

BILL: Senate Bill 300
TITLE: Special Education - Learning Continuity Plan - Requirement
DATE: January 27, 2021
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 300 in favor of continuing to allow local school systems to serve students eligible to receive special education services in accordance with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the full array of existing state and federal requirements.

MABE does not believe it is reasonable to mandate that local school systems be uniformly required to provide an additional continuity of education plan to accompany each IEP in preparation for an emergency long-term school closure of 10 days or more in which special education services cannot be provided.

Local boards of education recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures have presented enormous challenges for all students, families, and educators. Through each school system's education recovery and reopening plan, and in accord with State and federal laws and regulations, school systems are working to provide all students eligible for special education services with access to continuity of learning through distance and in-person instruction and the delivery of other services. While the challenges of teaching and learning in special education have been extraordinary, MABE does not endorse adopting new State laws to expand the already extensive scope of mandated special education services, including the workload and diversion of professional staff time to create the continuity of learning plans proposed in Senate Bill 300.

Maryland's boards and educators place a very high priority on ensuring that students receive high quality special education programs and instruction to meet the unique needs of every disabled student. Maryland, and all other states, are mandated to provide a wide array of special education services in compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and federal and state regulations. IDEA requires that eligible disabled students receive special education and related services if they are between the ages of 3 and 21. The special education services mandated by IDEA must meet the legal standard of providing a Free Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE, and do so in the least restrictive environment.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 300.