

SPECIAL EDUCATION

MABE POSITIONS

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

- ✓ **Supports** increased state, local, and federal funding and resources to support high quality special education programs and services.
- ✓ **Supports** maintaining the State's required share of the total costs for nonpublic placements of students.
- ✗ **Opposes** legislation to mandate expanded special education services beyond federal requirements.
- ✗ **Opposes** legislation to expand unilateral parental consent conditions or shift the burden of proof in special education decisions and disputes including IEP meetings and due process hearings.

BACKGROUND

Local boards of education place a very high priority on ensuring that students receive high quality special education programs and instruction to meet the unique needs of each student. Maryland's professional educators and school administrators are working within a very comprehensive federal and state legal and educational framework to serve special education students. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future law and other recently enacted laws further enhance funding levels and the quality of early intervention and special education services.

Maryland, and all other states, are mandated to provide a wide array of special education services in compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and federal and state regulations. IDEA requires that eligible disabled students receive special education and related services if they are between the ages of 3 and 21. The special education services mandated by IDEA must meet the legal standard of providing a Free Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE, and do so in the least restrictive environment. When IDEA became law in 1975, the federal government promised to fund 40 percent of the additional cost of educating children with disabilities and yet has never provided more than 20 percent. Maryland has historically provided additional special education funding through per pupil cost formulas. In addition, non-public special education placements are supported by local school systems paying 300% of the local share of the average per pupil, with costs above this amount shared between the State (70%) and school system (30%). In 2023, Maryland enacted a law to provide increased state and local funding to achieve pay parity for nonpublic special education school teachers relative to public school teachers (HB 448).

Since 2013, state legislation has been introduced to place the burden of proof on the local school system in a due process hearing that is held to resolve special education disputes. In Maryland, and nearly all states, the party initiating the action in a special education due process hearing, whether the parents or the school system, bears the burden of proof. This is consistent with the assignment of burden of proof in the American legal system and with a 2005 Supreme Court case arising from a complaint against the Montgomery County school system (*Schaffer v. Weast*). In 2019, the General Assembly's multi-year study of the IEP process, staff allocations, and resources for parents was completed without recommending shifting the burden of proof.

As a meaningful alternative to shifting the burden of proof, bills passed in 2014 to ensure that parents are informed of procedural safeguards, rights and responsibilities, and available services; and in 2017 to require parental consent for certain decisions adopted by the IEP team. A 2016 law required the translation of IEPs into the parents' native language, and a 2021 bill clarified the independent evaluation process. In 2022, a bill passed to prohibit public schools from using seclusion as a behavioral health intervention and to prohibit, with exceptions, a public or nonpublic school from using physical restraint as a behavioral health intervention. In these ways Maryland has mandated expanded special education procedures and services beyond federal requirements.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, other state laws, and the Maryland Leads grant program, provide funding and policy reforms to invest in special education programs and services, enhance the positive role of early screenings and interventions to identify and respond to learning difficulties, reduce the identification of students for special education services, and improve the lifelong learning outcomes for students.

For additional information, see MABE's [Resolution on Special Education](#).