

**BILL:** House Bill 998  
**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - In-Person Instruction and Related Services - Requirement  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**DATE:** February 24, 2021  
**COMMITTEE:** Ways & Means Committee  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 998.

MABE opposes this legislation in favor local board governance and superintendent and professional staff administration of the school reopening issues covered by this proposed legislation.

Local boards appreciate the bill's focus on securing in-person instruction for students, especially students in categories of highest need, in the 2021-2022 school year. MABE's 2021 legislative positions and priorities reflect the association's commitment to equity and excellence and to a strong educational recovery from the ongoing crisis on behalf of each of our nearly 1 million public school students. For MABE, educational equity means providing access to essential academic, social, emotional, and economic supports in order to engage each student in rigorous well-rounded instruction toward them achieving their highest potential as learners and citizens.

However, MABE strongly opposes the key provisions of this bill which would mandate not only a universal obligation to provide in-person instruction but also impose the mandate to accommodate the preference of a student's parent or guardian for continued remote learning. In these ways, the bill would severely limit the discretion of each local school system to adopt and implement educational policies and strategies that comply with state laws and guidance and deemed to be in the best interests of the local school system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a historic and devastating public health crisis, economic crisis, and quite clearly an educational crisis. The pandemic has forced school closures, millions of emergency school meals provided off-site, unbudgeted transitions to online and hybrid teaching and learning to ensure the health and safety of students and staff, and reductions in available state and local revenues. 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 factored into local decisions on whether and how to implement distance, hybrid, and in-person instruction.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 998.