

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake  
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Neil E. Duke, Esq.  
Chair, Baltimore City Board of  
School Commissioners

Andrés A. Alonso, Ed.D.  
Chief Executive Officer

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Dear City Schools Colleagues, Staff, Partners and Friends,

For Baltimore City Public Schools, the state budget for education now being debated in Annapolis is a matter of fundamental importance. Any change in the state method for funding education that reduces our funding at a time of growing enrollment is a grave risk to the progress and momentum that is now underway in City Schools.

This year, the submitted state budget is proposing to change the education funding formula under Maryland's Thornton law by reducing the base amount of funding for each student. As a result, even though City Schools' enrollment went up by more than 700 students, state funding for City Schools is slated to decrease by more than \$15 million. Meanwhile, many of the costs of doing business—in things like health benefits, utilities, pre-k programs—keep going up, by about \$58 million next year.

For City Schools, this means a reduction in spending power from last year of about \$73 million—that's about \$870 for every student. We have already cut the central office by 34 percent over three years and devolved the bulk of our dollars to schools, so it will be more difficult than in the past to protect schools from such a reduction in spending power. For a typical school of 600 students, that means a real drop in spending power of about \$522,000—almost 10 percent of the school's budget. To accommodate these cuts, schools will have to cut priorities that are critical to school success. Whether we do this by reducing teachers and increasing class size, by slowing down our expansion of career and technical education programs and the creation of new schools, by halting our expansion of pre-k programs, by eliminating art and music or after school programs, or by getting rid of field trips and other enrichment, our kids will lose out. We already fail miserably at the upkeep of our buildings, due to lack of funding. Our kids only get one chance to get an education, and it is essential that our schools are equipped to prepare them to succeed. Our history as a city shows that.

But now, as a city community that cares deeply about its children, it is essential that everyone—parents, educators, students, partners and friends of City Schools—communicate with great clarity and urgency that, during tough budget times, our commitment to our children must take top priority. The Thornton promise to our kids must not be broken. The [Baltimore Education Coalition](#), a network of organizations concerned about education in Baltimore, is sponsoring a **Rally and Action at Lawyer's Mall in Annapolis at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, February 28**. To find out more or to sign up for a bus, please contact your school or the [Baltimore Education Coalition](#) as soon as possible at [www.becforourkids.org](http://www.becforourkids.org). Buses need to be reserved by Monday, February 21.



Last year, more than 600 City Schools' advocates, parents and community members were present in Annapolis to defend cuts to our state funding—successfully. This year, our community must be present in even greater force. In the meantime, please [call or email](#) your legislators and our state leaders right away to urge them to guard against cuts and advocate for increasing revenues as needed to keep our promises to our kids.

Some have said that cuts are inevitable in difficult budget times and that education has been “spared”. But, these proposed cuts come on top of significant cuts already made in 2008 to the Thornton formulas for state educational funding. In 2007, a special session of the Legislature made significant reductions to the funding called for by those formulas—changes that with the additional proposed cuts to next year’s budget mean that **City Schools will have received about \$244 million less** over fiscal years 2009-2012 than we would have received under the original formula. In this sense, the budget axe during this economic downturn fell first and very seriously on schools. And, because Baltimore City receives 67 percent of its funding from the state, more than other counties with larger local tax bases, the impact of these cuts has been felt keenly by our schools. In October 2007, shortly after arriving in Baltimore City, I [testified in special session](#) against those proposed cuts. Every word I stated then holds now, with even greater force, because the past has been forgotten so quickly.

Moreover, the additional cuts in the formulas proposed this year would have an impact in years to come. The legislation would put these lower levels in place until 2015. This reduction in the base amount per student represents a departure from the Thornton law’s commitment to the fundamental constitutional promise of a full and adequate education for every child, a promise which Maryland’s courts have affirmed as a legal requirement in the *Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education* case. Since 2008, in extraordinarily tough times, the leadership of the state has held to its promise to hold education harmless, and we are grateful for the opportunities which that commitment has made possible for our students, and the progress that they have made as a result. We ask that our leaders hold to their commitment now.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the reform of the past several years has been the support of the entire community for our kids—a support communicated in tangible terms by our willingness as a community to invest in their future even during difficult economic times. Our professionals have responded with concessions in labor negotiations that have been all about a commitment to better outcomes for kids. Our parents and partners have supported schools as never before. And our kids have responded with improved performance at every level, and by staying in school in record numbers.

Some say education should now feel the pain. We say our kids should never feel any pain. They should feel the embrace of a community that believes in them.

Thank you again for all that you do for our great kids and great schools.

Sincerely,

Andrés A. Alonso, Ed.D.  
CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools