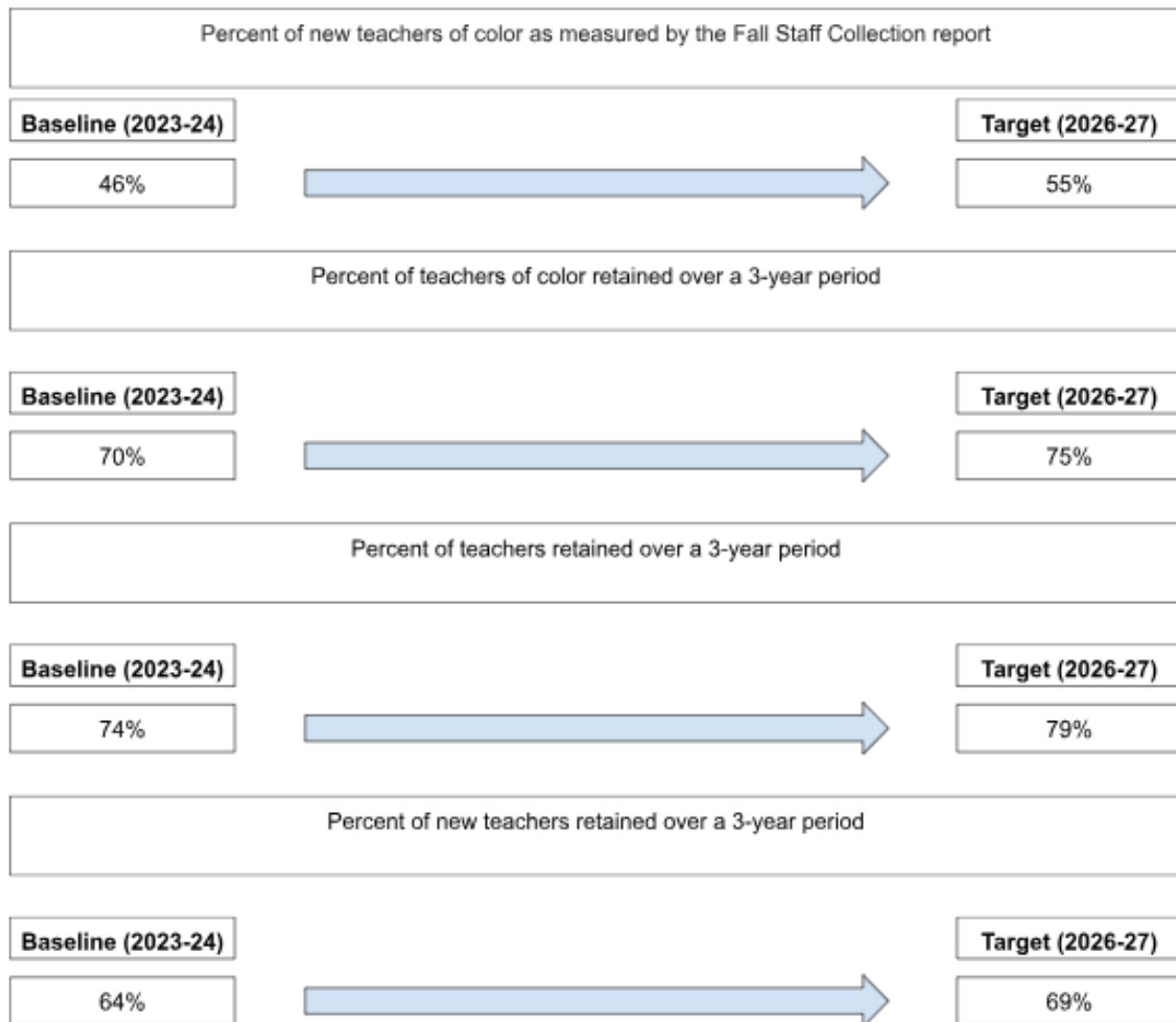
In the summer of 2024, the AIB and Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) adopted aligned metrics and targets related to literacy, mathematics, workforce diversity and retention, and chronic absenteeism. In drafting the targets, the AIB and MSDE staff considered the data's linear trend and how ambitious each target is relative to the baseline data, in addition to anticipated progress or student growth within the two to three-year time frame based on specific strategies, programs, and initiatives implemented under the Blueprint, such as the MSDE's partnership with Maryland Initiative for Literacy & Equity (MILE) program in support of effective literacy instruction and expanded access to behavioral health and wraparound services through community schools and community support partnerships. The AIB and MSDE staff solicited feedback on the proposed metrics and targets from partners and members of the public before sharing them with both Boards for consideration and adoption.

The AIB and MSBE adopted literacy and math achievement metrics based on student proficiency by grades 3 and 5, in addition to demonstrated proficiency of students across multiple grade levels. Based on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) scores from the 2023-24 school year, the AIB and MSBE set targets for each of the literacy and math metrics to be achieved in the next two (2) school years and ultimately result in a 10-

percentage point increase in literacy and math achievement by the end of the 2025-26 school year. In addition, the AIB and MSBE set a target for decreasing chronic absenteeism statewide between the 2022-23 and 2025-26 academic years.



The AIB and MSBE also set targets for metrics related to workforce diversity and retention that are based on staffing data from the 2023-24 school year. Unlike the metrics related to MCAP achievement and chronic absenteeism, the AIB and MSBE set targets for these metrics for the 2026-27 school year.



Progress towards meeting these targets will be monitored at both the State and local levels. LEA-level targets aligned with these metrics reflect the interval increases established at the State level (i.e., each LEA will aim to increase their math and reading proficiency scores from the 2024-25 school year by 5-percentage points in the 2025-26 school year to reflect the 5-percentage point increase target at the State level within that time frame). Each LEA is responsible for setting implementation and outcome targets aligned with these metrics at the school level.

2.3 Progress in Blueprint Implementation by Pillar

Pillar 1. Early Childhood Education

The Blueprint is expanding access to high-quality, full-day Pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds across the state of Maryland through implementing a mixed-delivery (public and private) Pre-K system. This expansion depends on developing partnerships with private Pre-K providers and their LEA with the intended outcomes of increasing the number of private providers participating in this mixed-delivery system. This complex work involves collaborating with market programs,

finding locations and space suitable for our youngest learners, facilitating teacher training, professional development and collaboration amongst public and private teachers. In addition, LEAs are supporting private providers with students requiring special education services.

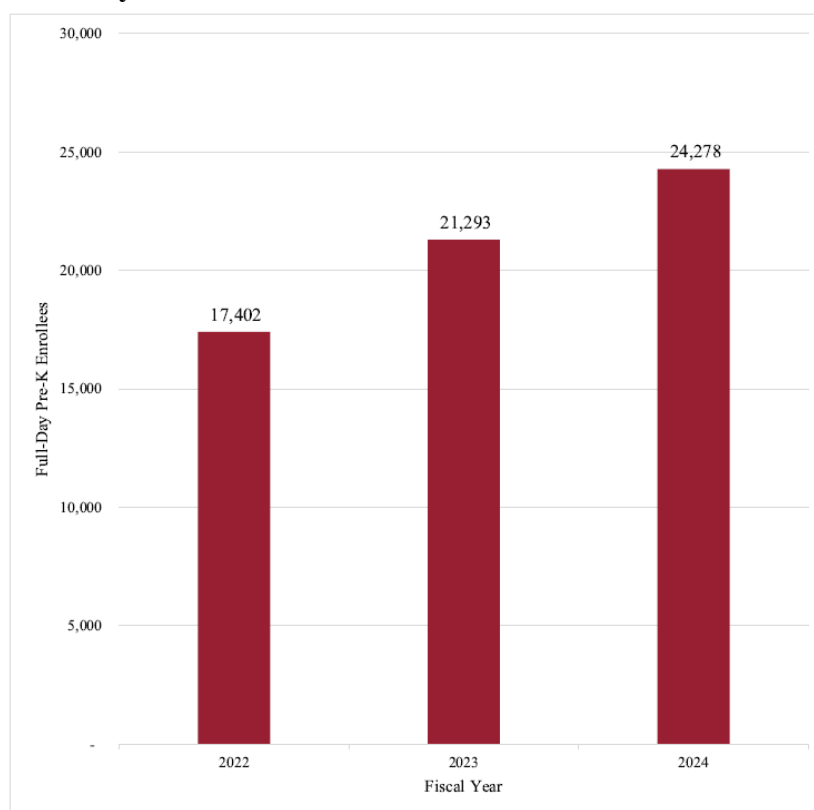
Expanding family support

In addition to increasing access to high-quality Pre-K programming for all Maryland students, the Blueprint seeks to improve student readiness for kindergarten by expanding support for families of young children by creating new Patty and Judy Centers. Between FY 2023 and FY 2024, three (3) additional Judy Centers and one additional Patty Center opened in Maryland. Judy Centers served 17,681 children from birth to kindergarten age in FY 2024, reflecting an increase of 1,393 children served from FY 2023. In FY 2024, 878 children from birth to 4 years of age, and 816 families across 17 sites were served by Patty Centers.

Expanding Pre-K Access and Enrollment

Between FY 2023 and FY 2024, total Pre-K enrollment (both part time and full-time students) for 3-and-4-year-olds statewide increased from 30,690 to 31,378. In FY 2023, 50% of LEAs were still designating some of their Pre-K slots for 4-year-olds as part time; as of FY 24, 16 of 24 LEAs are solely offering full-day Pre-K programming for their 4-year-old enrollees in alignment with the high-quality Pre-K standards embedded within the Blueprint. The number of 3- and 4-year-old students enrolled in full day Pre-K statewide increased by nearly 40% from FY 22 to FY 24 as shown in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1. Total Full-day Pre-K Enrollment Fiscal Year 2022 -2024



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

In February 2024, the MSBE adopted the prekindergarten sliding scale that will be used to determine the family share of the Pre-K cost families with incomes that fall between 301-600% of the Federal Poverty Level (Tier II). The adopted sliding scale model was designed to ensure that the family share of Pre-K costs shall not exceed 7% of their annual income. The sliding scale will be implemented in the 2025-26 school year.

LEAs working with eligible private providers for Pre-K services updated their existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the MSDE and each eligible private provider participating in publicly funded pre-kindergarten in the county. These MOUs ensure private providers are receiving the per-pupil funding and resources they need to stand up the mixed-delivery Pre-K system.

To support alignment across public and private Pre-K settings and serve as the foundation for college and career readiness, MSDE's Division of Early Childhood adopted new Early Learning Standards in February 2024. These new standards will help LEAs in designing and implementing professional development that supports high-quality Pre-K programming, thereby paving the way for higher rates of kindergarten readiness in the state of Maryland.

Providing High-Quality Pre-K Programming

As part of the high-quality standards that public and private Pre-K providers need to meet to receive public funding, child care centers/family child care homes and public Pre-K schools must initially achieve quality rating levels of at least 3 or 4, respectively, and ultimately achieve a quality rating level of five (5) in the Maryland EXCELS program within five (5) years.

