The Anne Arundel County Board of Education SUPPORTS Senate Bill 346 - Education - Prekindergarten Students - Funding. This bill would establish supplemental prekindergarten grants beginning in fiscal year 2019 and require that prekindergarten students to be included in an enrollment count for purposes of calculating State aid formulas for education. Senate Bill 346 would also prohibit the Act from being construed to authorize the inclusion of prekindergarten students in the county or statewide wealth per pupil education aid calculations.

Strong state and county funding support of prekindergarten –12 public education will ensure that all students have the programs, services, and instructional support needed to meet rigorous standards established for student performance. Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports full per pupil funding allocation for students attending pre-kindergarten without any offsetting reduction in compensatory education funding. AACPS currently absorbs the cost of roughly 2,000 prekindergarten students (1,300 full-time equivalent) without per pupil funding for these students because prekindergarten students are not included in the annual enrollment counts for State and local education aid.

The expansion of prekindergarten programs is a high priority for the AACPS school system because investments in early literacy and prekindergarten education are absolutely essential to efforts to close and eliminate achievement gaps. This is especially critical for AACPS students who face many challenges which can become barriers to academic success. As a school system, AACPS is continually exploring ways to expand prekindergarten opportunities for students, but as with any system with many needs and limited funding, have been unable to expand the prekindergarten programs to meet current needs.

Senate Bill 346 would provide school systems with a means to support and expand prekindergarten programs, ultimately providing equity and educational opportunities to students in need. This bill is a step in that direction, as it provides school systems with much needed funding to support their youngest learners and provide quality prekindergarten programs for qualified students.

Accordingly, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education respectfully urges a FAVORABLE committee report on Senate Bill 346.