

# Education Policy 101: Where is Policy Made?

Use this document as a starting point for where to go to get answers about policy issues.

## Some Definitions:

- Statutes--are enacted by the legislature
- Policies--are voted on by the school board and provide direction for the regulations made by the CEO of City Schools
- Administrative Regulations at the state level are collected in the Code of Maryland Regulations--COMAR. These are procedures adopted by MSDE
- Regulations at the City Schools level are written by the City School Administration in accordance with board policies. You can find them on Board docs.
- Guidance documents--are internal documents that provide guidance to principals in how to carry out school district initiatives

## Groups that set or influence policy

**THE SCHOOL FAMILY COUNCIL** In City Schools, the School Family Council is the stakeholder body that: reviews and approves the school improvement plan, provides advisory input to school's budget, and assists in the selection of the principal. There does not seem to be any official public policy that defines what the council does, however, there is an internal [guidance document](#) dating back to FY15. See this document for a description of duties and the composition of the council.

**THE PRINCIPAL** Principals are constrained by board policy, COMAR (the Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations), school law, court cases and union contracts. They have some latitude over the school's priorities, the schedule, staffing and the budget. They are solely responsible for many decisions such as staff evaluations. Principals report directly to their network leader (Instructional Leadership ED). Principals are also required to include stakeholders in decision making about the School Improvement Plan and the budget. (See School Family Council) Principals are part of the [Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association](#) (PSASA)--their bargaining unit and this is their [contract](#).

**THE DISTRICT** The Central Offices of the Baltimore City Public Schools are responsible for supervising and supporting schools. The district's main role is to implement policies and regulations established at the federal government, state government and school board. Central Office is made up of a number of departments, all of which are overseen by the CEO. The district [website](#) and their [budget engagement website](#) are important sources of information about schools, the calendar, and budget development.

**THE BALTIMORE CITY BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS** The state delegates responsibility for schools in each geographic area (23 counties and Baltimore City) to local school district boards. Local boards have the following main tasks: setting a vision and mission for the district, approving policies, establishing the organizational structure, approving curriculum, adopting a budget, creating a climate of educational excellence, ensuring equity, balancing input from different stakeholders, approving the appointment of leadership positions (from principal and up). School board members can only act by voting at official board meetings. Individual board members have no power except as part of a voting board. School boards do not always have as much power as they might due to: the structure of bureaucracy which tends to resist change, powerful outside influences, state and federal laws and restrictions on spending. The 9 Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners are currently appointed, but starting in 2020 there will be two additional board members who are elected. See [boarddocs](#) for important repository of information. Within board docs, go to the [upcoming board meeting](#) and click on the agenda. Within the agenda, click on any blue attachments to find the details of what will be presented at the board meeting.

**THE CITY** The Mayor's and City Council's influence over education in Baltimore has varied over time. As of the [2017 legislative session](#), the mayor is now solely responsible for approving school board members. The city council approves the school district's budget, but it could be argued that the last mayor who had a deep role in the operation of City Schools was Kurt Schmoke. The proportion of the district's \$1.3 billion operating budget that comes from the city is only [approximately 21%](#). For an excellent history of the [relationship between Baltimore's Mayors](#) and School Superintendents, see [Education is My Agenda](#).

### **TEACHER UNIONS**

[The Baltimore Teachers Union](#) (BTU) represents teachers and paraprofessionals and advocates for teacher-friendly policies at the local and state level. Their major policy impact in Baltimore City is negotiating the teachers' and paraprofessionals' contracts, which must be ratified by the union's membership. Within the BTU, grassroots groups of teachers ([BMORE](#) and CEDE) are working to increase the organizing and activism within the BTU. The state and national teacher unions--the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Teachers Association (NEA)--have historically had a seat at the policy table. The AFT and NEA influence state and federal legislation through their lobbying dollars, and to a lesser extent, they organize their members in opposition to policies that are unfavorable to public education.