Increasing numbers of Pre-K providers are meeting these quality standards overall, particularly among family childcare and public Pre-K schools—between June 2023 and June 2024, the number of family childcare centers with a quality rating of five (5) increased from 92 to 122, and from 141 to 212 for public Pre-K schools.

Increasing numbers of private Pre-K providers and staff continue to take advantage of financial incentives and support programs designed to help support providers in meeting the Blueprint’s high-quality standards for early childhood educators. The number of childcare providers participating in the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund (CCCPDF) tuition assistance program increased from 317 to 381 between FY 2023 and FY 2024. In FY 2023, 56 students graduated with an associate or bachelor’s degree under the program, and approximately 60 students are projected to graduate in FY 2024. At the end of FY 2024, 974 participants had been provided with grant funding from MSDE to earn or renew their Child Development Associate credential through the Council for Professional Recognition.

Improving Student Readiness for Kindergarten

Education Article § 7-210 tasks the MSDE with administering a kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA) to all incoming kindergarten students that is racially and culturally unbiased and to be used for curriculum development and the early detection of learning challenges. In alignment with this requirement, the MSDE contracted with Johns Hopkins Center for Technology in Education (CTE) to evaluate the current KRA for any racial, cultural, or linguistic bias. Johns Hopkins CTE collaborated with WestEd to study the KRA instrument and compiled their findings in a report that was shared with MSDE and, subsequently, the AIB. In looking across different groups of Maryland kindergarteners, the report found an unacceptable risk of bias inherent in the existing assessment. Based on these results and further feedback from LEA leaders dissatisfied with the KRA, the MSDE requested an expedited procurement to develop a new KRA assessment without biases that will first be administered to students in SY 2025-2026. During SY 2024-2025, teachers will receive professional development and training on administering the new assessment without bias.

Statewide KRA results from the 2023-2024 academic year confirm that Maryland’s early childhood classrooms continue to slowly, but steadily, recover from the negative impacts of the COVID pandemic on learning and growth amongst its youngest learners. 44% of students demonstrated kindergarten readiness based on their KRA scale score in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, compared to 42% in FY 2023 and 40% in FY 2022. 32% of students assessed demonstrated

“approaching” readiness, while 24% demonstrated “emerging” readiness and based on these outcomes, shall be provided with the appropriate supports and interventions to ensure they perform at grade level by the end of the school year. Disaggregated results showed that nineteen LEAs saw increases in readiness scores on the KRA compared to the 2022-2023 school year. In addition, KRA scale scores saw modest increases across most racial demographics and student groups, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students from low-income households, from FY 2023 to FY 2024 scores.

Pillar 2. High-Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders

Teacher Retention

A central objective of Pillar 2 is to recruit and support high-quality and diverse teachers to meet the State’s workforce needs. Teacher attrition rates at the school, LEA, and State levels decreased slightly between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years but are still notably higher than they were pre-pandemic. They remain highest for teachers with less than three (3) years of teaching experience and for Black/African American teachers compared to other groups of educators. Between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years, the percentage of new teachers who worked in any LEA in Maryland three years prior and continued to work in the same LEA in the three succeeding years, decreased from 67.9% to 62.4%. This trend increased slightly to 63.7% of new teachers in the 2023-2024 school year. The percentage of teachers of color across the State who worked in the same LEA three (3) years earlier and each of the three (3) succeeding years decreased from 72.9% to 69.7% between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years.

Teacher Diversity

Maryland’s teacher workforce continues to slowly diversify, particularly among first-year teachers—between 2019-2020 and 2023-2024 academic years, the percentage of first-year teachers who are white in decreased from 62.2% to 54.1%. However, staffing data shows that the Maryland teacher workforce still does not reflect the diversity of its students. For example, while Black/African American students made up 32% of Maryland’s students in the 2023-2024 academic year, Black/African American teachers made up only 20.4% of its population of teachers.

In support of the State’s efforts to diversify and expand its teacher workforce, the State provides funding to the Maryland Teaching Fellows Scholarship to encourage highly skilled and diverse candidates to teach in high-need schools. Between FY 2023 and FY 2024, the number of students awarded a Teaching Fellows Scholarship increased by approximately 93%, from 191 awards to 368. Of the 313 applicants who did not receive the award, nearly 48% did not meet the minimum enrollment status requirement for the scholarship, and 28% ultimately declined the award.

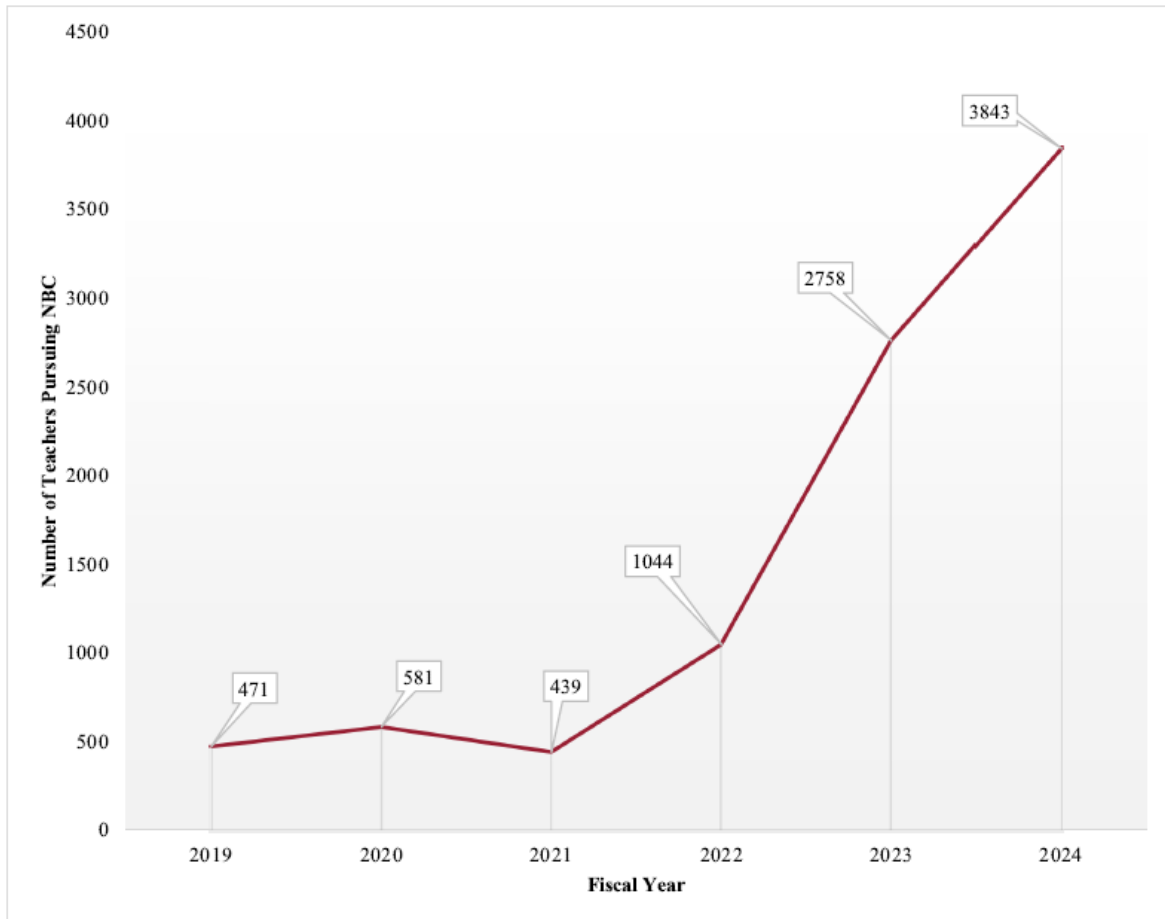
Professional Growth

Maryland is establishing a new statewide educator career ladder under the Blueprint to provide teachers with the time, professional development, and support to continually improve their practice. LEAs were required to submit Levels 1-3 of their negotiated career ladders to the AIB for review and approval on July 1, 2024; these career ladders are being implemented in the 2024-2025 school year. In addition, several LEAs also elected to submit Level 4 of their career ladder (due July 1, 2025) in order to pilot the Lead Teacher role in the 2024-2025 school year.

Teachers who are pursuing or have achieved/maintained National Board Certification (NBC) will move up the different levels of the career ladder to take on additional leadership responsibilities within their school building. Between FY 2023 and FY 2024, over 45% of LEAs increased the number of NBC teachers they employed. In FY 2024, Maryland ranked first in the country in the number of new teachers earning NBC, and second in the country for the number of new teachers of color earning NBC.

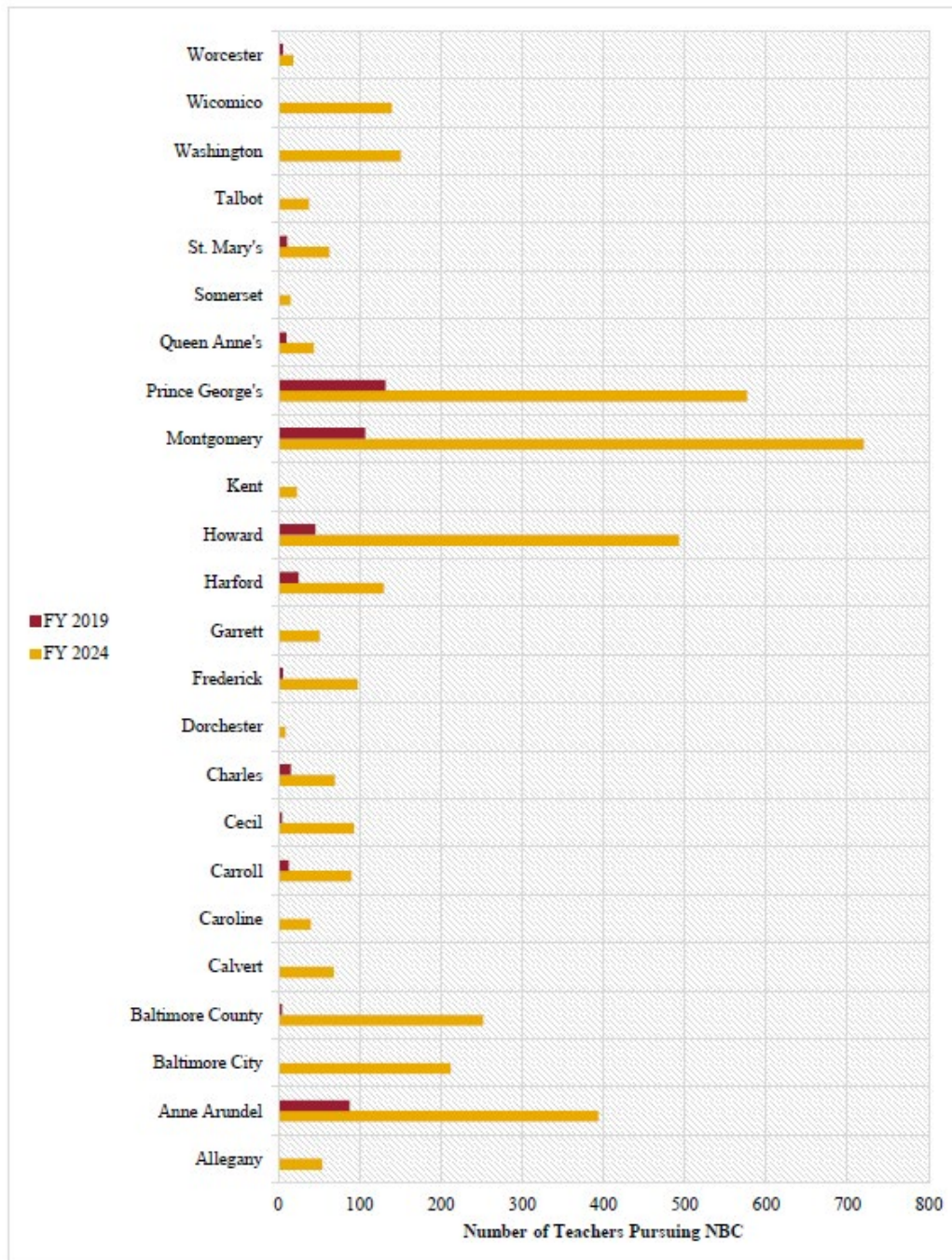
Statewide, the number of teachers pursuing National Board Certification between FY 2023 and FY 2024 increased by 39%. Notably, this represents an increase of 268% since FY 2022, indicating that the number of NBC teachers statewide should experience significant shifts over the next several years based on this demonstrated interest in pursuing the certification. Exhibit 3 shows this data by LEA. In FY 2024, Maryland had 11 LEAs rank among the top 25 districts in the country for the number of teachers pursuing NBC.

