Gubernatorial Leadership to Improve Education in Maryland: 
The Baker Vision and Plan

Executive Summary

Rushern Baker is committed to the principle that all of Maryland’s children should have access to high quality equal education, no matter where they live or their economic status. He understands that an educated citizenry is essential to the proper functioning of our state, nation and democracy. As governor of Maryland, Rushern Baker will oppose efforts by the Trump Administration to undermine public education generally and its stakeholders. He will resist Republican-led cuts in education funding, reversals of anti-discrimination statutes, attacks on unions and worker rights, and efforts to undermine urban school districts that serve our state and nation’s most vulnerable students. The silence in Annapolis from the governor’s Office on these and related urgent issues will end when Rushern Baker becomes governor of Maryland.

Rushern Baker’s commitment to equal high-quality education for all children is personal. As a child, he struggled with reading, got into fights, and as a member of a military family, was disciplined at many schools. Yet with the love and support of parents and dedicated teachers, he became the first in his family to earn a college degree. He knows that a high-quality education can change lives, because it changed his.

As governor, Rushern Baker’s number one priority will be improving Maryland’s public schools so that every child has the same opportunity to succeed as he did. Maryland rose to the number one ranking in the nation following passage of its visionary ‘Bridge to Excellence’ – Thornton Education funding adequacy and accountability plan. In recent years, the state’s education performance ranking has declined. New leadership is required in the Governor’s office to work with school districts and the Kirwan Commission to return Maryland to its number one ranking.

Rushern Baker has put forward a comprehensive education proposal to transform Maryland’s public-school system and ensure that every child is prepared to succeed in our 21st century economy. He will do this by taking bold and aggressive steps to implement recommendations of the Kirwan Commission to boost academic performance, increase access to quality early education, increase access to mental and behavioral health services, narrow the achievement gap based on income, improve career technical education, recruit and retain high-quality teachers and make higher education more affordable.

From PTA president and managing an education non-profit, to leading the second largest jurisdiction in the state, Rushern Baker knows how important state support is to improving schools. As County Executive, Rushern Baker consistently fought for increases in school funding and higher teacher salaries; dual-enrollment programs; safe and secure school environments; and expanded universal pre-k and full-day kindergarten.
As Maryland’s next governor, Rushern Baker will commit to meeting with school superintendents once a month to collaborate with them on the implementation of his innovative 10-Point Education Plan to make Maryland schools number one in the nation again. The plan addresses: early start initiatives, strengthening low-performing schools, 21st Century Career programs, career technical education, enhanced support for educators, mental and behavioral health, school infrastructure, funding and performance accountability, curricular innovation, and college access and affordability.

**Early Start Initiatives**
Full-day prekindergarten programs prepare students better for kindergarten and help low-income parents who can’t afford the skyrocketing costs of childcare. Under the Baker administration, Prince George's County went from 8 full-day pre-kindergarten programs to fifty in four years.

Currently, Maryland requires school districts to offer half-day pre-kindergarten programs; but does not provide funding for full-day kindergarten. The state also does not include pre-kindergarten students in the state’s funding formula, which serves as a disincentive to offer full-day pre-kindergarten.

As governor, Rushern Baker will increase funding for and access to full-day pre-kindergarten programs so every child in Maryland can have a great start. Following the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission, Rushern Baker will make pre-k education available to every child and offer free pre-k for children from low-income families.

Rushern Baker will also establish the “Read to be Ready” enrichment programs that extend high quality reading programs to ensure children are reading by 3rd grade. Reading proficiency by third grade is the single most important factor in ensuring high school graduation. The state will work to provide funds to train non-profits along with faith and business communities to provide early learning literacy programs. This will help ensure children between pre-k and second grade are fully prepared to meet state literacy standards by third grade.

**Strengthening Low-Performing Schools**
As governor, Rushern Baker will increase access to a full range of health and human services for students and families in persistently low-performing schools. Increased community engagement in a child’s education can lead to improved student learning, healthier communities and stronger families.

