

LWVMD Fact Sheet: Examining “Local Control” Within a Multi-level Educational System

LWVMD Convention
June 9, 2025

Charge to the Study Committee

“. . . to examine whether to retain, delete, or amend the language in Financing Education that supports the “*continuation of local control over the schools.*”

The charge recommended that such a study:

- define “local control,”
- identify what is mandated by the state, and
- indicate where flexibilities exist for local input and direction.

Current LWVMD Position on *Financing Education*

Financing Education: The primary responsibility for funding public elementary and secondary education lies with the state (1972, 1975). Support for:

1. A foundation program based on a weighted per pupil formula supported from general state revenues at a level high enough to eliminate inequities.
2. Some local leeway to provide additional funding for education.
3. Continuation of local control over the schools.
4. The encouragement of increased federal funding for education.

LWV Position on Education

- The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWV) “*recognizes that primary responsibility for public education resides with the states.*”
- The LWV position on the federal role in education states that “*the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality education for all children in Pre-K through Grade 12*”
- LWV also states that “*action on school funding equity takes place predominantly at the state level, where school financing laws are made*”

Blueprint for Maryland's Future (2021)

GOAL: Improve the quality and equity of the Maryland educational system

IMPLEMENTATION: Designed to be phased in over 12 years

FUNDING: Increase state education funding by \$3.8 billion total through FY2032

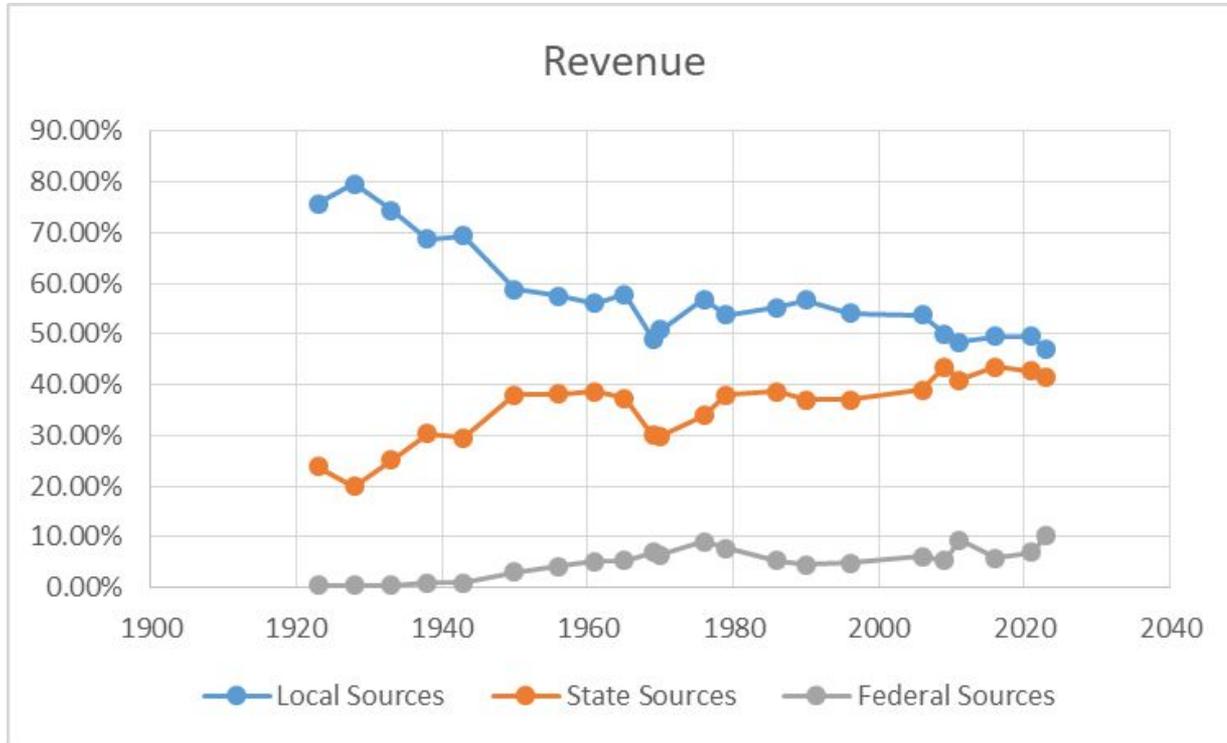
POLICY: Five Pillars

- **Early Childhood Education**
- **High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders**
- **College and Career Readiness**
- **More Resources for Students to be Successful**
- **Governance and Accountability**