Exhibit 2. Teachers Pursuing National Board Certification



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Exhibit 3. Number of Teachers Pursuing Board Certification by LEA - 2019 and 2024 Comparison



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Teacher Compensation

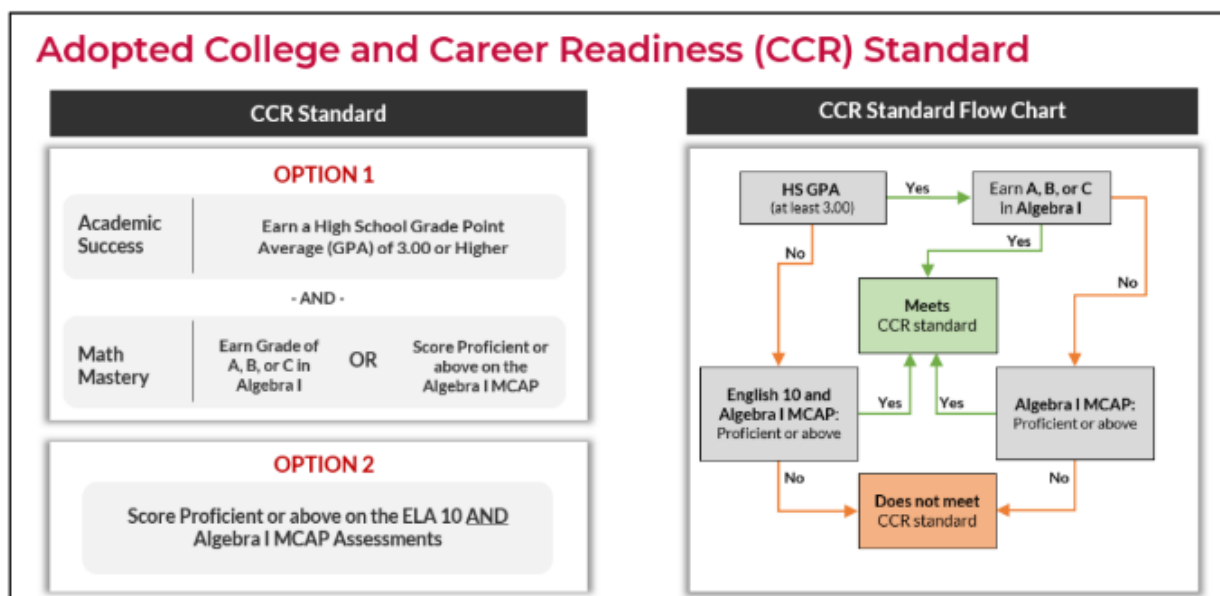
The Blueprint calls for increasing the minimum teacher salary statewide to \$60,000 by July 1, 2026. As of FY 2024, the average minimum salary statewide was \$54,439. As part of their 2024

implementation plan submissions, all 24 LEAs confirmed that their teachers received the required 10% salary increase between FY 2019-FY 2024.

Pillar 3. College and Career Readiness

Updated CCR standard

The implementation activities and strategies that fall under Pillar 3 of the Blueprint collectively aim to create a world class instructional system for Maryland students that enables them to become CCR and pursue the post-CCR pathway of their choice before graduating from high school. In alignment with this objective, and to fulfill a requirement of the Blueprint law, the State Board of Education adopted a new CCR standard based on the results of the empirical research study conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in February 2024. Under the new standard, students have two (2) options to meet the CCR standard: 1) by scoring Proficient or above on the ELA 10 and Algebra I MCAP Assessments, or 2) by earning a 3.0 GPA and either a grade of A, B, or C in Algebra I, or scoring Proficient or above on the Algebra I MCAP Assessment. The figure below, developed by the MSDE, summarizes the two (2) pathways for students to meet the CCR standard.



1

Improving literacy and math instruction and interventions

Work is underway in the development of a fully aligned Pre-K-12 instructional system across Maryland. Following the MSBE and AIB's adoption of a joint resolution to evaluate literacy instruction statewide, in January, the MSBE voted to adopt a [resolution](#) requiring all literacy instruction in Maryland public schools to be aligned to the Science of Reading by the 2024-2025

¹ State Board Adoption of College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standard – Implementation Guidelines, January 30, 2024

school year. The LEAs submitted comprehensive Pre-K-12 Literacy Plans including evidence-based best practices aligned with the science of instruction and the science of learning. Between January through July 2024, the Maryland Initiative for Literacy and Equity at the University of Maryland and Morgan State University (MILE) reviewed draft literacy plans and provided feedback to LEAs to inform revisions for their final Pre-K-12 literacy plans due in July 2024 as part of their Blueprint implementation plans. MILE also reviewed the final plans and made recommendations to MSDE and AIB on plan approvals.

In addition to literacy, work is underway to support the development of high-quality math programming aligned with Maryland's standards. LEAs submitted their draft Pre-K-5 math plans in September 2024; final Pre-K-12 comprehensive plans are due in June 2025. Similar to the literacy plans, MSDE contracted with an outside expert, in this case the Institute of Education Policy at Johns Hopkins University, to support the review of LEA math plans and provide technical assistance to MSDE and LEAs in finalizing their plans.

As part of their 2024 Implementation Plans, LEAs submitted tutoring plans to ensure all students in K-3 struggling with reading have access to high quality tutoring during the instructional school day. They also submitted their plans for supporting all students who were identified as not progressing towards CCR. School based teams will create individualized learning plans for students using evidence-based programs and strategies including, but not limited to, high-quality tutoring for students.

Supporting implementation of Post-CCR pathways

To support the effective implementation of the newly adopted CCR standard, the AIB and MSBE jointly adopted a dual enrollment policy in Spring 2024 to maintain equitable access to advanced coursework while effectively addressing financial constraints faced by LEAs. Under the policy, the MSBE and AIB resolved that, for fiscal years 2025 and 2026, LEAs are responsible for covering the tuition and associated fees of at least two (2) dual enrollment courses per Fall and Spring semester for students who have met the CCR standard. LEAs may elect to cover the tuition and fees for more than the minimum number of courses during this time period. The policy also clarified that students who have not yet met the CCR standard shall have initial access to Post-CCR Pathways, including developmental and co-requisite dual enrollment courses.

The new Blueprint Career Counseling program was launched across the State of Maryland in SY 2023-2024, and implementation continues in the current year. Local workforce development boards, LEAs, and local community colleges have hired career coaches and are providing career counseling for students in grades 6-12, including supporting students in identifying their career goals and selecting one or more post-CCR pathways. The lead partner in implementation of the program varies across the State, as identified through an MOU that all three (3) parties must sign.

The Blueprint sets a statewide goal that by the 2030-2031 school year, 45% of high school students will complete the high school level of a registered apprenticeship or another industry-recognized credential (IRC) prior to graduating from high school. In support of this goal, approximately 75% of LEAs increased the number of apprenticeships available to their high school students in the 2023-24 school year. In addition, the CTE Committee developed separate policies related to IRCs and high school-level registered apprenticeships that were submitted to and approved by the AIB during their August and October 2024 public meetings, respectively. These policies will inform the technical assistance provided to LEAs as they implement components of registered apprenticeships and IRCs, the review and approval of IRCs that will count towards the statewide target related to credential attainment, and how progress in completing registered apprenticeships and IRCs will be monitored.

Pillar 4. More Resources for Students to be Successful

Implementing the Community School Strategy

Concentration of Poverty Grants under the Blueprint provide eligible schools with both personnel funds to be used for staffing a community school coordinator and providing health care coverage, in addition to per pupil funding to provide wraparound services, including social services, before and after school programs, academic support, and enrichment programs. Between FY 2024 and 2025, the number of community schools in Maryland increased from 454 to 621 due to the newest additions of elementary, middle and high schools. Currently 23 of 24 LEAs are now home to community schools, and four (4) LEAs have 40 or more community schools. Furthermore, all schools across the Dorchester County Public School system are designated as community schools.

Expanding Health Services

Since 2021, the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and Maryland Community Health Resources Commission have provided new grant funding totaling \$111 million to expand access to comprehensive behavioral health services for children, kindergarten through high school, in every school district in Maryland. The Consortium awarded 129 grants to service providers in all 24 jurisdictions in Maryland in FY 2024, and as of August 2024, 93 service provider programs have been launched. The programs cover a wide range of behavioral health issues through prevention, behavioral health screenings, counseling, addiction treatment, family support, crisis planning and services, telehealth services, support groups and wraparound services for Pre-K through high school students and their families. In March 2024, the Consortium awarded approximately \$5 million to 10 organizations to pilot local Community Support Partnerships before they are implemented across the State as required by the Blueprint. These organizations will serve as a coordinating body, or “hub,” as part of a collective impact model approach to implementing these support partnerships alongside community behavioral health providers. As of October 2024, 3 of the 10 hubs have hired staff and are prepared to transition into full partnerships following the pilot phase.

In addition to expansion of behavioral health services through the Consortium, the Blueprint calls for increasing the number of school-based health centers (SBHCs) across the state. At the end of FY 2024, 16 of 24 LEAs have active SBHCs, and 75% of LEAs that supported SBHCs in both FY 2023 and FY 2024 increased the number of students served by these centers.