In Prince George’s County, working off the success of the Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI), County Executive Baker implemented the TNI@School program to reach all levels of learning, from elementary through high school, with customized programming tailored to the most urgent needs of the school community, its students, and its families. To this end, TNI@School fosters strategic foundations with community-based resources. Surveying, understanding, and partnering to meet the needs of our 40 schools is the goal. And making the schools centers for community, with tangible, sustainable resources that make a difference, is the mission.
As governor, Rushern Baker will focus on improving coordination between health and human services agencies and education services for expectant and new parents. He will focus on increasing programs that combine family activities, health care, adult education, early intervention, child care, parenting classes and family literacy. Rushern Baker will expand his TNI@Schools program to provide wrap-around community services to low-performing schools across the state.

Rushern Baker also knows that Maryland’s achievement gaps based on income and race are far too wide. The best way to lift children out of poverty, is through world-class education. Yet, as more and more children in Maryland are living in poverty, we have leveled off funding in education. Our children are facing greater needs, but we are providing them with less resources.

21st Century Careers
Maryland has the capability to be a world leader in an innovative, technology-driven economy. But that starts with having a world-class education system. In order to make Maryland an economic innovative world leader, we need a highly-skilled and well-educated workforce.

Rushern Baker will focus on training Maryland students for jobs of the future. In order for Maryland students to compete globally, access to technology is essential. Rushern Baker will prioritize increasing every schools’ ability to access the technology needed to succeed in the 21st century economy.

Rushern Baker will create a funding stream to support language immersion and coding programs for K-12. Helping students speak multiple languages fluently and become fluent in computer science will give Maryland students a competitive edge in our 21st century, global economy.

Rushern Baker will incentivize partnerships between Maryland’s STEM business community and schools in underserved communities to increase the number of under-represented minority groups, particularly low-income students of color and women, in STEM related industries.

Rushern Baker knows that career exploration is crucial to providing opportunity for Maryland students to obtain 21st century jobs. Rushern Baker will work with the private sector and relevant government agencies to create statewide externship programs for teachers to learn new technology and skills from professionals in leading Maryland industries. This training can then be used to mold curriculum programs.

Rushern Baker will also expand his successful Youth Career Connect Program, which utilizes Department of Labor grants to connect students to internships with industry professionals.

Career Technical Education
As governor, Rushern Baker will focus on revamping the State’s career and technical program to include a greater emphasis on licensure and industry recognized certification in growth industries.

Rushern Baker will engage leading Maryland employers, trade unions, economic development officials, relevant state agencies, and Maryland teachers in the redesign of the state’s career and technical curriculum. The curriculum will include an emphasis on “soft” skills (time management, resume writing, punctuality, et al.), career exploration, apprenticeships, and internships, building on the successful $7 million Department of Labor Grant (Youth Career Connect) the County received during County Executive’s Baker’s tenure.

**Enhanced Support for Educators**

Rushern Baker understands the importance of hiring and retaining quality teachers. As governor, he will expand the Maryland Teaching Fellows program to increase the number of quality candidates that choose to teach out of high school. The program will provide qualified, high-performing high school students with a scholarship for four years of free tuition at a Maryland State University in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-needs school district in Maryland. The fund will establish an endowment that businesses can invest in for a tax credit.

Maryland must increase the diversity of its educators given the changing demographics of our public schools. Currently, only 25% of Maryland teachers are from a minority group. Studies show that a more diverse teaching workforce can help minority students succeed.

The average statewide starting salary for teachers was $34,234 in 2015. While salaries have increased over the past 3 years, the reality is the starting salary for teachers is often a deterrent to recruitment and retention of high quality educators.

As governor, Rushern Baker will focus on increasing teacher salaries to those of other professions such as, architects, engineers, and nurses. Rushern Baker will follow the Kirwan Commission recommendation for teacher salaries. This includes raising the starting salary for teachers, a living wage for support staff, and stipends for mastery certifications for teachers and administrators.

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has decreased 20% since 2010. Roughly 60% of all teachers hired in Maryland are from out of state with less than a quarter of new teachers hired last year in Maryland were prepared in a Maryland university or college program.

As governor, Rushern Baker will work to create a pipeline for education support personnel to gain the requisite certifications and experience to pursue advancement opportunities within education.

As governor, Rushern Baker will focus on creating a system of career ladders to help
keep great educators in the classroom. For many, limited advancement opportunities force our best educators to administration positions. We need our best educators in front of students, not in the central office.

