

Safety in Public Schools

(Adopted 1999; amended 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017)

WHEREAS, safety in public schools is important to local boards of education for the protection of students and staff, as well as a necessary element for a good learning environment; and

WHEREAS, threats to maintaining public school safety may be caused by a variety of factors both within and outside the school environment; and

WHEREAS, school safety issues arise in the daily operation of school facilities and services involving buses, science labs, kitchens, and boiler rooms; and

WHEREAS, school safety issues arise in the daily administration of school discipline policies and procedures, including the suspension and expulsion of students for disruptive behavior; and

WHEREAS school safety issues arise as school systems develop plans to respond to natural, accidental and technological incidents, including weather events, industrial accidents, network security and data breaches, acts of terrorism, hate crimes and other criminal acts; and

WHEREAS, public school safety issues and strategies vary from school system to school system; and

WHEREAS, safety in public schools requires adopting and implementing policies and procedures to educate staff and students about ways to reduce risks in the school setting and to respond to safety incidents when they arise; and

WHEREAS, safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general; and

WHEREAS, public school systems are mandated by state law to admit all individuals between the ages of 5 and 21 free of charge; and

WHEREAS, providing a free public education for all in safe learning environments requires that students maintain regular school attendance and are responsible for complying with rules of conduct and the law; behaviors which are essential to their learning, graduation, and success in college and career; and

WHEREAS, maintaining safe schools sometimes requires the suspension or expulsion of students, and suspension and expulsion are essential disciplinary tools that should be complemented with a continuum of school and community-based counseling and alternative education services; and

WHEREAS, students involved in gangs and gang-related activities in Maryland's public schools present serious school safety issues and the Safe Schools Act of 2010, supported by MABE, was

enacted as a comprehensive approach to enhancing state and local gang-related policies and programs in conjunction with local law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 have resulted in federal, state, and local efforts to ensure that school systems develop coordinated emergency readiness, response, and recovery plans and procedures; and

WHEREAS, in 2004 the State Board of Education adopted regulations requiring local school systems to adopt emergency plans and conduct drills to prepare for violent or traumatic events on school grounds, including technological or natural disasters; and

WHEREAS, following the tragic school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, the General Assembly called for a review of all emergency plans and the State Board adopted new regulations to specify the six types of emergency drills that all schools must conduct each year; and

WHEREAS, in 2013 the state capital budget included \$25 million to support projects such as facility risk assessments, security cameras, photo identification systems for visitor sign-in, lockset changes for interior and exterior doors, hardening glass areas, and relocating school office areas to a school's primary entrance area, among others; and

WHEREAS, in 2013 the General Assembly enacted and funded the creation of the Maryland Center for School Safety, which is to serve as a clearinghouse for information and best practices, to provide and facilitate professional staff development, conduct training, and facilitate coordination and collaboration between local school systems; and

WHEREAS, in 2017 legislation was enacted to reduce the number of mandatory fire drills on schools based on whether the building is equipped with sprinklers and in accordance with the State Fire Prevention Code; and

WHEREAS, emergency management involves: 1. mitigation and prevention strategies to reduce risks to life and property; 2. preparedness and planning strategies, including drills, for routine and worst-case scenarios; 3. response strategies including intergovernmental coordination; and 4. recovery strategies to restore a positive learning environment after a crisis; and

WHEREAS, the adoption and implementation of risk management and school safety programs are sound educational and economic policy, recognizing the critical need to ensure continuity of operations in each of Maryland's public schools systems;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that MABE will strive to provide programs and services that enhance school safety through identifying and educating school boards and administrators about sound risk management and school safety policies and procedures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges federal, state, and local elected officials and other interested parties to work collaboratively with local boards of education to develop and implement local public school safety programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges federal, state, and local governments to ensure adequate and equitable funding for local public school safety programs, alternative education programs, and the wide array of mental health and public safety services provided by other public and private entities, which are essential to maintaining safe schools and access to a quality education for all of Maryland's students.