Pillar 5. Governance and Accountability

Implementing Expert Review Teams

As required by the Blueprint law, the MSDE developed the Expert Review Teams (ERT) model and plan in 2022. In its first year, the MSDE ran a pilot program to test the model and learn from the process. Standing up an ERT program required hiring a substantial number of expert reviewers, developing rubrics and templates, training the expert reviewers, preparing school and school districts, and creating a smooth process for visits, debriefing, and the development of the reports.

In 2023-2024, the MSDE submitted a revised ERT model and, with AIB input and approval, created a second process that focused on elementary literacy instruction in conjunction with MILE. The MSDE provides annual training to ERT members on the Blueprint, and AIB staff joins at least one of these sessions per year to share and discuss what ERT members can expect to see at the school and classroom level during the early years of Blueprint implementation.

In the 2023-2024 school year, ERTs visited 50 schools across 18 LEAs, including 14 community schools and nine (9) schools designated as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools. MILE research teams visited an additional 80 schools to examine literacy implementation across the State and summarized their findings in an implementation report published in August. The report also included an ELA observation rubric for the Expert Review Teams to use in school visits.

In addition to ERT visits conducted through MSDE, the CTE Committee is responsible for organizing and deploying a CTE Expert Review Team to ultimately visit all schools and assess progress towards successful student completion of the CTE pathway. CTE ERT members should develop recommendations to address any issues identified by the ERT. In Spring 2024, the CTE ERT conducted two (2) visits to LEAs to pilot its revised ERT deployment approach. The CTE ERT visits will focus on implementation at the district level because CTE programming is typically organized across an LEA than by individual schools. Following the CTE ERT pilot visits, the CTE Committee plans to focus visits in the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 academic years on gathering baseline data to create a clear and comprehensive understanding of CTE programming and implementation across the State. Visits conducted in subsequent years will focus on how CTE programming aligns with the statewide CTE framework and progress towards reaching specific Blueprint outcomes.

Minimum School Funding Requirements

When the Maryland General Assembly created the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, it recognized the importance of ensuring per pupil funding reaches the students it is intended to help and, as a result, require minimum school funding levels to ensure allocated funds follow children to their school programs. In Md. Code Ann., Ed. §5-234, the Blueprint law establishes minimum school funding at 75% of the per pupil amount applicable to the foundation program and seven targeted funding programs, as well as 100% of the concentration of poverty per pupil grant and 100% of per pupil funding for private providers participating in the full-day prekindergarten program.

The reporting of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future minimum school funding requirement (§5-234) is critical to the AIB, ensuring transparency, compliance, and alignment with the goals of the Blueprint. Accurate reporting enables the AIB to monitor whether school districts are meeting the mandated minimum funding requirements for each Blueprint priority, thus allowing the AIB to hold LEAs accountable for using state and local funds appropriately and with fidelity.

Due to the complexity of reporting requirements and methods for reporting, the AIB and MSDE recognized the need to develop a joint policy for a more comprehensive and effective approach to implement the Minimum School Funding Requirement. Per the [Joint Implementation Policy #2 – Blueprint for Maryland's Future Minimum School Funding Requirement](#), the AIB and MSDE will use data collected from the Blueprint Financial Reporting System created by PowerSchool to analyze LEA expenditures at the school system and individual school level and to evaluate compliance with the 5-234 requirement.

Historically, LEAs have reported budget and expenditure data at the LEA level by the State programs/categories. In order to meet the new requirements, LEAs had to restructure their chart of accounts and develop or revise allocation methodologies for funds following the students. MSDE, AIB and PowerSchool have worked closely with the LEAs to provide guidance and technical assistance for submitting and uploading accurate and reliable data.

LEAs began refining data and configuring files throughout fiscal 2024 (beta year) and were required to begin reporting their school-level budget and expenditures on or before July 1, 2024, and each July 1 thereafter. Fiscal 2025 is the baseline year for school-level expenditure data. LEAs began reporting into the Blueprint Financial Reporting System by August 15, 2024, with the previous month's data to be submitted by the 15th of the next month. The MSDE is required to submit their first report of the data submitted by the LEAs under this requirement for the period July 1, 2024, through November 30, 2024, to the AIB in January 2025.

The first full year of LEA data will be available by October 15, 2025, after the closeout of fiscal 2025, and will allow the AIB to assess whether resources are allocated effectively and identify

areas needing additional adjustments or support in measuring LEA progress on meeting the Blueprint minimum school funding requirements.

Blueprint School Leadership Training

Finally, the Blueprint law requires that the MSDE, in collaboration with the AIB, develop a cohort-based School Leadership Training Program to train education leaders on effective educational and school leadership including the Blueprint law and a variety of related components to support its implementation. During the 2024 Legislative Session, HB 1287 made changes to refine the expectations of the training program, including a requirement for the State and local superintendents as well as the chair and vice chair of the State and local boards of education and the AIB to participate in the program. This training is intended for the State superintendent, local superintendents, members of the State Board, members of the AIB, members of local boards, school principals and senior instructional staff. AIB staff joined with MSDE staff to review applications through a competitive grant review process.

The MSDE created a competitive School Leadership Training grant program to run from June 30, 2024, through June 30, 2025. Ultimately, the grant was awarded to the K-12 Coalition, a vendor with national experience in providing education leadership training programs. An initial introduction and planning meeting was held in July with K-12 Coalition, the MSDE, and the AIB. Additional weekly planning meetings have been held since summer 2024 refine the training model, clarifying expectations and approaches, and determining the cohorts and training groupings. A virtual kick-off meeting and the first in-person session were held in Fall 2024, with local superintendents, local board of education chairs, the AIB and State Board of Education leadership. The AIB staff will continue to collaborate with MSDE staff to develop and implement the training program.

Section 3. Blueprint Implementation Plans

The AIB is responsible for reviewing Blueprint implementation plans submitted by 24 LEAs, as well as MSDE, MHEC, CTE Committee, the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, and Juvenile Services Education Program (JSEP). The MSDE, MHEC, the CTE Committee, and the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports submitted their 2024 implementation plans in August and are in the process of revising their initial plans based on feedback from the AIB staff.

Beginning in December 2023, the AIB staff partnered with the MSDE staff and held regular office hours to support the development of local implementation plans for all LEA Blueprint Coordinators as well as district staff, school leaders, and strategic facilitators, as needed. The AIB and MSDE staff held dedicated office hour sessions related to each component of the [2024 LEA Blueprint Implementation Plan Development Guide](#), including the description of systemwide Blueprint implementation; using and updating the data appendix provided to each LEA; and answering pillar-specific questions. Attendees had the opportunity to submit questions

in advance for staff to answer in each office hour session, and AIB and MSDE staff were also available outside office hours to meet with LEA staff or answer questions as needed.

The AIB staff were available for technical assistance meetings with LEAs. Staff met with Blueprint Coordinators, Assistant Superintendents of Instruction and Operations, and other key leadership personnel to support the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Topics in these meetings included clarification and guidance of revisions on Blueprint plans submissions, explanation of fiscal questions, statutory requirements and other required components of Blueprint submissions.

The AIB staff also met with staff from each State agency/entity that were required to submit an implementation plan in FY 2024 to review the specific questions and prompts that they were being asked to respond to as part of their plan templates. Agency staff had the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback prior to each individual template's finalization. The AIB staff checked in with State agency staff prior to their plan's submission and met with agency staff as needed to review outstanding questions and comments about their submissions.

3.1 2024 Local Education Agency Plans

As described in the 2023 Annual Report, the AIB and MSDE developed the 2024 LEA Blueprint Plan Implementation Development Guide in response to local input and feedback on the 2023 plan's development. The revised guide sought to streamline the submission and review process by condensing the number of implementation questions from 164 in the 2023 template to a total of 24. To address concerns related to usability, LEAs were also able to create their own documents to respond to the questions in the guide rather than completing a template as required in the 2023 Blueprint implementation submission.

The FY 2024 plan submission process followed a phased-in approach to provide the LEAs and their strategic facilitators with more time to focus on developing systemic plans and strategies to implement the Blueprint across all five (5) pillars. In the initial part of their submission, due March 15, 2024, the LEAs described how they are holistically approaching systemwide Blueprint implementation across all five (5) pillars. In the second part of their second submission, due May 1, 2024, the LEAs responded to 23 specific questions about Blueprint programs and components anchored to expected outcomes.

In addition to responding to Part I and Part II of the LEA Blueprint Implementation Plan Guide, the 2024 LEA Blueprint Implementation Plan submissions included local Career Ladder submissions (Level 1-3), 10% Salary Increase Attestation, P-12 Comprehensive Literacy Plans, and any necessary updates to the Memorandum of Understanding for local Career Counseling programs, all due by July 1, 2024. AIB and MSDE staff have reviewed each of these components as part of the LEA's Blueprint Implementation Plan and provided feedback and/or requested

additional information/revisions as needed. Approval of each LEA Implementation Plan by the AIB depends on submission and approval of each component of the plan in accordance with the [Appeal Policy and Process for Release or Withholding of Funds](#) adopted by the AIB in 2023. As of January 2025, all 24 LEAs have received full or conditional approval (pending receipt of final signed documents) of their 2024 Blueprint Implementation Plans.

Below is more detail on the AIB's and MSDE's collaborative review process of the Part I and II plans.

Collaborative Plan Reviews

Each of the 24 responses in the individual LEA Blueprint implementation plan submissions was evaluated by the AIB and MSDE staff reviewers based on the Criteria for Success specific to each prompt included in the plan guide and approved by the AIB. A team of MSDE and AIB staff members served as plans reviewers and came together in person over three (3) days in May 2024 to read each of the 24 submissions and evaluate them against the established Criteria for Success. Each component of the LEA Blueprint implementation plans was reviewed by at least five (5) reviewers.

Plan reviewers engaged in a rigorous norming process prior to reading each plan to ensure that they applied the Criteria for Success consistently. In addition to assessing whether responses met the Criteria for Success, reviewers identified both areas of strength and opportunity as well as for growth and improvement in each LEA's submission. Upon completion of independent reviews of each implementation plan, the MSDE and AIB staff convened to discuss any ratings variances on the Criteria for Success and validate the final ratings.

Based on the results of the review process, eight (8) LEAs were asked to update their response to the Systemwide Implementation prompt, and all 24 LEAs were asked to update their Part II submission based on feedback from AIB and MSDE staff. The AIB and MSDE staff separately reviewed responses to Question 23 that focused on Blueprint funding and resources from the rest of the submission, and feedback specific to each LEA's individual response to this question was provided to LEAs.

After each resubmission, AIB and MSDE reviewed the updated responses to determine if they met the Criteria for Success, and if they did not, provided LEAs with further feedback and requests for revision. The AIB and MSDE staff met with LEA staff to discuss their revisions as needed. LEAs went through as many as three rounds of plan revisions before their Part I and Part II responses were determined to meet the Criteria for Success.

LEA Plan Strengths and Weaknesses

The review of local Blueprint plans elevated areas of strength and weakness that were shared with each LEA as part of the plan approval process. Plan feedback identified implementation strategies that showed potential for, or had already demonstrated evidence of, positive impacts on student achievement. Areas for improvement identified implementation approaches that

technically met the Criteria for Success based on the plan response, but required additional considerations and changes to successfully realize the Blueprint's expected outcomes.

