

Safety and Security in Public Schools

(Adopted 1999; amended 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021)

WHEREAS, safety in public schools is important to local boards of education for the protection of students and staff, as well as a necessary element for a good learning environment; and

WHEREAS, threats to maintaining public school safety may be caused by a variety of factors both within and outside the school environment; and

WHEREAS, school safety issues arise in the daily operation of school facilities and services involving buses, science labs, kitchens, and boiler rooms; and

WHEREAS, school safety issues arise in the daily administration of school discipline policies and procedures, including the suspension and expulsion of students for disruptive behavior; and

WHEREAS school safety and security issues arise as school systems develop plans to respond to natural, accidental and technological incidents, including weather events, industrial accidents, network security and data breaches, acts of terrorism, hate crimes and other criminal acts; and

WHEREAS, public school safety and security issues and strategies vary from school system to school system; and

WHEREAS, safety in public schools requires adopting and implementing policies and procedures to educate staff, students, and families about ways to reduce risks in the school setting and to respond to safety incidents when they arise; and

WHEREAS, safety in public schools is the joint responsibility of local boards of education, school administrators and staff, students, parents and guardians, law enforcement and other public safety agencies, human services agencies, and the community in general; and

WHEREAS, public school systems are mandated by state law to admit all individuals between the ages of 5 and 21 free of charge; and

WHEREAS, providing a free public education for all in safe and secure learning environments requires that students maintain regular school attendance and are responsible for complying with rules of conduct and the law; behaviors which are essential to their learning, graduation, and success in college and career; and

WHEREAS, maintaining safe schools sometimes requires the suspension or expulsion of students, and suspension and expulsion are essential disciplinary tools that should be complemented with a continuum of school and community-based counseling and alternative education services; and

WHEREAS, students involved in gangs and gang-related activities in Maryland's public schools present serious school safety issues and the Safe Schools Act of 2010, supported by MABE, was enacted as a comprehensive approach to enhancing state and local gang-related policies and programs in conjunction with local law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 resulted in federal, state, and local efforts to ensure that school systems develop coordinated emergency readiness, response, and recovery plans and procedures; and

WHEREAS, in 2004 the State Board of Education adopted regulations requiring local school systems to adopt emergency plans and conduct drills to prepare for violent or traumatic events on school grounds, including technological or natural disasters; and

WHEREAS, following the tragic school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, the General Assembly called for a review of all emergency plans and the State Board adopted new regulations to specify the six types of emergency drills that all schools must conduct each year; and

WHEREAS, in 2013 the state capital budget included \$25 million to support projects such as facility risk assessments, security cameras, photo identification systems for visitor sign-in, lockset changes for interior and exterior doors, hardening glass areas, and relocating school office areas to a school's primary entrance area, among others; and

WHEREAS, in 2013 the General Assembly enacted and funded the creation of the Maryland Center for School Safety, which is to serve as a clearinghouse for information and best practices, to provide and facilitate professional staff development, conduct training, and facilitate coordination and collaboration between local school systems; and

WHEREAS, in 2017 legislation was enacted to reduce the number of mandatory fire drills on schools based on whether the building is equipped with sprinklers and in accordance with the State Fire Prevention Code; and

WHEREAS, a mass school shooting occurred on Feb. 14, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida; and a tragic school shooting occurred on March 20, 2018 at Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County, Maryland; and

WHEREAS, the Maryland Safe to Learn Act was enacted to comprehensively reform school security by:

- Establishing a School Safety Subcabinet and an Advisory Board;
- Increasing funding for programs, staff, and regional locations for the Maryland Center on School Safety (MCSS);
- Requiring local assessment teams for the identification of, and intervention with, students or other individuals who may pose a threat to school safety;

- Requiring school systems to designate a certified school safety coordinator;
- Requiring school systems to conduct annual safety evaluations of each school;
- Requiring all school resource officers (SROs) and school safety and security personnel to complete a specialized curriculum;
- Requiring school systems to report on schools with assigned SROs and, if not, how adequate local law enforcement will be provided;
- Authorizing regulations to incorporate active shooter preparedness training in the annual schedule of school safety drills;
- Requiring local school systems to designate a mental health services coordinator; and
- Exempting local school system and law enforcement safety evaluations, plans and policies from the Public Information Act; and

WHEREAS, when the Safe to Learn Act passed in 2018, it mandated the development of a comprehensive curriculum for all SROs and any other designated school security personnel, including a 40-hour, 5-day training program focusing, in part, on restorative practices, school-based mediation, implicit bias, maintaining a positive school climate, and informal counseling roles and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground under the knee of a police officer who was subsequently convicted of murder, sparked nationwide protests and debates on the need for police reforms, including reforms to SRO programs; and

WHEREAS, in 2021 the Maryland legislature considered but did not enact bills to reform or eliminate SRO programs; however, major police reform legislation that was enacted regarding the police officers' bill of rights, police misconduct, use of force and arrest procedures, use of body-worn cameras, and training, will impact all law enforcement officers including SROs; and

WHEREAS, emergency management involves: 1. mitigation and prevention strategies to reduce risks to life and property; 2. preparedness and planning strategies, including drills, for routine and worst-case scenarios; 3. response strategies including internal and intergovernmental communication and coordination; and 4. recovery strategies to restore a positive learning environment after a crisis; and

WHEREAS, the adoption and implementation of risk management school safety programs, and security enhancements, both programmatic and capital, are sound educational and economic policy, recognizing the critical need to ensure continuity of operations in each of Maryland's public school systems; and

WHEREAS, school systems in Maryland and nationally are experiencing an increased rate of cyberattacks, including ransomware attacks, which can disrupt teaching and learning and other school system operations and impose burdensome costs;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that MABE will strive to provide programs and services that enhance school safety and security through identifying and educating

school boards and administrators about sound risk management and school safety and security policies and/or procedures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges federal, state, and local elected officials and other interested parties to work collaboratively with local boards of education to develop and implement local public school safety programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will advocate for increased state funding to support the work of local school systems, and partner with local government organizations and others to advocate for state and local agency funding, to ensure that the Safe to Learn Act is implemented with fidelity in accordance with local board policies and school system determinations of the programs and services necessary to keep all Maryland students safe in school; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE supports a holistic approach to training SROs and other school security staff as essential to maintaining safe schools and access to an equitable, high quality education for all of Maryland's students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges federal, state, and local governments to ensure adequate and equitable funding for local public school safety and security programs, capital improvements, alternative education programs, and the wide array of mental health and public safety services provided by other public and private entities, which are essential to maintaining safe and secure schools and access to a quality education for all of Maryland's students.