

STUDENT HEALTH, NUTRITION & FITNESS

MABE POSITIONS

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

- ✓ **Supports** additional State and federal funding to ensure that all school systems, schools, and classrooms are prepared to offer safe and healthy learning environments for students and staff.
- ✓ **Supports** local board discretion to adopt policies and allocate resources to support improvements in student behavioral and physical health, nutrition, and fitness.
- ✓ **Supports** funding and policy decisions to strengthen school meal programs to provide healthy food for all students and expand access for economically disadvantaged students.
- ✗ **Opposes** mandates to expand the responsibility of public schools to provide physical and behavioral health services without adequate state, local, and federal funding.

BACKGROUND

Local boards have always placed a very high priority on providing school facilities, school meals, and programs of instruction designed to promote the physical and behavioral health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. MABE advocates that legislation addressing specific student health issues such as diabetes, allergies, medical cannabis, and other chronic and acute conditions reflect the input of school health professionals and the consideration of available staff and resources.

There are many other examples of student health-related laws enacted in recent years. A 2016 law requires age-appropriate education on awareness and prevention of sexual abuse. The Start Talking Maryland Act passed in 2017 to expand drug education programs to include a unit on opioids and require schools to provide naloxone. Another 2017 law requires suicide risk response training for all educators. A 2020 law allows caregivers to administer medical cannabis to students on school premises. In 2021, bills passed to require the provision of menstrual hygiene products, programs and lactation space for pregnant and parenting students, school-based health center use of telehealth, and pandemic-related legislation. A law mandating school-based seizure action plans and staff training passed in 2022.

Local boards recognize the state role in governing student health issues through laws and regulations and advocates that such requirements not be overly prescriptive, costly, or burdensome. MABE advocates that local school systems and our dedicated school nurses and other health professionals are consulted as new requirements for board policies and school-based practices are considered. Student health issues addressed in this manner include diabetes, anaphylactic allergies, sickle cell disease, epilepsy and other seizure disorders, medical cannabis, and concussions. In light of the broad scope and staff-intensive nature of current student health mandates, MABE urges the legislature to consider the costs and benefits of new legislation.

Regarding physical education, MABE supports the State's charge to provide high quality physical education programs by providing a "challenging instructional program that advances the student's knowledge, confidence, skills, and motivation to engage successfully in a lifelong healthy and active lifestyle." State law requires physical education instruction for all students in grades kindergarten through 8, and through elective classes for students in grades 9 through 12. To enhance elementary school programs, MABE supported the law requiring all new elementary schools to include gymnasiums rather than multi-purpose cafeterias.

For many years, MABE has led advocacy for federal and state legislation to improve and expand the scope of school meal programs, including the community eligibility provision (CEP) program providing free meals throughout high-poverty schools. Since 2015, the Grab & Go Meals in High Schools program has allowed breakfast to be served throughout schools; and a 2018 law phases-in state responsibility for the student share of the costs of reduced-price meals. MABE continues to advocate for increased state and federal funding to expand access to nutritional school meals for students before, during, and after school.

For additional information, see MABE's [Resolution on Student Health and Fitness](#).