Common areas of strength identified across LEA Blueprint implementation plans include local efforts to increase access to Pre-K programming and strengthen partnerships with private providers; strategies to differentiate instruction to support student achievement and reaching the CCR standard; increased focus on expanding supports for diverse learners, particularly multilingual learners (MLs); and the use of a variety of communication strategies to share information about the Blueprint with local partners and community members.

Common areas for growth and improvement elevated by reviewers across multiple LEA Blueprint implementation plans include efforts to increase educator diversity and support school leaders in achieving National Board Certification (NBC); the effective use of data to monitor progress and inform strategic changes at the local level; partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs); and partner engagement related to the Blueprint's purpose and goals. The AIB staff compiled each LEA's areas of strengths and weaknesses into individual documents and shared them with district staff. These feedback documents, in addition to each plan's original and updated submissions, are available on the [AIB website](#).

3.2 2024 State Agency Plans

Each State agency and entity that developed an initial Blueprint Implementation Plan is required to submit an updated Blueprint plan to the AIB in 2024 for review and approval. The 2023 Update of the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan set a date of June 15, 2024, for 2024 State Blueprint Implementation Plans to be submitted to the AIB. Subsequently, the AIB bifurcated the deadline for LEAs to submit their 2024 Blueprint Implementation Plans into two (2) parts. As a result, the AIB staff focused on reviewing the LEA plans in May through July, in order to provide LEAs with timely feedback that may be necessary for effective implementation in the upcoming school year. Thus, during the May 16, 2024, public meeting, the Board approved the extension of the deadline for the 2024 State agency plans to August 15, 2024. This extension provided State agencies with additional time to develop their plans and ensure that the AIB staff have the capacity to review them and provide feedback in a timely manner. Since JSEP initially had a later statutory deadline than the other State agencies, the AIB adopted a later submission deadline of October 31, 2024, for JSEP's plan.

For the 2024 plan submissions, the AIB staff created an individual guide for each State agency plan identifying specific questions that require a response in their final submission. AIB staff shared a draft of each guide with State agency staff for questions and feedback before they were finalized. The AIB staff met with agency staff to review and discuss their specific plan guides, and AIB staff also made themselves available for questions as needed. During the April 18, 2024, public meeting, AIB Board members approved the Criteria for Success for evaluating each State agency's plan and determining if it can be recommended for AIB approval.

The AIB staff have reviewed implementation plan submissions from the MSDE, MHEC, CTE Committee, and the Consortium against the approved Criteria for Success and compiled feedback that will inform requests for revisions to initial plan submissions. The AIB staff met with agency staff to discuss areas of strength and needed revisions specific to each submission. Overall, the 2024 plans provided detailed updates about each State agency's work to fulfill their respective Blueprint implementation requirements over the last fiscal year. While not relevant for each submission or individual response, plans could have been strengthened by providing further detail about how each agency is approaching future implementation activities beyond affirming that the agency will satisfy relevant Blueprint requirements. Agencies will be asked to provide further detail about their plans for fulfilling these requirements, in addition to other areas where they did not meet the Criteria for Success, in updates and revisions to their original implementation plan submissions before AIB staff can recommend their plans to the Board for approval.

As of December 2024, AIB has approved the Consortium for Coordinated Community Supports' 2024 Plan.

3.3 Blueprint Independent Evaluation

The Blueprint Interim Evaluation Report as required by §5–410 of the Education Article requires the AIB to contract with a public or private entity to conduct an independent evaluation of the State's progress in Blueprint implementation and meeting the expected outcomes. Senate Bill 362 of the 2024 Legislative Session modified the date of the interim evaluation's completion from October 1, 2024, to December 1, 2026. The AIB must submit an interim report including the independent evaluation of the Blueprint's implementation to the Governor and General Assembly by January 15, 2027.

Due to the complexity of the Blueprint and access to measurable data, the initial term of the evaluation will span over multiple fiscal years. The request for proposals (RFP) for the interim evaluation was released on October 3, 2024, and posted on the [AIB website](#) and on [eMaryland Marketplace Advantage \(eMMA\)](#). The proposals were due on November 19, 2024. An evaluation committee was established for the proposal evaluation to ensure all criteria are met. The goal was to award a contract in December 2024 so that the contractor can begin the work in January 2025. The performance period is from January 2025 through May 1, 2027.

The scope of work includes an assessment of:

- the use of additional funding to meet the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future;
- progress toward the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and whether the goals have been achieved; and
- any recommendations to alter the goals or strategies employed to reach the goals, including new uses for existing funds or additional funding.

The evaluation should determine whether goals to be achieved within the interim evaluation period (the 2022-23 through 2025-26 school years) have been met and/or whether progress has been made toward long-term outcomes of the Blueprint.

The evaluation will provide the research and analysis necessary for the AIB to report on State's progress towards:

- increasing the number of teachers achieving National Board Certification;
- providing full-day Pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds; and
- improving behavioral health services and ensuring that students enrolled in public schools demonstrate College and Career Readiness.

State law also requires the AIB's interim report to identify any "legislative or structural corrections necessary to fully implement the Blueprint." The AIB expects this interim evaluation to also inform its recommendations on necessary corrections.

The interim evaluation will also assess the State's progress towards the Blueprint's expected outcomes and critical pillar-level objectives and outcomes, as identified in the Blueprint's Comprehensive Implementation Plan, that informs the Blueprint's overall theory of action.

The evaluation work will be overseen by the Executive Director of the AIB, along with the Director of Accountability (vacant at the time of this RFP). The selected Proposer will have regular meetings with the AIB, and other advisors designated by the AIB over the course of the project, including monthly virtual check-ins and will be responsible for submitting written status reports every six (6) months detailing their activities, any preliminary observations based on work to date, and upcoming activities.

The contract, if awarded, shall be to the most qualified Proposer, which submits the proposal that, in the sole judgment of the AIB, is in the best interest of the AIB. The AIB Board has the final authority to approve or reject the contract.

Section 4. Technical Assistance and Support for Blueprint Implementation

4.1 Technical Assistance Grants for Local Education Agencies and Career and Technical Education Committee

Phase I - Technical Assistance Grant Program

The AIB launched Phase I of its Technical Assistance (TA) Grant program in Summer 2023. Phase I was designed to provide direct and transparent support to assist the LEAs and CTE Committee with thinking innovatively and developing strategies to achieve the Blueprint's goals and to develop and implement their Blueprint plans by working with strategic facilitators. The AIB vetted a list of over 50 candidates with experience in strategic planning and education from

which the LEAs and CTE Committee selected a Strategic Facilitator. The initial grants provided strategic facilitation services to each LEA/CTE Committee from October 2023 to June 2024. Twenty-two LEAs and the CTE Committee elected to participate in the program and were paired with a Strategic Facilitator. Facilitators and their respective partners were primarily focused on standing up the partnership and developing the final project plan in October and November.

Each LEA/CTE Committee and its Strategic Facilitator created a project plan focused on specific aspects of Blueprint implementation that the LEA/CTE Committee deemed to be their highest priorities. In addition, all project plans were required to hold time for identified AIB priorities related to Blueprint implementation. For the first year of the grant, the AIB prioritized supporting LEAs and the CTE Committee in the development of their 2024 Blueprint Implementation Plan. To accomplish this work, LEAs were asked to ensure that Strategic Facilitators had the opportunity to confer with the local superintendent and executive team in addition to the Blueprint Coordinator.

Phase I of the grant program formally launched in October 2023; however, the initial component of the work was establishing a relationship, acquiring background knowledge about the LEA and its Blueprint efforts, and developing Part I of the 2024 LEA Blueprint Implementation Plan submission due in March 2024. Grantees were offered a No-Cost Extension (NEC) to finish outstanding year one (1) tasks. Seventeen grantees requested and were granted a NCE through December 31, 2024.

To support the grant work, the AIB staff hosted monthly Community of Practice (CoP) meetings with strategic facilitators to discuss progress on the project plans with districts. During these meetings the best practices were shared, barriers were identified and discussed, and innovative strategies were offered. Other means of technical support included one-on-one meetings with strategic facilitators and their Blueprint coordinators, email correspondence and phone calls to address localized challenges to Blueprint implementation. The AIB staff connected Strategic Facilitators and LEAs with common topics to increase the sharing of information and work undertaken in their respective districts.

Fostering collaboration across districts and between Strategic Facilitators has been an integral component of this grant and has helped support innovative thinking and problem solving by Pillar to deepen Blueprint implementation.

Phase II - Technical Assistance Grant Program

For FY 2025, the AIB launched the second phase of its Technical Assistance Grant. Building on what was learned during Phase I, Phase II expanded the AIB's support to specific focus areas. In addition to being able to continue working with a Strategic Facilitator, these targeted grants provide technical assistance to LEAs through strategic partners related to the allocation and

reallocation of resources/strategic budgeting and other specific topics to support continued Blueprint implementation.

The focus areas for the AIB Phase II Technical Assistance Grant Program include the following five (5) categories, in order of prioritization:

1. Resource Allocation/Reallocation and Strategic Budgeting
2. Extension of Phase I Grants for Strategic Facilitators
3. Career Ladder for Educators
4. College and Career Readiness Pathways
5. Prekindergarten Expansion in a Mixed Delivery System

LEAs interested in applying for the grant, had to complete the Application to Participate Form, identifying their needs and prioritizing the focus areas of interest. LEA/CTE applications were due by May 15, 2024. Although LEAs could apply for more than one (1) category, the CTE Committee was only eligible to apply for an extension of its Phase I grant. All 24 LEAs and the CTE applied for at least one category.

The allocation of these awards is based on the priority of the focus area, project plan(s) that have been developed by the LEAs and partners and approved by the AIB, and availability of funds. The AIB is in the process of awarding all grantees with their specified focused area funding requests and intends to spend the majority of the obligated funds by June 30, 2025.

Strategic Partners and Strategy Leads

A new component of the grant program this year was the addition of Strategy Leads and Strategic Partners in addition to the Strategic Facilitators from Phase I. The AIB engaged in a rigorous selection process to identify entities with deep knowledge and experience in the targeted focus areas to be Strategic Partners with the LEAs. The full requirements, application instructions, and review criteria can be found on AIB's website at: [AIB Phase II TA Grant - Applications and Instructions](#). The complete list of approved Strategic Partners is available [here](#). Not all approved Strategic Partners were able to be paired with LEAs. Upon reviewing the LEA requests, it was determined that it would be most beneficial and in the best interest of the program to group multiple LEAs with fewer Strategic Partners to create learning cohorts for more collaborative research, planning, and resource sharing.

From among those selected to be a Strategic Partner, the AIB chose one or more entities to be the Strategy Lead for each of the focus areas. They are charged with coordinating the master plan for the grant award year and to collaborate with other strategic partners identified to support the targeted focus area to provide to participating LEAs. The technical assistance may take a variety of forms including developing and sharing informational materials related to Blueprint content and implementation and best management practices, supporting the development of guidance,

providing models, facilitating discussions about promising practices, and problem-solving barriers as they arise. The Strategy Leads coordinate and host regular Community of Practice/Office Hour sessions to support collaboration, shared professional learning, and problem solving among LEAs, county governments, and their strategic partners.