**Mental and Behavioral Health**
Rushern Baker will direct the state Superintendent of Education and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to create a statewide network of support to provide access to behavioral and mental health services at every school in the state. He will also establish a governor’s task force to understand the system of supports in place across the state to support the mental health needs of children. As part of the TNI@Schools program, Rushern Baker put behavioral and mental health specialists in 40 schools. The therapists provide individual, group and family therapy.

Rushern Baker will expand this program by working with local communities to implement a statewide program to provide a behavioral and mental health therapist at every school in the state, focusing first on communities of highest need. Because every child in Maryland has access to health care, the program would not cost local schools money because physicians can bill the hours.

**School Infrastructure**
As Maryland’s governor, Rushern Baker will introduce a school infrastructure plan that will increase the state’s financial contribution to at least $400 million per year, renovate and/or replace schools over 50 years of age, and utilize innovative construction models to maximize efficiency. Increasing spending at the state-level to strengthen failing infrastructure will allow local dollars to be used on projects that have educational or programmatic priority. Under the Hogan administration, school construction dollars have decreased by over $150 million, while the political gamesmanship has slowed the progress of several critical projects.

As governor, Rushern Baker will prioritize maintenance programs that improve water quality and heating and cooling systems. Despite an aging school infrastructure, no child in Maryland should attend a school where heating and cooling issues persist with no plan or remedy in sight. Additionally, water quality remains an important health concern that must be addressed with a comprehensive plan, adequate resources and resolve to ensure student and faculty drinking water is safe.

As governor, Rushern Baker will increase funding for emergency maintenance to ensure unforeseen maintenance issues do not affect children’s ability to learn. Far too often in Maryland, schools have closed for weather related maintenance issues and school systems scramble to find resources to fix broken pipes, inoperable heating systems or more.

**Funding and Performance Accountability**
Rushern Baker knows that we must strengthen the state’s accountability metrics and mechanisms for local education agencies to ensure taxpayer dollars are being used efficiently and effectively to improve student outcomes.
While Kirwan’s analysis states that Maryland’s public schools are underfunded by $3 billion, Maryland taxpayers must be assured that any new resources devoted to education will be used to advance opportunities for students and move Maryland forward. Currently, school districts are required to report progress and performance to their Bridge to Excellence Master Plan – Thornton Funding. These plans must be evaluated and verified with community and parental involvement.

As governor, Rushern Baker will improve accountability between Maryland State Department of Education and the governor’s office by appointing a cabinet-level position for coordination, innovation, and accountability. He will invest in improving the state’s data systems to better track student performance and resource allocation. In addition, he will increase the auditing and reporting of school districts’ financial, programmatic, and performance data.

Maryland must invest in creating an early warning data system to assist teachers in helping students who are falling behind or at risk of academic failure. This must be done for all grades, not just high school.

**Curricular Innovation**
As governor, Rushern Baker will focus on increasing rigor and standards to ensure that our students are truly prepared for college and careers. In achieving this goal, the focus will be on content mastery and not primarily test preparation.

The over-emphasis of singular high stakes tests still burdens educators with the false choice of forcing students through content that they have not mastered to meet the demands of pacing guides and test schedules. This approach to education has created students who still need remediation after they graduate and before they are eligible to earn college credit. The over-reliance of standardized testing to assess a student’s content mastery has also led to increased performance anxiety and a lack of innovation by educators. Educators are not encouraged to think creatively, which stifles growth and contributes to the student retention issue that our state is facing. There is no “answer” here to the over-testing.

**College Access and Affordability**
Our community colleges are major resources in our state. If leveraged correctly and successfully, dual enrollment programs can prepare a stronger workforce that is prepared for our 21st-century economy.

Rushern Baker will incentivize partnerships between leading Maryland employers, trade unions, economic development officials, the Chamber of Commerce, relevant state agencies and community colleges to dramatically increase dual enrollment credits in Maryland.

As Governor, Rushern Baker will ensure that every Maryland student has access to tuition free community college.
Rushern Baker believes that establishing a connection between k-12 schools and the community college system is very important. As County Executive, Baker invested in dual-enrollment programs, like the Middle College Program, that connect k-12 schools with community colleges. Rushern Baker will increase dual-enrollment programs across the state so students can graduate high school ready for 21st century jobs.