

State of Our Schools



STATE STUDENT MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

O'Marie Barnes

Introduction

I am now over halfway into my term as your Student Member on the Maryland State Board of Education. Although we are continuing to move the student voice into true co-agency through initiatives found in my **MID-TERM RECAP**, there is still much work to be done.

For there are still too many students who are drowning in overcrowded classrooms and faulty facilities, too many who have not reached mathematics and literacy proficiency, and too many that do not know they have a voice on the State Board.

Every day, I am honored by the faith and trust you bestowed on me. As we run the final leg of this term, I am looking forward to continuing my service with a commitment to excellence. My team and I will not look back nor take our foot off the gas. Please enjoy this publication. Let's continue making progress together.

Things to expect:

Engagement (Polls, Two Truths & a Lie)

Opportunities in Student Leadership (External Resources for Students)

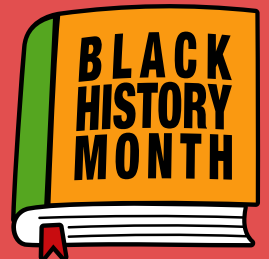
Announcements

Find Your Smob

Special Shout Outs!!!

O'Marie Barnes

Maryland State Board of Education
Student Member of the Board



MID-TERM RECAP

Advocacy on the Move

Through the "**On the Move**" initiative—the statewide tour announced last August—I have traveled across the state to hear from you directly. To bridge the gap between the boardroom and your hallways, we have launched:

The Student Concern Form & Event Invitation Form: Your direct lines to the Student Member

This Monthly SMOB Newsletter: Keeping you informed on every policy shift in real-time.

Historic Investment & Literacy Reform

Advocacy is most powerful when backed by resources. I am thrilled to report that Governor Wes Moore has proposed a **record-breaking \$10.2 billion education budget**. This includes a 16% increase in Concentration of Poverty Grants and raises per-pupil funding to \$11,800.

Furthermore, I am delivering on my promise of remedial support. Following our July revisions to Math and ELA standards, the Board recently recommended our new **Adolescent Literacy Policy** for public comment. This framework provides a roadmap for Tier 1, 2, and 3 instruction, ensuring that whether a student is excelling or catching up from pandemic-era learning gaps, they receive the specific support they deserve.

On January 23rd, I met with the Governor to discuss these very investments and how we can build upon this progress through open lines of communication. I am committed to ensuring that your voices are heard by the Governor's Office.

MID-TERM RECAP

Equity and the Digital Divide

We are tackling the "digital divide" by advocating for equitable replacement protocols for school technology. Currently, a broken screen can cost a family hundreds of dollars—a "pay-to-play" barrier we must dismantle. We are developing a framework to provide low-income families with repaired or replaced Chromebooks at little to no cost. A student's economic status should never dictate their access to the tools of success.

Local Autonomy & Student Power

Regarding the learning environment, I want to clarify the Board's Cell Phone Resolution passed last August: the State Board has not issued a ban. We have mandated that local districts create their own policies. This is your moment to lead; engage with your local boards to ensure student needs are balanced with academic focus.

Finally, we are fighting for the ultimate seat at the table. My amendment to the **Library Media Program Regulations** is now open for public comment. This would mandate that every school district establish a **voting student seat** on committees reviewing curriculum and library material objections.

Student Opportunities



Maryland General Assembly Legislative Scholarships: In-State Bound Seniors

Application Deadline: Varies

https://mhec.maryland.gov/Preparing/Pages/FinancialAid/ProgramDescriptions/prog_delegate.aspx



BigFuture Scholarships for Juniors and Seniors

Application Deadline: Varies

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>



Maryland Mental Health Art, Poetry, and Slogan Contest

Application Deadline: Varies

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdft56lJMpzdjQ_B7NAEiWqis8O2owF8q4uN-37D5TriKQZg/viewform

Student Opportunities



Strong Schools Maryland Student Ambassador Program

Application Deadline: Varies

<https://form.typeform.com/to/mknhBYIS?typeform-source=linktr.ee#students=xxxxx>



Maryland Civic Education Coalition — Youth Advisory Council

Application Deadline: Varies

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf1GUx9ShdPuAI-Fz284b_2-OAEPWOPMsaz-EpDvr55UZ29rw/viewform

Two Truths and a Lie: Black History edition

1

Maryland was home to Harriet Tubman, a key Underground Railroad leader.



