

BILL: Senate Bill 346
TITLE: Education - Prekindergarten Students - Funding
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 22, 2017
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 346 because it would enhance the adequacy, reliability, and transparency of state and local funding for public prekindergarten programs for our most economically disadvantaged children. Specifically, MABE supports this legislation in order to provide every school system with additional per pupil funding for each eligible four year old enrolled in a public prekindergarten program.

This legislation is needed to remedy the longstanding deficiency in funding provided to local school systems for prekindergarten, by providing a per pupil funding allocation to each local school system. The proposed legislation is intended to provide per pupil funding for half-day prekindergarten students at a "full time equivalent" (FTE) rate of 50% to align the amount of mandated per pupil funding with the half-day scope of mandated prekindergarten programs. Systems providing full-day prekindergarten programs would appropriately report those students at the 100% FTE rate. In this way, Maryland's education funding law would include prekindergarten students as enrolled and guarantee transparent per pupil funding for the high quality prekindergarten programs offered in each of our 24 local school systems.

Under current law, all children who are four years old on September 1 of that school year, who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FRPM) (i.e., from families whose income is at or below 185% of federal poverty guidelines (FPG)), and whose parent or guardian seeks to enroll the child in a public prekindergarten program, must be admitted free of charge to publicly funded prekindergarten programs established by each of the local boards of education. State regulations require local school systems to provide prekindergarten for a minimum of 2.5 hours per day using certified early education teachers. However, prekindergarten students are not included in the annual September 30 enrollment counts for State education aid. By not counting nearly 30,000 students as enrolled, the state funding laws that provide per pupil state and local funding for all students are not triggered.

Many school systems, in addition to the mandated half-day programs, also provide a significant amount of full-day prekindergarten to eligible students. Under this bill, providing full-day prekindergarten would remain entirely at the discretion of the local board, but such programs would receive full per pupil funding when offered.

A 2015 study entitled "A Comprehensive Analysis of Prekindergarten in Maryland" was published by the consultants retained to conduct a series of adequacy studies concerning Maryland's school finance system. According to the study, the return on investment (ROI) for prekindergarten is "a return of \$4.36 for every dollar invested." But the study finds that the ROI is even better for the investment proposed by this bill: "The highest return is seen in public school prekindergarten programs, at \$6.16 per \$1 invested."

Again, MABE supports this legislation in order to guarantee that adequate, accurate and transparent per pupil funding is provided to support high quality public prekindergarten programs.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 346.