

TRUE EQUITY Act

Providing a Federal Partnership in State and Local efforts to Ensure Educational Equity and Quality

United States Senator Ben Cardin

The fate of our Nation and the opportunities it creates for our children to enjoy successful careers and rewarding lives depends on the quality, equal access, and effectiveness of Pre-K through 12th grade education in every school district across the country. Despite current combinations of Federal, State, and local funding and innovative educational policies, many states and local school systems find persistent academic achievement gaps along racial, ethnic, and income levels between students of color and low-income students compared to their higher income and white peers.

In order to address these inequities in education, certain States, including Maryland, have researched and proposed bold, transformative Federal, State, and local funding and policy changes to their pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade education systems, with five main policy recommendations under the **Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education (Kirwan Commission)**. The Transformational Reforms and Updates to Ensure Educational Quality and Urgent Investments in Today's Youth (**TRUE EQUITY**) Act matches the recommendations under the Commission and provides for a stronger federal partnership in State and Local efforts to ensure educational equity and eliminate academic achievement gaps.

Under the **TRUE EQUITY Act**, an additional \$1.4 billion will be available to partner with State and local efforts to ensure educational equity and quality with stringent accountability measures. This legislation:

1. **Early Childhood Education:** Creates a new grant, authorized at up to \$275 million, that bolsters State and local investments in our youngest learners to prepare them to enter school ready to learn. In Maryland, this can expand access to all-day Pre-K and Judy Centers serving low-income families;
2. **High-Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders:** Creates a new grant, authorized at up to \$340 million, that supports additional teacher training and ensures educators are utilizing the latest practices. In Maryland, this would support statewide growing needs for special educators;
3. **College and Career Readiness Pathways:** Creates a new grant, authorized at up to \$50 million, that builds on State and local efforts to ensure that students have access to college and career pathways by 10th grade. In Maryland, this would expand access to certificate programs and dual-enrollment Pell;
4. **More Resources to Ensure All Students Are Successful:** Creates a new grant, authorized at up to \$750 million, that strengthens funding for programs that reduce achievement gaps and provide wraparound services for children. In Maryland, this would provide needed funding for low-income students, English learner students, children with disabilities, expansion of physical and mental health services afterschool and summer learning activities, and the purchase of educational technology devices; and
5. **Governance and Accountability:** Requires that any State applying for funding under the TRUE EQUITY Act establish an independent State Oversight Board that has the ability to hold State and local school districts accountable for failing to meet the State established educational equity goals, TRUE EQUITY Act grant renewals would be contingent on meeting educational equity goal. In Maryland, the Kirwan Commission's recommendation to establish an Independent Oversight Board would allow Maryland to qualify for the TRUE EQUITY Act grants.

All four grant programs provide a federal match of \$1 for every \$2 invested by State and local communities above FY22 spending levels, with State and local communities receiving one of the new grant programs required to provide a Maintenance of Effort of at least the previous year's funding level. In Maryland, these federal grants cover a significant portion of the costs to implement the Kirwan Commission recommendations, bringing up to \$1.4 billion in new federal funding to the state.