

BILL: House Bill 351
TITLE: Protect Our Students Act of 2018
DATE: March 1, 2018
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, opposes House Bill 351.

Local boards of education are deeply concerned that this bill, if enacted, would rewrite significant parts of the 2017 Protect Our Schools Act, and require corresponding changes in the now federally approved State Plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). MABE believes the Protect Our Schools Act of 2017 set reasonable guidelines for how Maryland measures student growth and school improvement under ESSA; and how the State Board can and should respond with resources to support improvements.

The Protect Our Schools Act also required that student performance results, called academic indicators, account for 65% of the overall statewide accountability system. This is clearly aligned with what ESSA intends when it requires that academic indicators are given “much greater weight” than any other measures of school performance. Contrary to the legislature’s guidance in 2017, this legislation would significantly raise the percentage of the accountability system based on student performance from 65% to 80%. This would result in much more weight being given to student test scores, and therefore much less weight given to other factors contributing to the well-rounded education and overall success of a school and its students.

Under ESSA, factors in addition to academic achievement as measured by test scores include: academic growth, progress toward English language proficiency, and the completion of a well-rounded curriculum. A major thrust of ESSA was to move away from the failed model of the No Child Left Behind Act which focused on reading and math scores at the expense of a well-rounded curriculum. NCLB also failed to give credit for student growth. These are federal changes that were supported by a broad national coalition including the National School Boards Association – changes which Maryland should uphold in our ESSA accountability plan.

MSDE and the State Board of Education have spent the past year carefully crafting the State’s ESSA Plan to align with the Protect Our Schools Act. Our State ESSA Plan was approved by the U.S. Department of Education on January 17, 2018. Maryland’s State accountability system for student and school performance should be allowed to move forward in accordance with the federally approved plan without undue interference from legislation in 2018 to change the rules midstream.

For these reasons, MABE urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 351.