

STUDENT HEALTH, NUTRITION & FITNESS

MABE POSITIONS

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education, representing all local boards of education in Maryland:

- ✓ **Supports** additional State and federal funding to ensure that all school systems, schools, and classrooms are prepared to offer safe and healthy learning environments for students and staff.
- ✓ **Supports** local board discretion to adopt policies and allocate resources to support improvements in student behavioral and physical health and fitness.
- ✓ **Supports** funding and policy decisions to strengthen school meal programs to provide healthy food for all students and expand access for economically disadvantaged students.
- ✗ **Opposes** a mandate for increased physical education instruction, including minimum minutes per week, without adequate state and local funding.
- ✗ **Opposes** a mandate to expand the responsibility of public schools to provide basic health services to include mental health services, without adequate state, local, and federal funding.

BACKGROUND

MABE is committed to securing state and federal funding in order to sustain school meal programs and the personnel who have been on the front lines throughout this crisis in meeting the needs of children and families in communities. The pandemic has raised many other student health issues, including the need for expanded telehealth services, Medicaid reimbursement for school health and mental health services including school psychology, and demands for health and safety related equipment, supplies, and staffing services. While federal legislation provided emergency funding in 2020, it was insufficient and provided only temporary assistance.

Local boards have always placed a very high priority on providing school facilities, school meals, and programs of instruction designed to promote the physical and behavioral health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures resulted in the emergency adoption of dramatic and costly changes in the preparation and delivery of millions of school meals. Fortunately, federal and state laws provide a strong foundation for high quality school meal services for Maryland's students. The 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act mandated reforms in school meal programs to improve the nutritional value of school meals. This legislation also created the community eligibility program (CEP) as an option for school systems with very high percentages of low-income children to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. Since 2015, the Grab & Go Meals in High Schools program has allowed breakfast to be served in any part of the school. And legislation passed in 2018 to phase-in state responsibility for the student share of the costs of reduced-price breakfasts and lunches.

The pandemic also resulted in the statewide cancellation of interscholastic sports and other opportunities for students to engage in organized physical activities. Local boards are committed to providing quality physical education programs in Maryland's public schools, including yearly instruction for all students in grades kindergarten through 8, and elective classes for students in grades 9 through 12. These programs must provide a "challenging instructional program that advances the student's knowledge, confidence, skills, and motivation to engage successfully in a lifelong healthy and active lifestyle." MABE has supported legislation to require that new elementary schools include gymnasiums rather than multi-purpose cafeterias, and legislation to ensure that coaches, parents, and students are fully informed about the risks and responses to concussions.

In 2017, MABE supported the Start Talking Maryland Act to expand drug education programs to include a unit on opioids; and require schools to provide naloxone. Other recent legislation includes a 2015 bill to require school counselor certification to include social and emotional development and indicators of trauma, abuse, depression, and other behavioral health issues; a 2016 bill requiring age-appropriate education on awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault; and a 2017 bill requiring suicide risk response training for all educators. In 2020, legislation passed to allow caregivers to administer medical cannabis to students on school premises.

For additional information, see [MABE's Resolution on Student Health and Fitness](#).