

Mavis Ellis, MABE Legislative Committee Vice Chair
Statement to the House Ways and Means and Appropriations Committee
Briefing on Education Issues Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic
June 11, 2020

I am Mavis Ellis, chair of the Howard County Board of Education, and vice chair of MABE's Legislative Committee.

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting that school board governance is about adopting sound policies and delegating certain decision-making to your superintendent and administrative team, and communicating clearly with students, parents, and the larger community on how we are doing – and where we can do better. Providing clarity (for ourselves let alone our parents) is frustrated and tested every day by the uncertainties surrounding school closures and safe re-openings, the equity and funding concerns already discussed by my colleagues, and the very diverse, and adverse, circumstances of our students, families, and communities.

MABE believes we best serve our communities and students through a balance of allowing local flexibility to adopt priorities and pursue new initiatives, but also adhering to uniform statewide standards on behalf of each student. Geography and economic circumstance should not determine a child's future.

Yes, local boards cherish and guard the local board governance role, but we also recognize the imperative for statewide standards from MSDE and, particularly in the case of COVID-19, from the Maryland Department of Health. As our joint letter with the superintendents' association states, we look forward to ongoing communication and collaboration with your committees and other state leaders toward the goal of achieving clarity on the many complex and unprecedented decisions that must be made in the weeks and months ahead. Our students, families, and staff deserve as clear a roadmap as we can provide.

Thank you for this opportunity to emphasize the critical role of local board governance and community engagement, particularly in these times of unprecedented uncertainty.