Blueprint Five Pillars

- **Early Childhood Education:** Expands publicly funded full-day pre-kindergarten for all 4-year-olds and income eligible 3-year-olds and increases the number of early childhood education providers through a mixed delivery system.
- **High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders:** Policies to improve the quality and diversity of teachers and leaders by elevating the status of teachers, adopting a performance-based career ladder and salaries comparable to similarly educated professionals. It increases the rigor of teacher preparation programs, and creates a leadership development system.
- **College and Career Readiness:** Policies to ensure that all Maryland public school students are college and career ready by the end of the 10th grade and can transition to postsecondary education or to the workforce after graduation. The Blueprint called for a College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard, criteria for meeting that standard, and the development of career and college pathways for students.
- **More Resources for Students to be Successful:** Increases state funding for public education through a combination of additional per-pupil funding added to the foundation formula and the adoption of the Concentration of Poverty grant program to support additional services in schools with high concentrations of poverty.
- **Governance and Accountability:** Creates the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) as an independent unit of the state to oversee the implementation of the Blueprint.

Sources of Funding - A mix of federal, state, and local funding



How Maryland Funds Public Schools

Maryland's Funding Formula:

- Foundation Program: Provides a uniform per pupil base amount of funding
 - Per-pupil funding shared by State and Local (wealth adjusted)
- Targeted Aid: Adjust funding to account for costs associated with providing educational services
 - Special Education Students
 - English Language Learners
 - Students eligible for free and reduced price meals
- Adjusts funding to account for local and regional differences in educational costs and local wealth

Local share of educational funding varies widely, ranging from 16.67% in Wicomico County and 17.41% in Somerset to 65.63% in Montgomery and 62.93% in Howard County (FY 2022-23).

Defining “Local Control”

What does “local control of education” mean?

Defining “Local Control” – Multiple Meanings

- Local control of education can take on many meanings that fall outside the responsibilities and duties that local agencies perform.
- Some refer to local control as a matter of state’s rights, rejecting federal intervention. However, local school boards are subject to numerous state and federal constraints.
- The term local control has been used to further certain political and ideological agendas.
 - Its meaning, interpretation, and use has shifted to accommodate new situations, issues, and spatial and demographic arrangements or to impose specific cultural, religious, or social values that may not be inclusive or representative of the entire student population.
 - These efforts are more often about promoting a preferred vision of schooling rather than about the site of decision making or “local control”.

Structure of the Educational System: Agencies

FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL
Congress	General Assembly	City/County Council
US Department of Educ	MD State Board of Educ	Local Board of Educ
	MD State Dept of Educ	Local Dept of Educ
		Local Schools

In other words, “local” is not one single agency.

Maryland Educational System

- MD Constitution gives the state primary responsibility for public education
- MD law and COMAR do not use the term “local control”
- The MD Code provides for a state board of education and state superintendent who oversee the administration of the state’s public schools
- The MD Code provides for the establishment of city/county boards of education and superintendents to carry out local responsibilities as defined in law.
- Local school districts are seen as agencies of the state educational system

What does “local control” mean within the context of
financing education?

“Local Control” is Context Dependent

- The meaning of “local control” is not entirely clear without additional information about the situation or the **context** in which it is being applied.
- For this study, the context for understanding “local control” is what it means in terms of **Financing Education**.
- **Framework** for understanding “local context:

Local control *for whom or for what*

- This framework clarifies the merits of and motivations behind a particular policy issue.

“Local control” within the Context of *Financing Education*

The **city/county council** (*for whom*) has the **authority** to **allocate funds, issue debt or impose taxes to finance schools** (*for what*).

Why?

- Only the city/county council has the authority to raise funds through taxation or bonds.
- Local school districts rely on the city/county council for *local* funds.