The AIB staff support each of the Strategy Leads in their monthly Community of Practice meeting to ensure the overall coherence of the grant program. Additionally, a designated AIB staff member supports each focus area and its respective Strategy Lead. The Strategy Lead for Strategic Facilitators is charged with pulling together the insights from each of the targeted focus areas to ensure that information learned in the small group settings is shared with all Blueprint implementation who would benefit from the information.

For Resource Allocation, LEAs are working with a vetted Strategic Partner to develop a Project Plan to include a multi-year strategic budget planning process to allocate new resources and reallocate existing resources to ensure that students and schools receive the resources they need to be successful. Priority was given to LEAs that include their county government in their application to Participate. Several LEAs/county governments were paired with a Strategic Partner to work both as a group and individually. Two strategy leads were identified, Afton and APA. These leads will shepherd the overall program while participating LEAs are paired with qualified Strategic Partners. This work kicked off in Summer 2024 with strategic partners and LEAs working together in developing their project plans, centered around the feedback they received for Question 23 of their Blueprint Implementation Plan. The Community of Practice and Office Hours sessions will be instrumental in building out the learning cohorts and collaborating with other strategic partners and/or strategic facilitators. Topics may include budget development and processes, Blueprint funding formulas and regulations, multi-year planning with opportunities to establish uniformity for assumptions and data accuracy.

For Extension of Phase I Grant Agreements, an LEA/CTE Committee was able to choose to continue to work with its current Strategic Facilitator or select a new Strategic Facilitator from Phase I to continue, enhance, or add to any aspect of their Phase I project plan to ensure successful outcomes.

For Career Ladder, CCR Pathways, and Prekindergarten Expansion, LEA will work with a vetted Strategic Partner to develop a Project Plan and specific budget to develop and implement the local career ladder, including the potential reorganization of the school day, school master schedule, and educator roles and responsibilities; develop and implement CCR pathways, including individualized plans for students who are not yet CCR: and/or develop and implement meaningful solutions to expanding full-day prekindergarten in the county.

Grant Progress and Compliance

To monitor progress and ensure compliance with the grant program, Strategic Partners must develop, in collaboration with the LEA/local government, a Project Plan that clearly demonstrates the applicant's ability to fulfill the goals outlined by the LEA/local government and identify objectives that drive strategic thinking, innovation, and impact. Following the project plan, the Strategic Partners must submit quarterly Status Reports to the AIB detailing the progress toward their project plan objectives. Strategic Partners are required to obtain LEA signatures on these Status Reports prior to submission to the AIB. In the event the AIB determines a Status Report has not been satisfactorily completed, the AIB will communicate in writing any milestone deficiencies, errors, inaccuracies, or non-conformities to the LEA and the Strategic Partner. The LEA and the Strategic Partner shall correct deficiencies and resubmit the corrected milestone for acceptance within an agreed-upon time period.

The performance period of the Phase II Technical Assistance Grant Program is July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. Initial awards were made beginning in June 2024. Awards are finalized when the final project plans are approved by the AIB and the grantees on a rolling basis.

4.2 Support to State and Local Partners

Providing technical assistance support to State and local agencies and partners responsible for implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is a critical component of the AIB's core mission. The AIB staff regularly organize and engage in technical assistance to enhance understanding of the Blueprint's goals and purpose and to support effective Blueprint implementation at the State and local levels, including frequently facilitating convenings between stakeholders critical to the Blueprint's success.

Implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future requires innovative thinking, collaboration, and ongoing opportunities to discuss progress, challenges, and strategies to overcome obstacles. The AIB is committed to providing technical assistance to all partners involved in the implementation of the Blueprint.

Across all pillars of the Blueprint, the AIB and MSDE staff have developed a collaborative working relationship in support of Blueprint implementation throughout the past year. Staff continue to meet on a weekly basis to check in on progress and provide updates related to critical Blueprint implementation activities. The AIB and MSDE have worked together in support of specific projects and tasks related to the Blueprint, including the deployment of Expert Review Teams to visit schools and assess Blueprint implementation across the state; the implementation of the Literacy Expert Instructional Support Teams Initiative; the implementation of the newly adopted College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard and development of guidance related to CCR programs, supports, and pathways; implementation of the community schools model; and the alignment of overlapping implementation metrics. The AIB staff regularly review proposed MSDE regulations related to the Blueprint, including the update of new teacher regulations in

April 2024 and development of a new teacher induction program, and provide feedback to the MSDE.

The AIB and MSDE meet regularly with the Public-School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) through their monthly meetings, conferences, and special meetings. In addition, AIB staff meet at least monthly with the Blueprint Coordinators and weekly when necessary, including during the development of Blueprint Implementation Plans in Winter/Spring 2024, as well as at least bi-weekly with the Chief Financial Officers.

The AIB staff collaborates extensively with CTE Committee staff and local workforce development boards, local education agencies and local community colleges to continue developing and implementing career counseling programs required under Blueprint law and support the implementation and refinement of MOUs to govern the work between the three (3) MOU partners. In addition to Career Counseling, the AIB staff provided feedback on new policies the CTE Committee developed including: a new CTE framework, industry recognized credentials (IRC), apprenticeship definitions and policy, and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future 45% state-wide milestones of high-school students graduating with an IRC or high school apprenticeship. Additionally, the AIB staff provided input on the CTE Committee's ERT plan and engaged in an ERT visit to a county visiting two (2) schools and experiencing the ERT process first-hand.

The primary focus of the AIB's collaboration with local workforce development boards has been standing up the career counseling programs around the State in the inaugural and second year of the program. Secondary benefits have arisen in identifying additional areas the local workforce development boards can assist in additional Blueprint efforts. One example of this includes learning about and considering the development of teacher apprenticeships in Maryland. Our partners on the local workforce development boards are committed to the Blueprint, clearly see the value of expanding their role and how they serve as a bridge to connect students to the workforce and are eager to collaborate.

The Maryland institutions of higher education are connected to the Blueprint in several ways. Their primary touchpoints are in preparing teacher candidates, including early childhood, and enrollment of high school students both during high school and after graduation. These two focus areas are enormous in scope and are two large work areas within Blueprint implementation. The collaborations with both MHEC and the collective IHEs as well as individual institutions are quite valuable in deepening Blueprint implementation.

Below are some examples of targeted support the AIB has provided over the past year by pillar.

Pillar 1. Early Childhood Education

The AIB staff invited Christy Terrell-Corbin, Executive Director, University of Maryland College of Education's Center for Early Childhood Education and Intervention to present at the PSSAM Blueprint meeting in June. The University of Maryland launched the first registered apprenticeship program for Early Childhood Educators (ECE) in the state of Maryland. Their Early EdCorp Registered Apprentice Program supports creating a high-quality workforce in the child-care setting by funding paid internship opportunities for local childcare providers. Ms. Terrell-Corbin's presentation offered insight to LEA leaders on how apprenticeship programs like this could be expanded throughout the State to support the development of a high-quality Pre-K workforce.

Another important focus area for Pillar 1 was keeping the Joint Chairmen's Report (JCR) recommendations identified in the December 2023 report, *2023 Joint Chairmen's Report Alternative Quality Requirements and Structural Elements for Private Prekindergarten Providers to Participate in Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs, p. 190*, front of mind for all partners at the State and local levels in order to alleviate barriers toward effective implementation of the Pillar 1 initiatives and requirements. The JCR included a recommendation to continue hosting convenings to provide updates to all parties involved in the implementation of the mixed-delivery Pre-K system. In addition to monthly meetings with early childhood providers convened by MSDE, the AIB and MSDE jointly convened Head Start providers on October 16, 2024, to discuss how Head Start innovative approaches to partnerships with LEAs. In collaboration with the MSDE, the AIB will be joining a workgroup focused on the implementation of the Early Childhood Career Ladders.

Pillar 2. High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders

With the first submission documenting the launch of Career Ladders across all 24 LEAs due in July 2024, the AIB, in collaboration with the MSDE, collaborated throughout the year to provide official guidance and support to LEAs and education associations. In addition, Strategic Facilitators were used in several of the counties to support this work. Technical Assistance sessions were hosted related to the Career Ladders to assist in sharing thinking and models from around the State, ensuring common understanding of the intent of the law, and addressing questions and challenges as they arose. In collaboration with the MSDE, the AIB assisted in developing FAQ documents and hosted collaborative sessions/feedback. LEAs submitted their initial career ladder plans to MSDE and AIB in July 2024. The AIB staff reviewed them and sent requests for revisions when necessary. The AIB staff met with LEA teams to discuss the revision requests and to clarify components of the submitted career ladders to ensure they met statutory requirements. The AIB then provided final feedback to LEAs with areas of strengths and areas for improvement for their July 1, 2025, submissions.

Given the recent regulatory and legislative changes that have been implemented over the past few years that affect the Blueprint requirements for Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and the implementation of the Blueprint by EPPs, the AIB reconvened the Teacher Preparation Workgroup in Fall 2024. The workgroup discussed updates on implementing the requirements of Blueprint expectations, innovative approaches to implementing requirements, best practices in supporting diverse teacher candidates and conditional teachers to grow the teacher pipeline. AIB is working with MSDE, teacher preparation programs, and LEAs to continue these cross-sector convenings in smaller groups to facilitate sharing of innovative approaches and joint problem solving to address these challenges at scale.

Pillar 3. College and Career Readiness

In April 2024, the AIB staff hosted a Blueprint Pillar 3 virtual session for Maryland secondary school principals. In this session, Vice Chair Kirwan communicated the crucial role principals play in student success as envisioned by the Blueprint by serving as instructional leaders in their school buildings. Providing principals with this understanding was important as they come into direct contact with career counselors in their building and serve as the conduit to assist teachers and families in understanding this program and its intent.

In Fall 2024, the AIB staff joined the MASEP/MASSP annual conference and presented several sessions focused on the career ladder, NBC for administrators, and support for students who need more resources under Pillar 4. The AIB also attended the winter MAESP/MASSP Assistant Principals conference where Vice Chair Kirwan and AIB staff members discussed the evolving role of assistant principals under the Blueprint. Additionally, staff hosted three virtual sessions for assistant principals and other school leaders to deepen their understanding of career ladders and, separately, the requirement for assistant principals to spend 20% of their working time in classrooms actively engaged in learning activities.

The AIB, MSDE and CTE Committee, in collaboration with Maryland Workforce Association (MWA) which represents all of the local workforce development boards, hosted a technical assistance session in February 2024 at the Maritime Institute to support the continued development of career counseling throughout Maryland. Vice Chair Kirwan and AIB staff attended the fall 2024 Raising the Bar conference hosted by the Maryland Workforce Association. This event was intended to foster regional and statewide workforce development collaboration and sharing of best practices particularly related to career counseling. To date, the AIB has taken the lead in standing up and supporting the program, served as the main point of contact for questions and assistance, and coordinated with sister agencies to develop guidance, clarifications, and support to advance the first-year implementation efforts while strengthening planning for year two of programming. The AIB has been in discussions with the CTE Committee and MSDE to shift the lead implementation role to our sister agencies in the coming year.

