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Kirwan Commission on Education Puts Government Too Far into Classrooms

ROCKVILLE, MD (June 25, 2018) — Recommendations from Maryland's Kirwan Commission on public education reform would dramatically increase government spending and bureaucracy while delivering questionable results for Maryland students and families. That is according to a new study from the Maryland Public Policy Institute that analyzed interim recommendations from the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

"While the Kirwan Commission's full title includes the word 'innovation,' little about their recommendations is innovative," said Christopher B. Summers, president and chief executive officer of the Institute. "Rather, they would create a bureaucratic top-down system that regulates everything from teacher training to pre-school. Maryland must instead encourage freedom in public education, not standardized tests and administrative fiat."

Institute's Analysis of the Kirwan Commission's Interim Report:

Maryland Already Invests Big in Education: The commission's recommendations would lead to a significant spending increase, yet Maryland already ranks 6th in the nation in teacher salaries and 10th in the nation in per-pupil spending, according to rankings from EdBuild. From 1998 to 2014, Maryland increased education operating expenses by \$3.8 billion in inflation adjusted dollars – a 45% increase. The question is whether Maryland students, families, and taxpayers get value from this investment.

Kirwan Will Grow the Bureaucracy: The commission's recommendations will empower the state and local government bureaucracy foremost. The Commission calls for a new state office of oversight, a new commission, more task forces, and new state authority to regulate teachers and students. Teachers will have less freedom to be creative and schools across the state will become homogenized.

Pre-K Expansion Offers Mixed Results: The commission calls for a significant expansion of pre-K programs, which would cost taxpayers billions, yet evidence from other states suggests caution. In Tennessee, students who did not attend pre-K surpassed their pre-K peers in learning gains by second and third grade. Pre-K can benefit families, but a wise initial step would be to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs before requiring taxpayers to pay for an expansion.

Maryland Encourages Administrative Bloat: While the number of teachers has increased 36 percent from 1992 to 2015, the number of administrative staff grew by 60 percent. Despite increasing funding for public education, a growing share of tax dollars now supports administrative staff with no teaching responsibilities.

"The cost of compliance and implementation of the recommendations will be exorbitant," said James Shuls, Ph.D., author of the report. "Some policies will reduce student and teacher freedom and many will simply not work as they are intended."

Institute's Recommendations for Public Education Reform:

Increase Teacher Pay Through Efficiencies Elsewhere: Investing in quality teachers is appropriate, yet teacher pay increases lag behind benefit increases and total operating expenditures. Maryland must reform pension obligations and eliminate administrative bloat and reinvest the savings in pay raises for high performing teachers.

Remove Ineffective Teachers: The commission emphasizes improving professional development but fails to address tenure and dismissal of low-performing teachers. Economist Eric Hanushek has shown that removing the bottom five to

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eight percent of teachers and replacing them with a teacher of average quality would help the U.S. rise to the level of the top countries in the world in math and science.

Introduce Market Based Pay for Teachers: Market-based pay allows teachers to earn more money by teaching in high-need subject areas, high-need schools, or by being a highly-effective teacher. Currently, most districts pay the physics teacher on the same pay scale as the elementary school teacher. Market-based pay would demand a higher salary for the high-need physics teacher.

The report's author, James V. Shuls, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and the graduate program director of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. He earned his Ph.D. in education policy from the University of Arkansas. The full report can be found at mdpolicy.org.

About the Maryland Public Policy Institute: Founded in 2001, the Maryland Public Policy Institute is a nonpartisan public policy research and education organization that focuses on state policy issues. Learn more at mdpolicy.org.

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