

BILL: House Bill 266
TITLE: Student Education Equity Grant Program – Established
(Student Education Equity in Funding Act)
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 3, 2021
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) appreciates this bill's focus on facilitating the return of students to in-person instruction but opposes enacting House Bill 266 because the grants established for students who attend nonpublic schools would function as publicly funded school vouchers for nonpublic school tuition. MABE supports sustained public investments in public elementary and secondary education and opposes continued or increased public expenditures for nonpublic school programs.

MABE's opposes House Bill 266 based on opposition to nonpublic school vouchers, tuition tax credit programs, or other proposals that would threaten public school funding and public control over the use of public dollars. Nonpublic schools, with the exception of nonpublic special education schools, are not subject to the same legal requirements as public schools in areas such as teacher education and certification; academic standards, student assessments and other performance accountability measures; civil rights and anti-discrimination laws; and special education. Therefore, MABE has joined the National School Boards Association (NSBA) in urging Congress to reject using federal funds for voucher programs, including any special education vouchers, or for military children or other specific groups of students. Similarly, MABE urges Congress to oppose any amendments to make vouchers part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or COVID-19 related legislation.

MABE recognizes the historic and devastating impacts of the ongoing public health and economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 coronavirus. This is also an educational crisis, forcing school closures, emergency meal distribution, transitions to digital and distance teaching and learning, and reductions in available revenues to sustain and advance Maryland's outstanding but already inadequately and inequitably funded public education system. Local boards know that student learning will benefit from the return to in-person instruction. However, the health and safety of students and staff must continue to be a high priority and factored into the policy and administrative decisions of each local board and superintendent on whether and how to implement distance, hybrid, and in-person instruction.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 266.