**PHILANTHROPISTS, LOBBYISTS AND NON-PROFITS** More and more, philanthropists are influencing education policy at every level from the schoolhouse to the federal government. By offering money with conditions for how it is spent and by selectively picking which non-profits, think tanks, schools or districts will receive outside resources, a philanthropist or non-profit can push a particular education reform agenda. At a national level, the main groups that influence education policy include: the Gates Foundation, the Walton Foundation the Broad Foundation, as well as a variety of venture capitalists. There are numerous think tanks and lobbyist groups

funded by these foundations. One blogger who is particularly good at following the money is Jennifer Berkshire. Until recently she published as [Edushyster](#). For more information about this trend toward private influence in education policy see: <https://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com> or [Diane Ravitch's blog](#)

## MARYLAND STATE

According to the state constitution, power over public education is as important as the power to tax or to provide for the general welfare of the state's citizens. Prior to 1983, states tended to delegate decision making responsibilities to local districts. Ever since 1983, with the publication of a significant national report--[A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform](#)--there has been more and more focus on "accountability" in the form of: academic standards, professional certification and preparation, and curriculum development. More recently, the federal government and states have also emphasized: choice, charter schools, vouchers, tax-credits and homeschooling.

**THE COURTS** State courts have played an active role in school finance. More on this on our web site under: ***20 Years of Forgotten History: Why Organizing is Our Only Chance at Adequate School Funding***. Courts have also played an active role in the issue of school segregation. (See Brown vs Board of Education)

## THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: CONGRESS AND THE US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The US Constitution does not mention education. The power to control public education therefore historically rested with each state. However, starting with the *National Defense Education Act* in 1958 and the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) in 1965, the US Congress has had a role in correcting for discrimination based on race, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Much of this influence comes in the form of grants made by the US Department of Education (DOE). For instance Title I grants give extra money to districts with higher poverty levels. DOE provides grants (such as [Race to the Top](#) which led to many changes in how states hire and evaluate teachers) as a way to influence local policy.

## Quick reference for useful websites:

### BOARD DOCS

- Main page for Boarddocs--This is where all the board related documents are stored (agendas, policies, meeting dates, and attachments that are shared at board meetings) <http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/board.nsf/public>
- This is the calendar for when policies will be reviewed in SY18 <http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/board.nsf/public>
- Baltimore City Schools Discipline policy--either go through the board meetings or through the policy tab <http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/board.nsf/public#>
- This is the most recent policy that says what the SCHOOL FAMILY COUNCIL is supposed to look like and do <http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/board.nsf/public>

- City Schools Calendar for next school year  
[http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/Board.nsf/files/AHBUN979C496/\\$file/SY%2017-18%20%2018-19%20Proposed%20Calendar%20v2.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/Board.nsf/files/AHBUN979C496/$file/SY%2017-18%20%2018-19%20Proposed%20Calendar%20v2.pdf)
- This is the calendar for when budget decisions were made this spring. The one for next year is not yet available.  
<http://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcpss/board.nsf/public>

## **CITY SCHOOLS**

- Baltimore City Schools Code of conduct  
<http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/24478>
- BCPSS Teacher Evaluation Ratings:  
<http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/23237>
- This is the website created by City Schools to disseminate information about the budget <http://engage.baltimorecityschools.org>

## **COMAR**

- COMAR on school safety  
<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/13a/13a.01.04.03.htm>
- COMAR on behavior interventions  
<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/13a/13a.08.04.03.htm>
- COMAR on suspension rates  
<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/13a/13a.08.06.02.htm>
- <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/discipline-compendium/Maryland%20School%20Discipline%20Laws%20and%20Regulations.pdf>
- COMAR Online: <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/COMAR/ComarHome.html>  
Evaluation policies:  
[http://www.dsd.state.md.us/COMAR/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=13A.07.09.\\*](http://www.dsd.state.md.us/COMAR/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=13A.07.09.*)

## **THE TEACHERS CONTRACT**

- BCPSS Teacher Attendance Policy:  
<http://baltimoreteachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/BCPS-Attendance-Policy.pdf>
- Setting up a union chapter committee: BTU Contract  
<http://www.baltimoreteachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Balt-City-BTU-2013-2016-Teacher-Agreement-03-10-14-kjz1.pdf>