Maryland Association of Boards of Education
2024 Legislative Positions

SCHOOL FACILITIES FUNDING FOR EQUITY & EXCELLENCE

MABE POSITIONS

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education, representing all local boards of education in Maryland:

- ✓ **Supports** a state capital improvement program of at least $450 million in addition to the Built to Learn program to expand prekindergarten and career and technical education school facilities called for by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and to provide the State's share of school construction and renovation project costs to guarantee high quality teaching and learning environments.
- ✓ **Supports** continued funding for the Aging Schools Program, the School Safety Grant Program, and other projects to improve the health, safety, and environmental sustainability of school facilities.
- ✓ **Supports** the pursuit of innovative construction and financing strategies to maximize the capacity of state and local governments to fund high-quality school facility projects.
- ✗ **Opposes** any legislation or school construction program regulations or actions which would limit local authority over school facility design, construction, procurement, maintenance, or operations.

BACKGROUND

For MABE and Maryland's 24 local school boards the mission to provide all Maryland students with high performing school facilities conducive to learning is a top priority. Local boards appreciate the State's investments in the annual capital budget for new schools and major renovations, and targeted investments to support aging schools, school safety projects, HVAC and lead remediation projects, energy efficiency projects, and projects to address significant enrollment growth. In addition, the State is fulfilling the commitment to fund 21st Century schools in the Baltimore City Public School System. In recent years, the General Assembly has formally adopted $450 million as the foundation for the annual capital improvement program for school construction. These initiatives demonstrate the State's commitment to investing in high quality school facilities and learning environments for all students.

However, all 24 school systems are confronting dramatic increases in school construction costs driven by inflation and labor costs, limiting the scope of planned investments in school projects. In addition, the Blueprint law requires the expansion of elementary schools for full-day prekindergarten for three- and four-year olds and expansion of career and technical education (CTE) programs which will require new technical schools. The Blueprint provides increased per pupil operating funding but does not include any capital funding for these "brick and mortar" projects. In addition, the pandemic challenged the operation of school facilities and highlighted the need for increased state and local funding for school maintenance staff and building systems.

In 2022, legislation passed to require the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) to update gross area baseline (GAB) standards for elementary, middle and high schools to align with the Blueprint (HB 1290). In 2023, the IAC updated COMAR regulations to increase the size of elementary schools by nearly 9%, and to provide additional space for English Language learners, community schools, CTE, PreK, tutoring, and collaborative teaching. MABE is advocating for a long-term plan to adequately and equitably fund statewide improvements in school facilities in light of major Blueprint programs and other cost drivers.

Recent updates include legislation enacted in 2023 (HB 458) to establish the IAC as an independent state agency, and require feasibility analyses of the use of alternative energy sources for new school construction projects, including wind, solar, and geothermal. The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 provides a 5% increase in the state share of projects costs for new net zero school. The federal Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 provides funding for renewable energy projects. In 2022, legislation requires school designs to accommodate food waste composting. And the Safe School Drinking Water Act of 2021 mandates strict lead remediation.

The Maryland Constitution requires that the State provide a "thorough and efficient" system of public education and MABE believes that this includes the duty to equitably provide safe, high quality school facilities in which all students can learn. New schools and major renovations take years to plan and construct and our students and communities deserve solutions now. For additional information, see MABE's Resolution on Adequate and Equitable School Facility Funding.