



CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS 2023-2024

Digital and Distance Learning

(Adopted 1994; readopted 1997; amended 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2020, 2021, 2023)

WHEREAS, the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) has consistently supported the expanding role of digital learning and educational technology as integral to college and career readiness for all students; and

WHEREAS, MABE has advocated for funding and policy initiatives to close the “digital divide” to provide and promote access inside and outside the school setting for all students to educational resources through information technology; and

WHEREAS, MABE has supported state efforts to ensure student data privacy and the incorporation of universal design for learning (UDL) standards in the use of educational technology; and

WHEREAS, MABE has supported state legislation to enhance local school system flexibility to implement virtual learning programs and federal legislation to enhance the E-Rate program’s funding for digital devices and information technology through fees assessed to telecommunications companies; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in statewide school facility closures and necessitated the immediate transition to distance learning through access to online platforms and other instructional materials from mid-March through the end of the school year; and

WHEREAS, the demands on local school systems to provide almost exclusively online instruction to Maryland’s nearly 1 million students, including the provision of tens of thousands of digital devices, highlighted the significant and inequitable gaps in student, family, and community access to the broadband services needed to access online instruction; and

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) required each school system to develop and submit continuity of learning plans including the following components:

- An overall description of how continuity of learning will be delivered to all students, including the distance learning platform, available technology, and how students will be accommodated who do not have access to a device or the internet;
- A description of the roles and responsibilities of district staff, school administrators, teachers, instructional assistants, students and parents;
- A sample teacher's day and student's day is included for elementary, middle and high school students;
- A plan of accountability that identifies how they monitor and assess student performance;
- A description of how the school system plans to address equity, specifically concerning students in special education, English language learners, students with academic needs, homeless students, and gifted students;
- A section that identifies the professional development plan for staff; and
- A description of the resources available for students; and

WHEREAS, in June of 2020, MSDE issued a State Education Recovery Plan which extended the requirement for local continuity of learning plans within each local education recovery plan for the 2020-2021 school year; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the shifting of the federal, state, and local focus from the digital learning needs of students within schools to outside school facilities; and

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the federal government enacted the American Rescue Plan which included \$7 billion for an "Emergency Connectivity Fund" (ECF) to support schools and libraries in purchasing connectivity equipment and devices on behalf of students and educators and to close the digital divide and homework gap; and

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic Maryland enacted the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 which created the Office of Statewide Broadband, Digital Inclusion Fund, and Digital Connectivity Fund to provide grants to local governments and nonprofits to increase access to affordable high-speed internet and require collaboration with local school systems and community colleges to ensure that students have the ability to connect to broadband Internet that allows for full engagement in remote learning without disruptive lagging and periodic disconnection; and

WHEREAS, MSDE and local school systems have consistently collaborated on the development of digital learning standards which MABE believes are applicable to in-school instruction and distance learning; and

WHEREAS, Maryland's digital learning standards for students adopted by the State Board in 2019 include the following objectives:

- Empowered Learner: Students leverage technology to take an active role in choosing, achieving, and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by research;
- Digital Citizen: Students recognize the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of living, learning and working in an interconnected digital world safe, legal and ethical;

- Knowledge Constructor: Students curate (select and evaluate) a variety of digital resources to build knowledge and produce creative artifacts to make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others;
- Innovative Designer: Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful, or imaginative solutions;
- Computational Thinker: Students develop processes and employ strategies for understanding and solving problems in ways that leverage the power of technology;
- Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively using the platforms, tools, styles, formats and digital media appropriate to their goals;
- Global Collaborator: Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally; and

WHEREAS, in 2023 legislation was enacted to provide new definitions and standards for the short-term use of virtual learning due to inclement weather, the operation of permanent virtual schools established by local boards with State Board approval, and the terms and conditions for a long-term shift to virtual learning, as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports state and local efforts to pursue the effective use of blended and virtual learning initiatives; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges the Governor, General Assembly, and State Board to develop, implement, and fund an initiative to ensure equitable investments in Maryland's 24 local school systems in the educational technology necessary to accommodate student learning, whether in a school building or through distance learning, for all Maryland public school students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE urges the Governor, General Assembly, and State Board to develop, implement, and fund an initiative to ensure equitable investments in Maryland's 24 local school systems in the educational technology necessary to accommodate student learning to eliminate the "digital divide" in all Maryland schools, communities, and students' residences; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will advocate for federal funding and programs, including reforms to the E-Rate program, to ensure universal access to broadband services essential to the ability of all students and educators to engage in digital learning in schools, communities, and students' residences; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will advocate for sufficient state and federal funding to ensure that MSDE and local school systems can meet the state and federally mandated student assessment, data analysis, and reporting requirements; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that MABE will continue to support programs to:

- Prepare students for college and career readiness through access to online learning, personalized learning, digital devices, and high-quality digital content;
- Create a fully technology-proficient PreK-12 educator workforce; and
- Provide equitable access to current and emerging digital resources and infrastructure for all students and educators and expanded opportunities for parents and guardians, families, and communities.