

Office of Strategic Initiatives

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BLUEPRINT
for our students' future

September 23, 2024

Maryland State Board of Education
stateboard.msde@maryland.gov

Re: Maryland LEADs grant and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Dear President Joshua Michael, Vice President Monica Goldson, Superintendent Carey Wright, Board members, and staff,

I was hoping to provide the following information as public comment at the State Board of Education Meeting tomorrow. Unfortunately, I have a conflict and will not be able to do so in person or virtually. Please accept and review my written comments for your consideration.

As the Maryland LEADs grant concludes this month, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunities it has provided to our district. Through LEADs, we made critical and innovative strides in implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and advancing our district's long-term goals. One of the key benefits of LEADs was its ability to enhance leadership capacity and resources, which enabled us to focus on the design and preparation for Blueprint-related work that is otherwise not covered by the Blueprint funding itself.

LEADs arrived at a critical time when our staff was stretched thin by post-COVID reinvention and recovery and new, ambitious tasks for the Blueprint. Some of you may remember that, at first, the rollout of LEADs brought stress and concern, but pushing through that challenge has proven to be a transformative opportunity. LEADs gave us the space and resources to innovate when we desperately needed support. It demonstrated that with adequate funding and resources, we possess the creativity and determination to bring real, meaningful change.

Through this grant, we redesigned our middle school schedules and curriculum to focus on Blueprint CCR goals. Initiatives like project-based learning and advisory periods, made possible by LEADs, have brought us closer to achieving career-minded goals. LEADs also enabled us to collaborate with our local community college to establish a workforce development program, whereby students now have the opportunity to earn career credentials, further advancing our Blueprint efforts.

LEADs allowed us to create a support network for our National Board Certification candidates, where we expanded our candidate pool and provided crucial resources to those who might not have pursued certification without the built-in support. Again, we saw significant progress toward the Blueprint's goals.

We strengthened our work for the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers through a comprehensive needs assessment focused on diversity hiring and retention. We also piloted a model school program for teacher candidates and launched career counseling for support staff interested in teaching, again advancing Blueprint goals for building up high-quality, diverse educators.

We dedicated resources toward strategic planning, professional development, and leadership for our Community Schools program—another critical step toward our Blueprint goals.

Although we were not approved for the Science of Reading LEADs strategy, I am confident we would be even further along in our literacy goals if we received that support.

I am incredibly proud of the innovation made possible in just two years by the Maryland LEADs grant and its impact on our district. As the Blueprint does not cover costs for the expansive leadership and planning required or provide many of the resources we relied on through LEADs, I assert that this grant salvaged, or at the very least, jumpstarted our path to meeting Blueprint objectives.

As discussions around budgets and future grants emerge, please keep the success of Maryland LEADs in mind. Our experience demonstrates that there is an opportunity for powerful innovation when the right resources are in place. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katie Ridgway". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

cc:

Sean Bulson, Superintendent, Harford County Public Schools, sean.bulson@hcps.org

Isiah Leggett, Chair, Accountability and Implementation Board, isiah.leggett@maryland.gov

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