

SB 0966 (MSC Testimony).pdf

Uploaded by: DiPietro, Jonathon

Position: FAV



Mr. Jonathon DiPietro, Director
Mr. Hunter Craig, Assistance Director
Mr. Christopher Lidard, Outreach Coordinator
Ms. Lauren Raskin, Outreach Coordinator

BILL: **SB 966 - Virtual Schools – Statewide Education Platform – Procurement and Establishment**

SPONSOR: **Senator Katie Fry Hester**

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

Friday, March 26, 2021

SB 966

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, we are writing in favor of SB0966 - Virtual Schools Statewide Education Platform.

Our most vulnerable black, brown and poor students are falling through the cracks. We see it with our own eyes in our communities, and it is reaffirmed in the news. It is the black, brown and poor students who are not appearing online. Without the structure of the classroom, they are struggling to direct their own learning. Their parents or guardians often lack the time or capacity to support their learning. Many times, there is not enough connectivity to reliably access online instruction. Time for learning is devoted instead to trying to secure food. Immigrant families who often rent just a room or a closet lack the protections against eviction afforded to those with formal lease agreements. Heightened forced distancing has made them uniquely vulnerable to being put out onto the streets. Thus, in these critical times, it is imperative to see investment in education as an investment in our State's economic and overall recovery. These are NOT mutually exclusive; they are critically intertwined. Relief stemming from the State must include education support for our most vulnerable students.

Despite deep commitment and exhaustive effort by the Maryland State Department of Education to establish continuity of learning, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has aggravated long existing racial and ethnic inequities and socio-economic risk factors, rendering it extremely challenging, if not impossible, for many of our black, brown and poor students to learn. Left unaddressed, this learning loss resulting from COVID-19 will set us back profoundly in our equity commitment. We risk undermining decades of investment and efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps for black and brown students. In order to evade the crippling effects of this pandemic, our response must be immediate, and our response must be aggressive; we must continue to reimagine and reinvent a system which does not serve every student equally. The Maryland Student Coalition (MSC) believes it to be unequivocally imperative that the State Board of Education be granted authorization to make a procurement on an expedited basis, and as such, have the much needed jurisdiction to facilitate virtual school operation on a

year round basis. A universalized and solidified system will serve as the foundation for much needed accountability, and will most importantly ensure the establishment of extended learning opportunity programs for students across the state. Extended learning time will bridge the disconnect between students who have immensely suffered academically during the pandemic and their counterparts, ensuring that no student, regardless of race or economic background, will be left behind.

For the reasons stated above, we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 0966.

SB 966.Virtual School Platform .pdf

Uploaded by: Woolums, John

Position: FWA

BILL: Senate Bill 966
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Education - Requirements
DATE: March 30, 2021
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) appreciates the intent of Senate Bill 966 to establish a framework for a robust statewide approach to ensuring access for all students to high quality virtual learning. However, given the status of local school system actions to procure learning management systems and the State’s recent procurement of a learning management system for the Maryland State Department of Education, MABE requests several amendments.

First, MABE appreciates the bill’s focus on value of learning management systems in delivering high quality virtual learning. Local school system have been procuring such platforms during the pandemic and in preparation for robust virtual learning programs going forward. Similarly, the Board of Public Works recently approved the State’s recent procurement of a learning management system for the Maryland State Department of Education. Senate Bill 966 is largely consistent with these initiatives and, importantly, continues to provide ample discretion to local school systems relative to utilizing the State platform. MABE also appreciates the references to quality standards and the need for grant-funded professional development.

MABE has identified several concerns and with sections of the bill pertaining to conditions on student eligibility for enrollment in virtual schools, defining the teacher certification and bargaining unit membership of teachers using the State platform, and the mandate for policies establish parental choice-based virtual schools into the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated widespread home-based virtual learning and has highlighted a long-documented and persistent inequity of students that lack adequate broadband access. This digital divide, commonly known as the homework gap, impacts millions of students across the nation, and families and students in each of Maryland’s 24 local jurisdictions and school systems. The equity issues arising from virtual learning must continue to be of the highest priority in crafting a new statewide approach to virtual learning.

