

MABE NEWS BRIEF

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION

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For Immediate Release
December 11, 2023

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MAJOR NEW PROGRAMS LAUNCHED BY MABE IN 2023 TO BENEFIT MARYLAND SCHOOL SYSTEMS SHOW IMPRESSIVE EARLY RESULTS

Annapolis-based Public Education Nonprofit Tackling Soaring Healthcare Costs, Patient Access Issues, and Time to Care Act Costs in Maryland

Annapolis – In promising year-end business and wellness news, the [Maryland Association of Boards of Education](#) (MABE) today announced significant progress already achieved in two new statewide initiatives it launched in 2023 – the **MABE Health Center Program** through Everside Health, and the **MABE-MACo Time to Care Act Collaborative**. Enthusiastic early feedback received from Maryland school systems participating in the initiatives is particularly welcome, given ongoing budget challenges tied to implementation of the state’s costly Blueprint for Maryland’s Future plan to transform public education statewide.

MABE launched its **MABE Health Center Program** in early 2023 with the achievable goal of helping combat skyrocketing health care costs for school systems, while at the same time improving access to quality primary care for public school system employees and their families.

“Health care costs continue to outpace nearly every other line item when it comes to school systems’ already-stretched budgets. Having seen firsthand what health care costs have meant for Maryland public school systems for over 30 years, these costs arguably represent the single largest line item increase in every school system’s budget for three decades and counting,” noted Milt Nagel, Executive Director of MABE. “On top of that, we have severe issues with access to primary care, where people not only don’t have quick access to primary care, but may have no access to a primary care doctor at all. Access to quality primary health care is key to sustained long-term healthy outcomes – from both a personal and financial perspective.”

The still-shrinking number of primary-care physicians indeed is “reaching a tipping point ... beyond which many Americans won’t be able to find a family doctor at all,” according to a September 2023 *Washington Post* op-ed. A growing body of research indicates the glaring need for both availability of and access to primary care, and such care’s direct tie to improved health outcomes. At the same time, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in September 2023 that health insurance costs “are climbing at the steepest rate in years, with some projecting the biggest increase in more than a decade will wallop businesses and their workers in 2024. Costs for employer coverage are expected to surge around 6.5% for 2024.”

In response, the innovative new MABE Health Center Program is providing comprehensive primary care and brain health services to local school system employees and their dependents in Maryland, with the option for school systems to also offer the benefit to retirees. MABE reports it is seeing enthusiastic feedback from both program users and school board members.

What makes the MABE Health Center Program so unique is it effectively is concierge primary care for school system employees, Nagel emphasized.

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“Through it, patients can reasonable expect same-day or next-day care, whether for physical conditions or mental health needs,” he said. “The program dramatically helps avoid budget surprises since it is based on a fixed per-member per-month cost, and reduces misdiagnoses since it provides for more comprehensive primary health care visits. It supplements people’s existing health insurance instead of replacing it, and also does not replace people’s primary care physicians; MABE Health Center doctors often work directly with patients’ existing primary care doctors. The set-up of health centers also can be well-tailored for rural or urban counties, depending on specific needs.”

Through school systems’ early health center efforts, they’re seeing quick access to care, more accurate diagnoses, better outcomes, and health center staff who take time to know details of a patient’s available benefits so the best, most appropriate care can be provided, Nagel added. “This is a model of what streamlined, lower-cost and accessible health care *should* be,” he noted.

In an early vote of confidence, the Maryland General Assembly recognized the need for the new program, and issued an \$875k grant in its 2023 session for up-front costs to assist with establishing the new health centers. All such centers are expected to break even by or before two years from their opening, in large part due to reduced variable costs, improved diagnostic accuracy, and markedly reduced waits for needed care. St. Mary’s, Washington, and Wicomico Counties already have board-approved centers, projected to open before the end of the fiscal year; these three early counties join the first-established Queen Anne’s County health center.

In further news, MABE also announced this year the **MABE-MACo Time to Care Act Collaborative**. In May of 2023 Governor Wes Moore signed into law The Time to Care Act 2023, which under certain conditions provides Maryland employees access of up to 12 weeks of paid time off to care for themselves or their families.

Because the Time to Care Act mandates paid leave, MABE and MACo have been instrumental in efforts to pull together as many school systems, county governments, and other local government organizations as possible in efforts to increase purchasing power with national vendors who will administer the program. In the process, MABE expects to help save school systems millions of tax dollars, which instead can be redirected into other budgetary needs. While the Maryland Department of Labor is writing related regulations, MABE is well underway in its ongoing efforts to ensure all 23 Maryland counties and Baltimore City benefit from the bold new collaborative.

“We see a huge opportunity to help equip school systems with innovative, proven cost savings solutions so they can offer different options to school system employees who value and appreciate their benefits. Many employees, especially support staff, are working explicitly for health coverage and care access for themselves and for their families,” said Nagel. “Whether it’s health care or other costs, it only makes sense that we do all we can to help make our offerings the best they can be in today’s challenging climate. We’re still in early days for our initiatives launched this year, but I am optimistic that we will reach our goal of doubling the number of MABE Health Centers by this time next year, with the added goal of seeing that all Maryland school systems benefit from the MABE-MACo Time to Care Act Collaborative.”

For further details from Milt Nagel on these programs or MABE’s additional recent collaborations with health offerings Cancer Navigator, Switchbridge or Accarent Health, contact jbeltz@mabe.org.

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About MABE:

Founded in 1957, The Maryland Association of Boards of Education is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to serving and supporting boards of education in Maryland. MABE is a leading advocate for public education in the state. All 24 Maryland boards of education are members of MABE.