Q & A

MD State Authority for Education

- State authority over education derives from the 10th Amendment.
- MD Constitution places the primary responsibility for public education with the state.
- The Maryland Code of Regulations (COMAR) delegates the supervision and administration of the state's elementary and secondary public schools to the Maryland State Board of Education and state superintendent.
- Local districts are seen as an agency of the state educational system.
- The state determines the laws and policies that govern education and delegates to local boards of education (*for whom*) certain duties and responsibilities in order to meet those requirements (*for what*).

Mandated: Key Responsibilities, Powers, and Duties of Local Boards

The responsibilities, powers, and duties of local city/county boards of education are ***defined in law*** by the Maryland General Assembly. Key aspects include:

- The election or appointment, as well as the size of local school boards, is determined by the state
- Local school board meetings must be conducted pursuant to public meeting statutes, equal opportunity laws, and must meet state rules for accreditation.
- Local school boards, subject to state laws and regulations, can establish the geographic school attendance boundaries, establish curriculum guides and courses of study, develop testing administration and data reporting policies, select curriculum materials, including textbooks, instructional materials, and visual auditory aids
- City/county school boards appoint principals, teachers, and other certified and uncertified personnel and set their salaries
- The local share of funding, usually from local property and income taxes, for local public schools is provided by the city/county government

Key Flexibilities for Local Input

- **Personnel decisions:** Local boards of education are responsible for hiring teachers but teachers must meet state certification requirements but contracts are subject to union negotiated requirements, and starting salaries must meet a state minimum requirement
- **Funding dependency:** Although local taxes contribute to school funding, a significant portion of funding comes from state and federal sources that ***come with requirements and restrictions on how they can be used***
- **Budget management:** The school district budget process involves the superintendent, the local school board and city/county council and is subject to federal, state, and city/county requirements linked to funding
- **Curriculum standards:** Local school districts can select textbooks and instructional materials, but these must align with curriculum standards, learning goals, and graduation criteria set by the state
- **Accountability:** Statewide assessments used to measure student performance and school effectiveness are administered locally, but federal and state test-based accountability policies significantly shape how schools and teachers are held accountable
- **Compliance:** Local school districts must comply with state and federal laws, such as special education regulations for individuals with disabilities and civil rights protection

Major Study Takeaways

- “Local control of education” has multiple possible meanings and varies depending on the context
- When referring to “local control,” it is important to ask: **local control *for whom, or for what***
- Within the context of the LWVMD position on ***Financing Education***,
 - “local” refers to the **city/county council (*for whom*)** and
 - “control” refers to the authority of the city/county council to **issue debt or impose taxes to finance schools (*for what*)**
- Under MD law, local districts are seen as an agency of the state educational system
- MD law defines the responsibilities, powers, and duties of local city/county boards of education
- Federal, state, and local levels share responsibility for education, with each actor empowered to work with and influence the other

LWVMD Current Position Revisited

Financing Education: The primary responsibility for funding public elementary and secondary education lies with the state (1972, 1975).

Support for:

1. A foundation program based on a weighted per pupil formula supported from general state revenues at a level high enough to eliminate inequities.
2. Some local leeway to provide additional funding for education.
3. Continuation of local control over the schools.
4. The encouragement of increased federal funding for education.

Consensus Question

1. In order to clarify that funding education is a state/local shared responsibility, should LWVMD remove “*continuation of local control over the schools*” (#3) from its current **Financing Education** position and amend the current position (#2) to state support for: “*Some leeway for **city/county councils** and boards of education to provide additional funding for education*”?

Yes _____

No _____

Uncertain _____

Local League Consensus Meetings/Process

- Convene local league and affiliate meeting/s to discuss the fact sheet and determine whether there is a consensus.
- Timeline:
 - Consensus Meetings: July - October 2025
 - Consensus Report Deadline: October 17, 2025
 - Submit Consensus Report to Program Chair
 - program@lwvmd.org
- Even if there are multiple meetings, only one consensus report is submitted from each local league or affiliate.
- Study committee members are available to join local league consensus meetings as a resource.

Determining Consensus

- LWVMD board forms a consensus committee to review the consensus results received from local leagues and affiliates.
- The consensus committee includes:
 - Study Committee Chair
 - Program Chair
 - One additional board member
 - Three members representing local leagues or affiliates
- The consensus committee reports results to the LWVMD board for approval
 - Each local league or affiliate gets “one vote” regardless of size
- Positions are released to members; action may be taken based on them.

Q & A