

May 5, 2020

Dr. Karen B. Salmon  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Dr. Salmon:

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing Maryland's 24 local boards of education, requests your consideration of the following comments on the document and resources prepared by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) entitled "Maryland Together - Maryland Recovery Plan for Education - Response to Covid-19 and a Pathway Forward."

First, MABE greatly appreciates the department's approach, reflected throughout the plan, of providing discretionary guidance to local boards of education and superintendents to consider alternative approaches and adopt local options. MABE's support for this deference to local decision making and the ability to select specific strategies based on local priorities and available resources cannot be overstated.

Second, MABE recognizes the challenge in crafting a meaningfully comprehensive plan given the totality of the impact on student learning resulting from the school closures ordered in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report appropriately provides guidance on an array of programs and services including school calendars and course scheduling, delivery of instruction and assessments, meeting the needs of our students requiring special education services, student supports including mental and behavioral health, and professional development for our teachers, principals, and other staff.

Based on our review of the draft plan, and the input of stakeholders on the May 4th statewide call, we request that the State's education recovery plan reflect additional funding and policy issues and include a more fully developed consideration of educational equity. In addition, MABE requests the consideration of creating a formal stakeholder group for the purpose of ongoing dialogue on planning and implementing COVID-19 education recovery strategies.

The ongoing and unprecedented effects of COVID-19 are enormous in terms of public health and the economy. In this light, local boards confront daunting challenges in providing continuity of learning to as many students as possible on a daily basis, and at the same time plan for the eventual returning of students to school buildings for instruction. Among these challenges, and uncertainties, are the specter of a substantial loss of state and local revenue to support teaching

and learning, and increased costs of maintaining a largely online system of teaching and learning while simultaneously transitioning students and staff back to their school facilities and classrooms.

Specifically, the draft plan appears to conclude, based on research, that reallocating instructional time is not nearly as effective as adding time. MABE defers to the department's research and conclusion on this complex issue. However, the draft plan does not acknowledge that this option is clearly much more costly. MABE therefore requests the addition of either a reference to the policy option of adding instructional time as having a greater fiscal impact, or a separate section acknowledging more generally that the array of policy options presented in throughout the plan present a corresponding array of financial costs.

Similarly, whether a local school system reallocates instructional time, or increases the amount of time, such policies inevitably require negotiations with employee associations representing the bargaining interests of our certificated educators and noncertificated staff. Therefore, MABE requests that this context for this policy issue be included in the plan. Again, in the alternative a section could be added referencing the issue of collective bargaining as it arises under any policy area involving wages, hours and working conditions of school employees.

In light of these concerns, MABE respectfully requests that the State's education recovery plan address the relative costs of adopting certain strategies and identify that certain policy areas are governed at least in part by locally negotiated collective bargaining agreements.

Regarding educational equity, the State criteria for continuity of learning plans does require that each plan include "A description of how the school system plans to address equity" including how the school system addresses special education, English Learners, Students with Academic Needs, Homeless Students and Gifted Students. However, the recovery plan itself does not include any section focusing on the issue of educational equity, or referencing the State Board's educational equity policy and equity lens. Therefore, MABE requests that these revisions be reflected in the state recovery plan.

Lastly, MABE reiterates the request that the department establish a stakeholder group dedicated to engaging with the department and State Board on statewide and local implementation of the COVID-19 education recovery plan.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. On behalf of all local boards, thank you again for your leadership and the dedication of your department in preparing this thoughtful and comprehensive plan so that school systems are informed and supported in making extraordinarily complex funding and policy decisions in the best interests of our nearly 1 million students.

Sincerely,



Martha James-Hassan  
President

Copy to:

MABE Board of Directors  
Local Board President/Chairs  
Superintendents of Schools/Chief Executive Officers  
Frances Hughes Glendening, MABE Executive Director  
Mary Pat Fannon, PSSAM Executive Director