



SB966 VIRTUAL SCHOOLS – STATEWIDE EDUCATION PLATFORM – PROCUREMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT

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EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

LETTER OF INFORMATION

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) is submitting a letter of information on **SB966 Virtual Schools – Statewide Education Platform – Procurement and Establishment**. This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to make a procurement for a statewide virtual education platform on an expedited basis with the approval of the State Board of Education. It authorizes virtual schools to operate in the State on a year-round basis. The bill requires MSDE, in accordance with the expedited procurement process, to issue a request for proposals for a statewide platform to provide virtual education on or before May 1, 2021. It requires MSDE to award a contract for the virtual education platform on or before June 1, 2021. The bill also requires MSDE to establish a grant program to assist a local school system in transitioning to using the virtual education platform. Grants are authorized to provide funding to local school systems for professional development, preparing and adapting MSDE-approved classes, and administrative staff time to support the transition. Each local school system must complete a virtual learning self-assessment. The bill establishes the priority for enrollment in virtual schools and provides for a lottery to select students for a virtual school if demand exceeds availability. It requires each county board of education to adopt a policy to allow a student to attend a virtual school in that county beginning in the 2021-2022 school year.

AACPS appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students. We believe that there is value in a statewide platform and the additional clarity around the use of virtual learning in a crisis.

It is important to note that local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing law. In fact, AACPS is currently looking to build a virtual school option for current home instruction students as a program of choice in the upcoming school year for targeted middle and high school students who have been successfully enrolled in home instruction. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in statewide school facility closures which compelled the immediate transition to distance learning through access to online platforms and other instructional materials from mid-March 2020 to the present.

AACPS recommends that the bill be amended to add the Maryland Association of Boards of Education to the entities with which MSDE will consult in the review and evaluation of requests for proposals for the statewide platform established under the bill.

AACPS does have concerns that this legislation will have a fiscal impact and, therefore, create an unfunded mandate. For example, AACPS would be required to hire a project manager to provide oversight of

enrollment, instructional quality, standard/credit acquisition, and compliance with all State, school system, and vendor requirements. Additionally, a counselor or registrar would be needed to support course decisions as well as college and career readiness platforms aligned to State and school system policies and regulations. AACPS is also concerned that a shift to universal management system would be costly. Local school systems around the State currently have a learning management system in place in their respective districts. In fact, AACPS recently procured a learning management system at a cost of \$1 million. In addition, MSDE has also purchased a learning management system. As such, it is imperative that MSDE and local school systems will not be required to purchase new learning management systems as a result of this legislation.

Thank you for consideration of this information regarding SB966.