As the instructional environment for students has shifted from traditional classrooms in school buildings to virtual classrooms, the necessity for each student to have high-quality access to the internet is imperative. In 2021, MABE is supporting legislation, such as House Bill 97, the “Digital Connectivity Act of 2021,” legislation essential to Maryland’s efforts to improve necessary high-speed broadband required for twenty-first century learning both when students are school and when they are home. Maryland’s local boards of education are also urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Congress to focus on ways to improve the overall connectivity and digital infrastructure for all students and abandon efforts to make connectivity more difficult.

Closing the homework gap is a pressing national need that must also be addressed through reforms to federal laws and regulations so that all students have equitable access to Maryland's world class public education system. Therefore, MABE and local boards across the nation are enthusiastic about the benefits to students flowing from the \$7.2 billion in digital equity and access funding provided in the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 966 with amendments to address the concerns outlined above.

SB 966 virtual schools PSSAM OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Fannon, Mary Pat

Position: UNF



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
P.O. Box 12040
Baltimore, Md 21281
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

Bill: SB 966 – Virtual Schools – Statewide Education Platform – Procurement and Establishment
Date: March 30, 2021
Position: Oppose
Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Contact: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to make a procurement on an expedited basis with the approval of the State Board of Education; authorizes virtual schools to operate on a year-round basis; requires the Department, 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; requires the Department to award a contract for the virtual education platform on or before June 1, 2021; etc.

The Public Schools Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), **opposes SB 966.**

PSSAM continues to support local and state efforts to implement virtual learning initiatives, but we oppose any legislative mandates in the creation of these programs. Local school systems are already fully authorized to provide virtual learning opportunities under existing law, and every district is in the planning phase for their fall programs using the existing guidelines. While current regulations may be need to be adjusted as we reflect on our year-long distance learning, these changes should be contemplated by education experts including MSDE, superintendents, and teachers. We need to retain the ability to create these programs to meet and respond to our local priorities, which also includes working with students and communities.

Additionally, many of the provisions of this bill have been addressed, such as the procurement of a statewide learning management system. The Department recently purchased Canvas. The Blueprint legislation (HB 1372) also encompasses two provisions in this bill – the virtual self-assessment for local school systems, and the charge to use the nationally recognized “Quality Online Education Standards.” (Quality Online Programs: Second Edition, 2019).

In order to preserve the highest quality public education in Maryland, we need to enter the world of virtual learning with a deliberate, methodical, and research-based approach. We need to create virtual school programs that ensure academic success for our students and instills confidence for families knowing that their children will continue to receive the highest quality instruction. As already mentioned, we need to work collaboratively with the Department and teachers, giving them a meaningful role in the development of virtual schools. A more formally developed virtual learning model is imminent, but it now is not the time to rush into its implementation.

For these reasons, PSSAM requests an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 966.

LEA Request for Virtual School Program.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Hands, Zachary

Position: INFO



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

School System Request for Virtual School/ Virtual Program

Date: [Click or tap to enter a date.](#)

Val Emrich
Director of Instructional Technology
Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Emrich:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#) (School System) requests approval to develop and implement a virtual school within the school system based on the qualifications outlined in Maryland Education Code Annotation 7-1401 et seq. The virtual school proposal is attached.

School System Superintendent Signature: _____ Date: _____

Virtual School Administrator: _____ Date: _____

I approve this proposal.