In collaboration with MSDE and the CTE Committee, AIB staff reviewed all MOUs and identified areas for additional support and monitoring. This included a spring check-in with each county and their three MOU partners to discuss implementation and provide updates as well as a review of resubmitted MOUs and 2024 Career Counseling Program Reports. AIB staff are in the process of reviewing the annual and fiscal report submissions and will be providing feedback to the MOU partners. The reviews are helping the AIB, MSDE and the CTE Committee to identify best practices that can be shared and common areas of challenge which will inform future technical assistance and guidance.

In September 2024, AIB created a dual enrollment workgroup to facilitate collaboration and alignment between Maryland agencies supporting the work of dual enrollment. Agencies brought together included AIB, MSDE, MHEC, PSSAM and Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC). During initial meetings, the workgroup brainstormed known questions/concerns regarding Blueprint and dual enrollment implementation and key topics for discussion were outlined. The workgroup will continue meeting to create standard operating procedures for critical details of dual enrollment (i.e. registration deadlines, fees, etc.). The workgroup will expand in to include four-year higher education partners and to begin addressing key questions and components of dual enrollment expansion that increase alignment to its intended outcome with Blueprint. Topics will focus on providing guidance around dual enrollment pathways aligned with career pathways and the accumulation and effective transfer of credits.

Pillar 4. More Resources for Students to be Successful

Throughout the year, as the MSDE developed guidance and documents for educators specific to special education, the AIB staff provided feedback for consideration. The main product in development is titled *Accommodating All Learners: A Guide to Inclusion*. The feedback given included concrete inclusion strategies using a culturally responsive lens to improve outcomes for all students with disabilities. The AIB staff presented, in collaboration with the MSDE, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and MDWorks, to the Business Roundtable to provide an overview of the Blueprint broadly and specifically how the Blueprint will benefit students with disabilities and prepare them for future success.

The Blueprint Special Education Workgroup (SPED Workgroup), required by the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, meets monthly to discuss special education across the State of Maryland and how to improve it, to investigate specific related topics and make recommendations on instruction and services for students with disabilities, and to develop intentional plans to provide technical assistance, and monitoring and data collection. AIB staff attend and participate in each meeting held, which includes completing the pre-work assigned to the group and actively participating in meetings where appropriate. An interim report from the Workgroup was

submitted on June 26, 2024, as required by Task 4.3.3(a) of the AIB Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan. Although a final report was due on December 1, 2024, the workgroup requested additional time to complete its work and will submit its final recommendations in Spring 2025. The workgroup will continue to meet to support the full work necessary to address the critical topics raised by the workgroup in fulfilling the workgroup's charge as described in the Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan.

The AIB staff meet monthly with the Executive Director of Community Schools and other MSDE staff to review, discuss, provide direct feedback and suggestions and respond to questions from the Community School Coordinators and LEA Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) related to Concentration of Poverty Grant funds, requirements, goals and issues. Several additional hourly webinars have been held to discuss specific topics, such as district leadership, allocation and utilization of funds. The AIB staff have also participated in a day-long mini-conference to discuss expectations, strategy and leverage the framework across the districts.

AIB and MSDE collaborated on drafting a joint report on the effective use of Concentration of Poverty Grant funds required by the Maryland General Assembly. The report includes self-reported data from LEAs on the use of concentration of poverty grant funds to support community schools in FY 2022 through 2024 and recommendations to ensure their effective use. The [report](#) can be found on AIB's website.

Governance and Accountability

Governance and accountability, the focus of Pillar 5, encompasses fewer areas that require technical assistance at this point. The three main focus areas that required technical assistance this year were expert review teams, minimum school funding requirement, and the school leadership training program.

To support the continued work of Expert Review Teams, the AIB provided training to expert review team members in Fall 2023 and is preparing to provide updated training to all ERT members in Fall 2024. Specifically, the AIB provides training on the Blueprint annually to all expert review team members to ensure they understand the requirements and expectations of the Blueprint, understand the phased in approach of the Blueprint and how that translates to the varied levels of implementation across the State, and charge them to assist in monitoring the progress of Blueprint implementation.

A major focus of Pillar 5 is how fiscal resources are allocated, managed, and used for the benefit of students and school communities. As part of Phase II of its Technical Assistance Grant Program which includes a focused grant area called Resource Allocation and Strategic Budgeting. This branch of the grant program was identified as a very timely need for the 2024-2025 school year as districts are grappling with budgets, working to examine their use of existing

funds to ensure alignment to Blueprint priorities, and reporting those expenditures in PowerSchool. AIB staff and the Strategic Partners worked closely with LEA CFOs and Blueprint Coordinators to support required revisions to Question 23 of the Part II LEA Blueprint Implementation Plans and to assist with collecting and analyzing financial reporting, developing multi-year forecasting tools, and providing allocation strategies to assist in developing Blueprint funding estimates.

Section 5. AIB Activities

5.1 Community Engagement

Throughout the year, the AIB Members and staff are actively engaged with a wide variety of communities, partner agencies, implementers, advocates, and others engaged in the Blueprint initiatives. In each of these activities the AIB is responsible for ensuring that the intent of the Blueprint law is clearly understood that barriers to implementation are identified and addressed, and that agencies are able to collaborate to the fullest extent by sharing their expertise. The manner in which these activities occur varies from attending and presenting at conferences, collaborating with partner agencies, collaborations with Blueprint implementation, and facilitating connections between agencies and collaborators.

Over the past year the AIB Members and staff were invited to attend and present or speak about the Blueprint and implementation progress at a wide variety of meetings, workshops, hearings, and conferences hosted by Federal, State, local, and other partners. Events were attended with Blueprint implementation partners including the Public Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), principal associations, teacher preparation programs, local workforce boards, Maryland Negotiation Service, Maryland Association of Counties (MACO), Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), and a retired educators association. Pillar focused sessions were also attended such as a Maryland National Board teachers conference and an early childhood education focused conference with public and private providers.

Expanding the audience to Maryland students, the AIB joined with student leaders through the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC). Staff presented and served on panels such as at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center in Washington, DC at the National Forum on Education Policy also with an emphasis on Pillar 2. Vice Chair Kirwan was invited to the United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee to share about Blueprint priorities and implementation with an emphasis on efforts in Pillar 2.

The AIB Board members and staff and board members valued the opportunities these events created to see Blueprint in action, strengthen awareness of the Blueprint's intended outcomes and to deepen community engagement in the Blueprint's vision for Maryland's education system.

5.2 Communications and Public Outreach

Throughout the reporting period, the AIB has continued to fulfill its responsibility to provide outreach and educational materials to educators, parents, students, and members of the public on the Blueprint of Maryland's Future, as well as encourage public feedback on an ongoing basis, through a variety of channels.

The AIB completed their year-long contract with Devaney & Associates (D&A), Inc. and its subcontractor Collaborative Communications on June 30, 2024. The primary goal of the contract was to develop a communication plan to ensure all communities have a clear understanding of the Blueprint and receive accurate information from trusted messengers.

During the reporting period, D&A and Collaborative Communications developed engagement strategies among key audiences, helped create content calendars, and assisted with increasing the AIB's reach on social media, including Twitter (now X), LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Monthly strategic communications included identifying and cultivating partners that serve as champions of the Blueprint and promoting outreach initiatives and building partnerships. The Devaney - Collaborative team attended external meetings to gather feedback from communities at the state and local levels of implementation. The team also created and shared marketing materials with a variety of key messengers including Blueprint coordinators, members of the Blueprint Coalition, MACO representatives, principal and superintendent associations, and county Public Information Officers (PIOs). Marketing materials such as one-pagers and slide decks were created for specific audiences, including teachers, families, and administrators, to increase awareness of new policies and initiatives being implemented in Maryland under the Blueprint, including career coaching for secondary students and additional support for teachers to pursue National Board Certification. These resources are available on the [AIB website](#).

The AIB hired an Outreach and Communications Director who started in mid-July and will continue to develop and expand the AIB's communications strategy in-house. As part of the AIB's communications strategy, the AIB has focused on informing administrators, educators, and families about the Blueprint Implementation highlights to be aware of during the 2024-2025 school year. This includes creating new materials to share with interested parties regarding the impact of implementing the Blueprint on educators, students, and families. The materials also encourage community engagement on both a district and state level by providing feedback to Blueprint Coordinators and the AIB.

The AIB has also maintained accounts on social media channels including X, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram and prioritized posting on all platforms 1-2 times per week, with increased posting planned for the coming months, including highlights on all pillars and features on the results happening at schools. The AIB has continued to repost and engage with the

#BlueprintInAction posts coming directly from schools and educators, which aims to highlight the positive change and impact of the Blueprint in schools across the state.

The AIB encourages communities to provide feedback through a variety of channels, including social media, email, events, and public comments at Board meetings. During the reporting period, in June and July of 2024, the AIB asked for and received many pieces of feedback regarding updates the public would like to see to the Blueprint Comprehensive Plan. The AIB continues to identify and expand effective approaches to reach all communities and build partnerships in order to garner consistent feedback from all voices, as well as provide continual updates on Blueprint implementation.

5.3 Advisory Committees

The AIB established four (4) advisory committees in June 2022 to elevate and incorporate community engagement in Blueprint implementation. The advisory committees are organized around Pillars 1 through 4. Each committee has six (6) members, including one (1) student. Members are appointed by the AIB. The committees are expected to meet at least quarterly. During their first year, the committees elected their leadership and established their meeting schedules and focus areas. A new advisory committee for Pillar 5 was announced at the AIB's May 2024 Board meeting as an expansion of community engagement with Blueprint implementation. This committee will monitor the effective implementation of the Blueprint in terms of accountability, governance, and oversight.

Original advisory committee members appointed in SY 2022-2023 served either a one or two-year term in order to have staggered end dates and all members had the opportunity to reapply at the end of their term. Moving forward, all advisory committee members will have two-year terms. The duration of student member terms remains the same at one (1) year with the opportunity to extend for an additional year.

The AIB thanks the following members who vacated seats in 2024 for their commitment to the Blueprint: Pillar 1 Member Jacob Bennett, Pillar 2 Member Kristi Murphy Baldwin and Student Member Stephanie Maceiko, Pillar 3 Student Member Peter Banyas, and Pillar 4 Member Dawn Jacobs Martin and Chandra Krantz and Student Member Jaden Farris.

Each advisory committee includes a student member. As a result of increased partnerships between AIB and student leadership organizations across the State, the number of student applicants increased significantly to 25 this year, up from eight (8) student applicants last year and four (4) in 2022. During this application cycle, the AIB received applications from every region of the State.

