

August 31, 2020

Clarence C. Crawford, President  
Maryland State Board of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

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

Dear President Crawford and Dr. Salmon:

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes the actions proposed for the September 1, 2020 meeting of the State Board of Education to adopt new requirements for local education recovery and reopening plans. Maryland's nearly 1 million public school students and their families deserve as much stability and transparency as possible at the outset of this school year, not the last-minute disruption which would be caused by adopting the newly proposed standards for virtual learning.

MABE is troubled that there had been no indication prior to Monday, August 24, 2020 during a special meeting of the State Board, nor had there been any public discussion or private deliberations to the knowledge of MABE concerning adopting a minimum number of hours of synchronous daily instruction as a condition of the State's approval of local plans. To be clear, at no point in the previous versions, or current draft version, of the State's Education Recovery and Reopening Plan which governs the framework for local plans, is there any reference to statewide standards or requirements for synchronous or asynchronous instruction. Therefore, MABE opposes the imposition of a major revision to local plans and the deadline to not only revise local plans but also implement the changes by September 28<sup>th</sup>.

As you know, there are 13 policy areas, generally referred to by the State superintendent as the "non-negotiables" – mandatory minimum parameters for policies and procedures which must be reflected in each local plan in order to secure State approval. MABE assures the State Board that truly extraordinary efforts have been made by local school systems since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic and school closures in early 2020. These efforts include unprecedented and complex funding, policy, and operational issues such as how to safely operate school facilities, safely transport students, safely deliver direct instruction to students with special needs, address the salary, health, and leave benefits of employees, close the digital divide of access to the internet not only within school buildings but also throughout counties and Baltimore City, launch new virtual learning platforms for all students, and so many more.

MABE appreciates the high degree of collaboration between local school systems and MSDE throughout the past months. Most certainly, all local boards are determined to pursue ongoing dialogue toward state and local coordination as our educational strategies and other policies evolve in response to the pandemic.

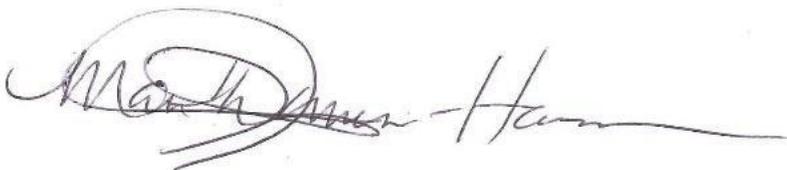
Unfortunately, the pending recommendation to adopt strict standards for minimum hours of daily synchronous instruction does not reflect any collaborative discussion with local education leaders or other stakeholders. For this reason, and the very late timing of the proposal at the opening of schools across the State, rather than weeks or even months ago when the State Plan and local plans were being developed, MABE respectfully requests that the department's recommendation be rejected by the State Board.

School superintendents, administrators and supervisory staff, principals, teachers, and parents have been engaged in developing local plans for months. They have done so with the benefit of state-level educational guidance from MSDE but without any complementary school health guidance from the Maryland Department of Health. However, on August 27, 2020, without prior notice or consultation with local school systems, health guidance was announced at a Governor's press conference. Just as the educational guidance provided in the draft State plan was greatly appreciated by local school systems in crafting their local plans, MABE looks forward to the further refinement of school health guidance tailored to the unique public health and safety issues school systems must resolve on behalf of all students, families, and staff.

Similarly, MABE appreciates the need to revisit and revise the MSDE guidance and standards for local plans. However, such revisions should be developed in a manner that provides ample opportunity for public input and the informed dialogue between school leaders and MSDE and the State Board. This has in no way been the case concerning the proposal before the State Board on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you for your consideration of this request to reject the proposal to adopt new requirements for the minimum number of hours of daily synchronous instruction per week to be reflected in the local plans for all 24 school systems, and to be implemented by September 28<sup>th</sup>, in just 4 weeks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Martha James-Hassan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name of the sender.

Martha James-Hassan, President  
MABE

cc:  
Local Board Presidents/Chairs  
Local Superintendents/CEOs  
Dr. Miya Simpson, Exec. Director, MSBE  
Mary Pat Fannon, Exec. Director, PSSAM