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Dr. Karen Salmon, Superintendent
Andrew Smarick, President, State Board of Education
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Re: Family League of Baltimore's Public Comment on the Maryland State Department of Education's ESSA Plan

Superintendent Salmon and President Smarick,

As Baltimore's Local Management Board, Family League serves as an architect of change in Baltimore by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families, and communities. Our mission is that all children in Baltimore will be born healthy, succeed in school, graduate high school and transition into higher education and the workforce.

We applaud the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in the drafting of Maryland's Consolidated State Plan in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We would like to offer our feedback on this second draft of the State Plan, particularly as it relates to our extensive work with the Community School strategy in Baltimore. This strategy is supported with empirical research, including a recent study that highlights community schools as an effective component for ESSA implementation plans.¹

In Baltimore, Family League facilitates the Baltimore Community Schools strategy in 45 schools across the city. Family League partners with lead agencies including the University Maryland School of Social Work, the Y of Central Maryland, and over 20 other community-based organizations to hire each school site's full-time Community School Coordinator, and support at least one out-of-school time (OST) program. This coordinator then works in the school and surrounding community to leverage partnerships critical to meeting the needs of students and their families.

Data suggests that this strategy works to address the impacts of student-level concentrated poverty by impacting student attendance.² Research conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) found that Community Schools operating for at least five years have shown significant gains in attendance and reductions in chronic absenteeism. For example, BERC found that average daily attendance among Pre-K to 5th grade students has risen between 2009 and 2014 in Community Schools,

¹ Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*. National Education Policy Center and the Learning Policy Institute (July 2017).

https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Evidence_Based_Strategy_BRIF.pdf

² Wool, S., Fermanich, M. and Reichardt, R. (2015). *The Effects of Concentrations of Poverty on School Performance and School Resource Needs: A Literature Review*. Denver, CO: APA Consulting

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while remaining flat or declining in most non-Community Schools.³ Rates of chronic absenteeism have also declined significantly in community school middle schools during that same period, while remaining virtually flat in non-community schools.⁴

In addition to these outcomes, Community Schools have shown increases in parent engagement in schools (Baltimore's Community Schools have recorded over 140,000 parent volunteer hours); reductions in suspensions and negative behaviors; and sustained academic outcomes for students both in Community Schools as well as in OST programs.⁵

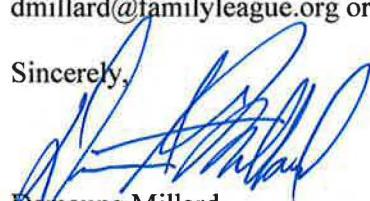
Throughout the State Plan, there is no explicit reference to the Community School strategy as a key approach to ensure support for students living in areas of concentrated poverty. Title IV, Parts A and B, address student supports and practical approaches to OST programming, but do not touch on the ways that Community Schools support these approaches. Additionally, in *Appendix E: Maryland's Family Engagement Plan*, there is no mention of community schools and the variety of family engagement strategies being employed by Community Schools across Baltimore.

We firmly believe that the development of the State Plan as an opportunity to highlight the benefits of the Community School strategy. We believe there is a need for the State of Maryland to provide support to expand the Strategy through full implementation in schools serving students who live in concentrated poverty.

Across Baltimore's Community School network, we see strategies in place that address chronic absenteeism, family engagement, out-of-school time learning opportunities, school climate, integrated health and social supports, and authentic community and family engagement. Family League encourages MSDE to incorporate the Community School strategy into its ESSA plan, as a comprehensive evidence-based model for how schools can deliver supportive services that ensure equity and greater student success, especially for student populations living in areas of concentrated poverty.

We thank you for your consideration, and are happy to provide additional information. I can be reached at dmillard@familyleague.org or (443) 552-0370.

Sincerely,



Demaune Millard
Interim President & CEO
Family League of Baltimore

³ Baltimore Education Research Consortium. (2013). A First Look at Community Schools in Baltimore. Retrieved from [familyleague.org: <http://familyleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CommunitySchoolsReportDec2014.pdf>](http://familyleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CommunitySchoolsReportDec2014.pdf)

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*