After recruitment efforts through the AIB's communication strategies and partners, 125 applications were received for the vacancies across all pillars. The AIB Subcommittee for Advisory Committees, chaired by Member Manko and including Members Doss and Robinson, reviewed all applications and identified candidates who represent Maryland's diverse population and bring unique perspectives to the advisory committees. The AIB approved the following new members recommended by the subcommittee on August 1, 2024:

Pillar 1 Member: Jennifer Mata-McMahon (Baltimore City)

Pillar 2 Member: Robert Willoughby (Caroline)

Pillar 2 Student Member: Obianuju Mba (Carroll)

Pillar 3 Student Member: Isha Ande (Howard)

Pillar 4 Member: Jessica Grant (Charles)

Pillar 4 Member: Shaleeta Jones (Prince George's)

Pillar 4 Student Member: Kadeen Belle (Caroline)

A total of seven (7) individuals (4 members and 3 students) were selected to fill vacant spots on one of the four existing advisory committees and will start to serve in SY 2024-2025.

Pillar 1 - Early Childhood Education

During this reporting period, the members of the Pillar 1 Advisory Committee discussed the Pre-K Expansion Grant, communication plans for parents and caregivers, best practices and ways to strengthen partnerships, MD Child Care Credential, professional development strategies, and support/resources available for public/community-based providers and families. This effort led to collaboration allowing Harford County to tour a high school in Washington County featuring ECE and CTE programs in action. Pillar 1 members prioritize inviting guest speakers to their meetings to expand perspectives and provide an opportunity for those implementing programs to share both successes and challenges.

The advisory committee chair and vice chair were invited to provide advisory committee updates to the AIB Board and the public on February 15, 2024, including how the advisory committee has supported collaborative efforts between LEAs. This facilitated the sharing of ideas and strategies across the State. Guests included:

- Early Childhood Services Dept. Health & Human Services
- Howard County Public Schools
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- Children's Opportunity Alliance, Montgomery County
- Prince George's County Public Schools
- Washington County Public Schools
- Baltimore County Public Schools
- Notre Dame University

Pillar 2 - High-Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders

The members of the Pillar 2 Advisory Committee discussed feedback on diversifying and expanding the teacher and leader workforce, teacher retention and credentialing, Grow Your Own programs, and the career ladder. In several of their meetings, guests such as Strategic Facilitators, Blueprint Coordinators, Human Resources team members, and other LEA staff shared their successes in implementing new programs and challenges faced both in the development and sustainability of the programs.

Invited guests at the Pillar 2 Advisory Committee meetings included:

- Baltimore County Public Schools
- Calvert County Public Schools
- Ed Rising
- St. Mary's County Public Schools
- AIB Strategic Facilitators
- Wicomico County Public Schools

Pillar 3 - Career and College Readiness

Pillar 3 Advisory Committee discussed career counseling, post-CCR pathways including college preparatory programming, dual enrollment/early college and CTE and apprenticeships, and support for students who have not demonstrated college and career readiness. Invited speakers at the Pillar 3 Advisory Committee meetings included:

- MSDE Staff
- CTE Committee Members
- Blueprint Coordinators
- Local Education Agencies Representatives
- Local Community College Representatives
- Early College Representatives
- Local Workforce Development Board leaders
- LEA CTE staff

Pillar 4 - More Resources for Students to be Successful

The members of the Pillar 4 Advisory Committee discussed the potential use of neighborhood indicators of poverty to determine eligibility for additional resources/supports, community schools and behavioral health, identification of multilingual learners in schools, resources for behavioral health, employee pipelines, and the implementation of the Workgroup on English Learners and the Workgroup on Instruction and Services for Students with Disabilities. In several of their meetings, guests such as Specialists, MSDE staff, and other LEA staff joined to share their best practices in problem solving as well as trials they faced in overcoming any challenges in providing more resources for student success.

Invited speakers at the Pillar 4 Advisory Committee meetings included:

- Anne Arundel County Public Schools
- MSDE
- Charles County Public Schools

Pillar 5 - Governance and Accountability

The AIB received 54 member applications and 11 student member applications for the new Pillar 5 Advisory Committee. Based on the amount of interest, the AIB is piloting a larger advisory committee size for Pillar 5 and selected 10 members and 2 student members. The new members have a variety of experience including but not limited to systems level change, K-12 accountability, deep understanding of the Blueprint's goals, intentions, and implementation efforts, and school improvement. The following inaugural Pillar 5 advisory committee members were approved on September 4, 2024:

Michael Brown (Baltimore County)

Evelyn Chung (Montgomery)

Heather Clabaugh (Frederick)

Aimee Evan (Anne Arundel)

Jacob Goldberg (Prince George's)

Joni Gutierrez-Palko (Carroll)

Jordan Hayes (Calvert, student member)

Jevons Liu (Baltimore City)

Glenda Prime (Baltimore County)

William Ramirez (Prince George's, student member)

Candace Savage (Worcester)

Crystalyn Thomas-Davis (Baltimore City)

The new Advisory Committee for Pillar 5 held its first meeting in November 2024 and will identify leadership and topics of study for the rest of the year.

5.4 Operations

The AIB is focused on building the capacity of the agency through recruitment and contractual services that are mission critical, thus increasing functionality while maintaining compliance with state regulations.

Staffing and Recruitment

The AIB is an independent unit of State government led by the Board and supported by an Executive Director and staff. The AIB is intended to be a small State agency that may utilize consultants and other experts to supplement its staff to provide timely assistance to support the Blueprint's implementation. State law mandates that the agency has at least 15 employees in total when fully staffed.

The agency is led by the Executive Director, Rachel Hise who was hired by the Board in February 2022, to be the first executive director after a 28-year career as a nonpartisan analyst, primarily in education and budget, with the Maryland Department of Legislative Services.

During the 2024 legislative session, the AIB received appropriation for a designated government affairs position (SB0360). This 16th position will serve as the Director of Government Relations and will be the primary liaison on behalf of the AIB to fulfill Legislative and Government relations duties with various state and local agencies and offices and other partners.

Given the AIB's limited staff, hiring well qualified staff is crucial to success. The AIB aims to recruit, hire, retain, and grow professionals who align with our vision and values, and whose competencies and skills will contribute toward the successful implementation of the Blueprint and improved outcomes for students and Maryland's future.

Recruiting well-qualified and experienced staff has its challenges. To date, the results of recruitment efforts have yielded candidates who either lacked specified experience or qualified applicants requiring compensation above the budgeted salary. The AIB has been strategic in prioritizing recruitments that are mission critical and making necessary adjustments to the budget allowance to better align the compensation with relative education and experience.

As of December 2024, the agency has ten full-time regular employees, legal counsel (50% time), and a part-time contractual employee:

- Executive Director
- Policy Director
- Implementation Plan Director
- Deputy Director for Operations
- Finance Director
- Executive/Special Assistant
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 2
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 4
- Outreach and Communications Director
- Data Analyst
- Assistant Attorney General (50/50 Cost Share MOU with IAC)
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 3 (contractual)

The AIB is expecting to recruit and fill the remaining full-time regular positions in fiscal 2025, in the following priority order:

- Director of Government Relations

- Accountability Director
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 5
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 1
- Administrator / Fiscal Officer
- Education Policy Analyst - Pillar 3

Since the establishment of the AIB, all matters related to the Equal Employment Opportunity Program have been handled by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). As of June 2024, these responsibilities have transitioned to the AIB. To comply with §5–207 of the MD State Personnel and Pensions Code, the AIB appointed three (3) AIB staff to serve as the Fair Practice Officer, EEO Officer and the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Coordinator. The three staff members have been receiving training/assistance from the Statewide EEO Coordinator in developing statewide training compliance and upon completion will provide resources to AIB staff. The AIB will foster a highly qualified and diverse workforce to support the Agency’s mission. The goal is to have a workforce that is reflective of our State. We will develop and implement policies that promote equal employment opportunity and workforce diversification reflective of the availability of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in the relevant labor market.

In addition, the AIB has been continuing to improve the staff’s awareness and understanding of equity in our workforce by developing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training that our coordinator facilitates on a regular basis. The overall purpose of our training aims to create a more inclusive, equitable, and respectable workplace for all employees. Training has been focused on building awareness, promoting fairness, addressing bias, creating a culture of inclusivity and empowering our employees to be effective and successful. This year, our planned activities have included presentations and training on cultural awareness, supporting workplace culture and the power of empathy. Our efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion will foster cohesiveness and productivity across the AIB while boosting both our talent attraction and retention efforts in the long run.

Technical Assistance Funding

The statute mandates at least \$3 million for each of the fiscal years 2022 through 2024, for the AIB to provide technical assistance to the LEAs and CTE Committee to develop and implement each governmental unit’s implementation plan. In fiscal 2022, the AIB was appropriated \$3 million but did not have access to the funds until June 2022 and therefore had to revert the total amount because there was not enough time to obligate those funds. In fiscal 2023, the AIB received \$3 million and developed the initial Technical Assistance Grant Program (Phase I). The AIB spent \$2.4 million on Phase I, which provided each of the 22 participating LEAs and the CTE Committee with a \$100,000 grant for technical and also reserved \$100,000 for the AIB to support the grant program with Communities of Practice, Office Hours, and individual support as needed. The remaining \$600,000 was reverted.

In fiscal 2024, the AIB received an appropriation of \$1.9 million for technical assistance, which would not be enough for the development of Phase II of the Technical Assistance Grant Program. However, due to recruitment difficulties, vacancies and strategic budgeting, the AIB was able to repurpose \$600,000 of unspent funds for the grant program. In addition, the General Assembly added \$1.1 million to the AIB's fiscal 2025 appropriation for the grant program. To date, the AIB has been able to obligate \$6 million out of the mandated \$9 million for Phase I and Phase II of the Technical Assistance Grant Program. All 24 LEAs are participating in one or more focus areas in Phase II of the AIB Technical Assistance Grant Program, and as a result, the interest in the grant has grown significantly and award amounts have also increased.

Website Development and Redesign

The AIB is continuously working to modernize our website and boost community outreach. The goal of the AIB website is to be used as a repository for Blueprint plans, reports, and educational materials in order to enhance transparency and public engagement and to provide additional resources to communities. To achieve this goal, the AIB needed to procure an experienced Systems Administrator to re-design and implement the agency website and create a Data Dashboard to provide live customizable data analysis and reporting.

Task Order Request #F50B0600045-38 was released on May 1, 2024, through the Maryland Department of Information Technology (DoIT) Agile Teams Resources Contract for a Category 3- System Development and Implementation / Systems Administrator to redevelop, redesign, and reorganize the current AIB website to provide systematic and timely information sharing and to provide a more interactive user experience. The bid was open to an approved list of contractors within the Maryland DoIT Agile Team Resources, Contract #F50B0600045.

After reviewing responses and interviewing the top three candidates, the staff recommended to award the Task Order Request to Elegant Enterprises as the candidate that was ranked number one overall as the best value to the. On June 20, 2024, the Board approved the award amount and awardee recommended by the Executive Director. The term of the contract is through June 30, 2025, and development of the data dashboards and redesign of the agency website is in process.