

The COVID-19 Pandemic & Public Education (New in 2020)

WHEREAS, in 2020 a novel coronavirus, COVID-19, resulted in a global pandemic and significant numbers of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths in Maryland by mid-April, a state of emergency declared by Governor Hogan in early May to mobilize State resources in response to COVID-19, and numerous subsequent executive orders to close nonessential businesses, limit public gatherings, impose a stay-at-home order, and effectively ceasing a large segment of economic activity in the State; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly adjourned on March 18, 2020 after passing landmark education legislation including the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act (HB 1300) and the Built to Learn Act (HB 1) and amended budget and revenue bills to address the public health costs arising from the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, on May 7, 2020 Governor Hogan vetoed the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act (HB 1300) citing concerns regarding the economic challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, action which triggered a provision of the Built to Learn Act (HB 1) making it contingent on the enactment of HB 1300 and therefore "null and void"; and

WHEREAS, the State Superintendent and State Board of Education ordered the closing of all public schools beginning in mid-March of 2020, at first incrementally and then through the end of the 2019-2020 school year; and

WHEREAS, the initial priorities for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and local school systems were protecting the health and safety of all students and staff, and the provision of school meals to all eligible students, which required unprecedented investments of staff and volunteer time and unbudgeted resources to distribute millions of meals from outside schools and other sites; and

WHEREAS, school systems were required to develop and provide to MSDE emergency continuity of learning plans for the remainder of the school year including:

- An overall description of how continuity of learning will be delivered to all students, including the distance learning platform, available technology, and how students will be accommodated who do not have access to a device or the internet;
- A description of the roles and responsibilities of district staff, school administrators, teachers, instructional assistants, students and parents;
- A sample teacher's day and student's day is included for elementary, middle and high school students;
- A plan of accountability that identifies how they monitor and assess student performance;
- A description of how the school system plans to address equity, specifically concerning students in special education, English language learners, students with academic needs, homeless students, and gifted students;
- A section that identifies the professional development plan for staff; and

- A description of the resources available for students; and

WHEREAS, MSDE issued the State Recovery Plan for Education which includes not only information to guide school systems in developing local plans to reopen schools based on stakeholder input and reflecting the uniqueness of individual school system financial and technological capabilities, but also requirements for the reopening of schools in Stage 2 to specify what each local school system must have in place for reopening; and

WHEREAS, MABE successfully advocated for a section devoted to education equity in the State Recovery Plan for Education, and the establishment of a permanent MSDE stakeholder group to provide input on COVID-19 related issues; and

WHEREAS, the public health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the passage of emergency federal legislation, including the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, to fund public health services and equipment, sick leave and unemployment benefits, and additional costs imposed on state and local governments and school systems, but without providing funding that may be used to replace state and local revenues lost due to the reduced economic activity during the crisis; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress has considered, and passed in the House of Representatives but not the Senate, legislation to provide substantial direct financial assistance to States and local governments to prevent draconian reductions in public services and payrolls, including deep cuts to public education; and

WHEREAS, MABE advocated directly with Maryland's federal delegation in support of the CARES Act, specific policy issues, and the need for legislation to provide additional federal funding to support public school budgets;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that MABE urges Maryland's federal delegation and the U.S. Congress to pass federal funding legislation to provide the needed education stabilization funds to ensure that Maryland can at least maintain current education funding levels and then begin to supplement that baseline with increased revenues as the national and state economic recovers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges the Governor and General Assembly to support funding and policy decisions which preserve to the maximum extent possible the current level of state and local funding for each of Maryland's 24 local school systems; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges the Governor and General Assembly to support funding and policy legislation consistent with preserving a balance of local board governance and policy decision making and a strong foundation of statewide standards to ensure that each student in every school system is guaranteed a high quality public education, including targeted interventions to address students identified with significant lost learning time, in the 2020-2021 school year.