

August 24, 2021

On Tuesday, August 24, 2021, Board President Clarence Crawford convened the meeting and was joined by members, including: Vice President Charles Dashiell, Jr., Shawn Bartley, Chuen-Chin Bianca Chang, Susan Getty, Vermelle Greene, Jean Halle, Rachel McCusker, Joan Mele-McCarthy, Lori Morrow, Warner Sumpter, Holly Wilcox, and student member Kevin Bokoum.

[Link to meeting agenda, materials, and video.](#)

Special Board Meeting on In-School Mask Mandate

At the conclusion of the regular meeting of the State Board a motion by board member Rachel McCusker was approved to hold a special meeting of the Board to discuss an emergency regulation for a statewide in-school mask mandate. This meeting will be held on Thursday, August 26th at 3 pm.

Public Comment

The State Board received the following public comments, all presented in person:

Cheryl Bost, President of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), introduced MSEA's new vice president Theresa Dudley, and asked the Board to adopt emergency regulations to impose a statewide mask mandate. She emphasized that the State Board was insistent that all schools reopen for in-person learning and that without a mask mandate schools are already experiencing quarantines of students and staff. State Senator Katie Fry Hester shared her perspective on the mental and social emotional health impacts of the pandemic on students. She applauded the work of Assistant Superintendent Mary Gable in forming the regional crisis teams and highlighted the provisions of the Blueprint bill establishing the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and providing significant funds to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students. Ms. Raven Bishop spoke as a Queen Anne's parent urging a statewide mask mandate. Catherine Carter, a parent and vision health and screening advocate, urged the State Board to support creating a state pediatric vision health database, completion of all required grade level screenings this school year, and support for the department's mental and behavioral health crisis teams. Veronika Carella, representing the Maryland Children's Environmental Health Coalition, urged the State Board to add school facilities projects to their state plan to utilize the funds provided by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act. She stressed that schools are not complying with integrated pest management and green cleaning products laws already in place which raises concerns about the health of school buildings as students return to in-person learning. A parent spoke in favor of emergency regulations to impose a statewide mask mandate to protect the health of students.

Consent Agenda

The Board approved the consent agenda including personnel actions and budget adjustments.

Virtual Learning Program Monitoring and Evaluation

The State Board received updates from Superintendent Mohammed Choudhury and staff on school system implementation of virtual learning and the department's ongoing work to monitor and evaluate these programs. Deputy Superintendent Carol Williamson reviewed the array of school system approaches and offerings of virtual learning and the department's intent to ensure that all virtual students are succeeding and being offered well-rounded programming. She identified attendance, accessibility for disabled students and universal design for learning standards, tutoring, social emotional learning, and access to extracurriculars, in addition to academic performance. Dr. Williamson outlined the plan to develop a comprehensive report by June 2022 on the outcomes within each of the virtual programs undertaken in the 2021-2022 school year.

Board member Rachel McCusker urged the department to consult educators on measures of attendance and engagement. Superintendent Choudhury shared that Texas adopted a statewide definition of virtual student attendance and engagement and that he strongly prefers this approach to Maryland's current approach of each local school system adopting its own standards. Board member Shawn Bartley asked whether school systems have been provided with standards for virtual learning programs and Dr. Williamson confirmed that they have. Board member Jean Halle raised concerns about the two school systems not offering any virtual option, and local policies regarding student and parent choice to switch back and forth between in-person and virtual learning. Board member Chuen-Chin Bianca Chang spoke to the need for digital equity and access. Superintendent Choudhury reiterated his intention to report on these issues at each monthly meeting.

[Virtual Program Monitoring Plan Presentation](#)

Blueprint Expert Review Team Program

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tiara Booker-Dwyer presented a comprehensive overview of the department's plan to implement the Expert Review Team program required by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act. She outlined the key responsibilities of the teams, including:

- Analyze the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in schools;
- Determine the underlying causes for student performance problems;
- Evaluate behavioral health services provided in schools, and
- Develop recommendations, measures, and strategies to address identified issues.

Dr. Booker Dwyer emphasized the magnitude of the program as involving a core of 60 expert review team members (10 teams of 6 members) who will be deployed to at least 10% of public schools (145 schools) in at least three different school systems each year beginning July 1, 2023. In addition, the law requires teams to visit schools in which students demonstrate learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2022-2023 school year. She outlined that members of teams will include:

- Two teachers with experience in the grade band, content, or type of school being reviewed;
- One school leader with experience in the type of school being reviewed;
- Two experts from entities with expertise in effective school improvement practices; and
- One behavior health expert from the Maryland School Mental Health Response Program Team.

Board members requested the participation of parents as team members and the engagement of students in the process.

[Expert Review Team Presentation and Draft Plan](#)

Learning Loss Recovery

Superintendent Choudhury and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Tiara Booker-Dwyer presented on the department's plan to utilize the state and local funding provided by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund and the requirement to measure and address the academic impact of lost instructional time on all students. Superintendent Choudhury noted that the intent is to kickstart the Blueprint's expert review team program through the review team program separately included in the department's plan to use federal COVID relief funds.

Dr. Booker-Dwyer reiterated the alignment of the ARP ESSER funded program and Blueprint expert review teams. She described the plan to create teams to review how school systems are addressing learning loss through evidence-based interventions and the effectiveness of interventions. To ensure funds are spent on experiences that maximize student learning in safe environments, MSDE will launch a comprehensive on-site and virtual review process. The process will focus on providing support to school systems, holding school systems accountable for addressing the impact of interrupted instruction, and fostering transparency in expenditure of funds. She emphasized that school systems have provided the department with two plans, a local application for ARP ESSER funds and a Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan. Dr. Booker-Dwyer outlined the thoroughness of the department's review of these plans and development of needed revisions.