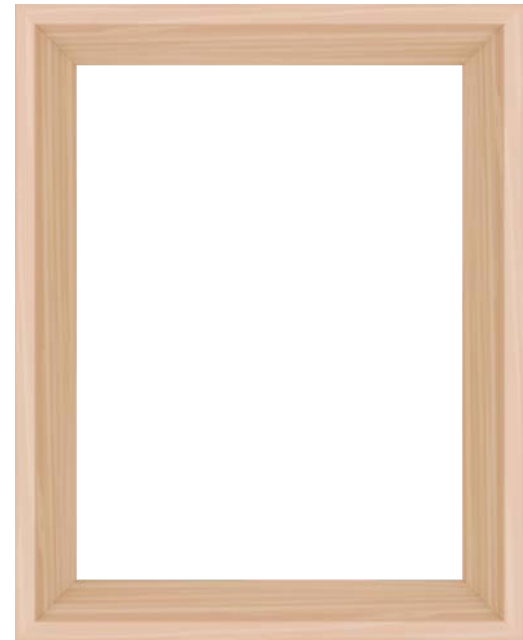
2

Student-led protests were a key part of the Civil Rights Movement.



3

Black History Month was created in the 1990s.



Read to find
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The lie is

Announcements



Stay tuned for updates the State SMOB
Instagram!
@statesmob



The Maryland State SMOB Student
Advisory Council is still accepting rolling
applications throughout the year!



Want to stay connected? Voice your concerns or invite me to visit your
community below!

Student Reporting Form Link:

Event Invitation Form Link:

<https://forms.gle/3xXfhhwLZUyTneFP6>

Find Your SMOB

What is a SMOB?

A Student Member of the Board (SMOB) represents students on their local or state Board of Education and advocates for student needs, concerns, and ideas.

Montgomery County

Anuva Maloo

Prince George's County

Erioluwa Ajakaye

Anne Arundel County

Brayden Morgan

Charles County

Munachi Obinali

Dorchester County

Christian Noel

St. Mary's County

Vanessa Li

Baltimore County

Foresight Ogungbe

Baltimore City

Zayra Chicas

Washington County:

Nora Murthy

Calvert County

Allison Jones

Allegany County

Angel Israel

Garrett County

Cadence Nativiad

Cecil County

Addison Metcalfe

Cambridge--South Dorchester High School

Izzy Trissell

Carroll County

Current: Jasmine Musaeva

SMOB-Elect Gabriella Tedeschi (2026-2027)

Frederick County

Alex Thomas

Harford County

James McVicker

Howard County

Erin Alistar

Talbot County

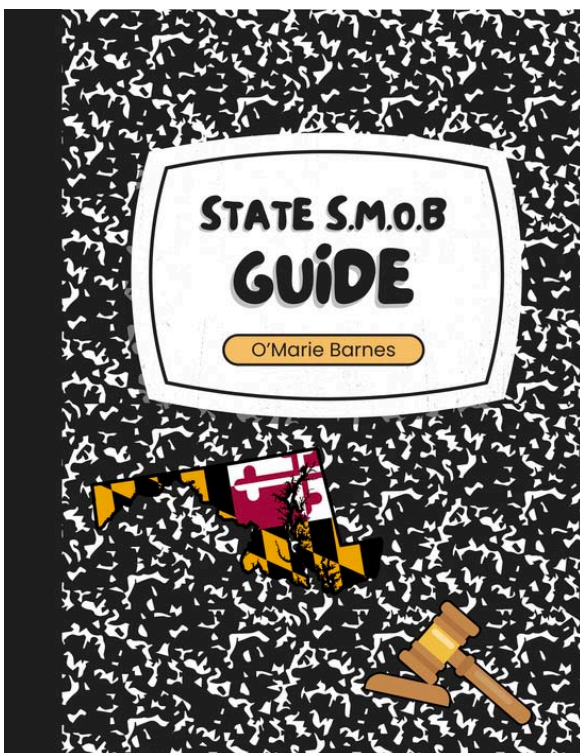
Elmber Pineda

Tyler Murphy

Special Shout outs!!!



Congratulate David Arowolo and Lorena Wu on their Finalist status for the 2026-2027 Student Member term!



We are excited to announce the completion of the State SMOB handbook, designed to guide students through the history and application process for the Student Member appointment.

We hope it catalyzes student involvement with the role. Please access the [Handbook Here](#)

Closing Remarks

Next issue, we want to highlight Incredible students in our state. Use this link to fill out the Google form so that you might see them in the next issue!

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfJQy0sR-GpKMbQsT14AR4x3fEVMhxlAm-WOkD7eBSe-xhzNg/viewform?usp=header>

On behalf of the Awareness Committee, thank you for reading the State of Our Schools newsletter. We all hope you learned something you didn't know before, and that the resources provided will aid you in your journey of leadership, and I'll leave you with a quote:

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader" –

John Quincy Adams

Cortly Witherspoon
State SMOB Awareness Advisor



If you have suggestions for improving or changing the newsletter, please reach out to cortlywitherspoon1@gmail.com.