State Superintendent Signature: _____ Date: _____

C: Monica Bias
Kim Bellinger



Virtual School Proposal Checklist

In accordance with the Maryland Education Code Annotation 7-1401 et seq., school systems wishing to establish their own virtual school must complete and submit the following information to MSDE:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Submit a completed request form and a proposal to the Maryland Superintendent of Schools for approval (7-1402).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Virtual School Proposal must include the following provisions for each enrolled student:
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Access to a sequential curriculum approved by the State Board that meets or exceeds school system standards (7-1403). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. An annually updated list of student courses that are being offered (7-1402). ii. All credit bearing courses must be listed in the State database of approved courses.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) A set length of time for learning opportunities per academic year that is required for public school students, unless the virtual school can show that the student demonstrated mastery or satisfactory completion of coursework (7-1403).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) Regular assessments in core areas of instruction (7-1403).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) Adopted curriculum shall include online interactive program components (7-1403).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e) A plan that includes the assignment of a school-based mentor to individual students or groups of students who will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. communicate with students at least once a week through face-to-face or virtual meetings, ii. communicate as needed with all other stakeholders (school system POC/Director of Program, parents, course facilitator, school, or counselors, etc.), iii. assist with time management, iv. troubleshoot technical issues, v. gather required materials of instruction, vi. proctor exams, vii. report grades and keep attendance records, and viii. arrange for tutoring (if necessary).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f) Enrollment procedures and processes (7-1402).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g) A process to provide the following items to parents and/or guardians (7-1404): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. instructional materials, including software, and ii. information on the closest public facilities that offer access to computers, printers, and Internet connection.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h) Assurance that all facilitators employed by the virtual school meet MSDE online facilitator requirements and are Maryland certified teachers (7-1402, 7-1405).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Identify the location of the administrative offices (7-1406).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> j) Include a financial sustainability plan to support the virtual school (7-1407).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> k) Provide the method that will be used to gather data for the yearly evaluation plan and report (7-1407). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Demonstrate increases in student achievement according to county and State academic standards. ii. Accountability and viability demonstrated through academic, fiscal, and operational performance.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> l) Set a timeline for the submission of an annual evaluation plan and report
<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> m) Comply with IDEA required services and interventions

SB 966 - LOI - Virtual Schools - Statewide Educati

Uploaded by: Hands, Zachary

Position: INFO



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

BILL: Senate Bill 966 **DATE:** March 30, 2021

SUBJECT: Virtual Schools - Statewide **COMMITTEE:** Education, Health, and
Education Platform - Procurement Environmental Affairs
and Establishment

POSITION: Information Only

CONTACT: Zachary Hands
410-767-0504 (Annapolis)
Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information for consideration regarding **Senate Bill (SB) 966, Virtual Schools - Statewide Education Platform - Procurement and Establishment**. MSDE is dedicated to supporting the expansion of high-quality virtual and hybrid programs that prepare students for college and careers. SB 966 supports this goal with certain timelines that are unattainable.

SB 966 authorizes MSDE to make a procurement on an expedited basis for a statewide platform. During the March 10, 2021 Board of Public Works meeting, a new robust learning management system platform (LMS) was approved for the state. This LMS platform is being used to house all MSDE online student and educator statewide courses as well as to support local school systems (LSSs) as they expand their virtual blended learning efforts. For over five years, there has been a process in place for each LSS to submit proposals for the development of blended virtual programs/schools and virtual programs/schools. (The forms are attached.)

SB 966 does not provide funding; however, implementation of the legislation will require a team that includes two additional education specialists to provide training, oversight of the LSS Local School allotted areas in the LMS platform, conduct required evaluations, create reports, and manage grant awards. The team will also include a LMS system administrator for virtual schools to maintain functionality of the system, assist with technical issues, enroll participants, and serve as the point of contact to the assigned LSS staff.

The July 2021 time constraint in SB966 will not provide adequate time to onboard the new LMS, hire staff, develop professional learning opportunities, and effectively integrate all LSS virtual blended program requests. Throughout the spring of 2021, MSDE will be engaged in migrating all existing courses to the new LMS and ensuring functionality.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 966**. For further information, please contact Zachary Hands, at 410-767-0504, or Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov.

AACPS SB966 Virtual School INFO 3.30.21.pdf

Uploaded by: Ortiz, Jeanette

Position: INFO



SB966 VIRTUAL SCHOOLS – STATEWIDE EDUCATION PLATFORM – PROCUREMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT

March 30, 2021

EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

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.