Mask Mandate Discussion

At the conclusion of the discussion on the department's review of local reopening plans, several members of the State Board and Superintendent Choudhury engaged in a lengthy discussion on their strong support for a statewide mandate requiring the use of masks by all students and staff. Issues discussed included the legal authority for the Superintendent to deny local recovery and reopening plans that do not mandate masks, and the potential to adopt emergency regulations requiring masks, which Superintendent Choudhury stated he supports.

Board President Clarence Crawford spoke emphatically in support of greater accountability both for the State Board and local boards to make decisions, adopt policies, and invest the billions of dollars being provided to improve student learning to a degree not achieved in the past. Regarding student learning and mask mandates he stressed that if either the State Board or a local board is failing on

accountability and transparency they should be removed from office. He concluded that leaders must “either step up or step out of the way.”

[ARP ESSER Fund Review Team Presentation](#)

English Learners

Superintendent Choudhury and Chandra Haislet, MSDE’s Director of Accountability and Data, presented a detailed “Spotlight on English Learners” including the following:

- Description of Maryland English learners;
- Where our English learners are located;
- What programs, supports and services are provided to English learners;
- How English learners are identified and exited;
- Outcome data on English learners and recently exited ELs; and
- Update on the Maryland’s Blueprint for the Future EL workgroup.

The Board and Superintendent Choudhury discussed the high rates of EL student dropouts, status of bilingual education in Maryland, role of the Biliteracy Seal for students fluent in multiple languages, and opportunities for improvements in all of these areas.

[English Learner Presentation](#)

School Mental Health Response Teams

Mary Gable, Assistant Superintendent of the Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy, introduced the presentation on the department’s progress in establishing the Regional School Mental Health Response Teams required by the revised Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Act. Ms. Gable was joined by Dr. Sharon Hoover, Co-Director of the National Center for School Mental Health and Director of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Center for Safe and Supportive Schools within the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Superintendent Gable outlined the components of the program and services, including:

Clinical Support for Students, Families, and Schools

- Improve behavioral health services for Maryland’s children and youth to meet the needs of children/youth and their parents/caregivers
- Supplement student support services by providing clinical support and assisting in implementation of prevention strategies before more restrictive and costly interventions become necessary

Professional Development

- Provide training and support to local school system educators on evidence-based supports and services for students

Crisis Response

- De-escalate crisis events and build/strengthen relationships between schools and community resources
- Provide suicide assessments, safety planning, coping skills, therapy, and education

Ms. Gabel and Dr. Hoover emphasized the program is being developed and will be delivered through a partnership between the department and the University of Maryland School of Medicine and National Center for School Mental Health to provide support to MSDE for hiring, start-up, and ongoing training for the regional teams and local school system personnel.

[Mental Health Response Program Presentation](#)

Mobile Response and Stabilization System

Superintendent Choudhury introduced the presentation by Michelle Zabel, Assistant Dean and Director of the Institute for Innovation and Implementation within University of Maryland School of Social Work. Professor Zabel outlined the intent and components of the MRSS approach and the need to be as highly effective as possible not only in the education but also mental health sector in utilizing the federal funding now available. MRSS is specifically designed as an upstream intervention to:

- Meet the needs of children, youth and young adults, and their parents/caregivers
- De-escalate and ameliorate a crisis before more restrictive and costly interventions become necessary
- Ensure connection to necessary services and supports
- Deliver key services that shift from overuse of high-end services and supports to home- and community-based services

Professor Zabel highlighted it is essential for programs to be tailored to students rather than applying adult models. She also noted the MRSS approach is intended to disrupt care pathways such as visits to emergency rooms and hospitalization. She described MRSS as culturally responsive, trauma informed, and family and student centered, with outcomes that reduce policy involvement and intensive and costly health care services.

[MRSS Presentation](#)

Regulations

- [COMAR 13A.06.07.01,.03,.07-.21 Student Transportation – Permission to Publish](#)
The State Board received an overview from Gabe Rose, MSDE's Director of Student Transportation, and approved for publication in the Maryland Register an opportunity for public comment regulations to implement legislation enacted in 2021 to allow non-school bus student transportation options for local school systems.
- [COMAR 13A.07.14 Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct History – Permission to Publish](#)

The State Board approved for publication in the Maryland Register an opportunity for public comment regulations to implement legislation enacted in 2021 (HB 373) to modify law enacted in 2019 (HB 486) to enhance the protection of student safety by requiring intensive employer history reviews of all prospective employees.

- [COMAR 13A.06.03 Interscholastic Athletics in the State - Permission to Publish](#)

The State Board approved for publication in the Maryland Register an opportunity for public comment regulations to address the number of all-star contests students are eligible to compete in, and provide additional scheduling flexibility within the season limitations for wrestling.

Waivers

- [Request for Waivers Related to Interscholastic Athletics for the 2021-2022 School Year](#)

The State Board reviewed and approved the department's recommended statewide waivers in response to local school system requests related to requirements for interscholastic athletics as a result of the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to maximize opportunities for a continuity of participation. The waiver recommendations would apply to interscholastic athletics through June 30, 2022.

State Board Meeting Calendar

The State Board approved its [meeting calendar for 2022](#).

Board Governance and Operations Manual

The State Board approved its Governance and Operations Manual.

Special Board Meeting on In-School Mask Mandate

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