



HB1376 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION - VIRTUAL EDUCATION - REQUIREMENTS

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WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

LETTER OF INFORMATION

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) is submitting a letter of information on **HB1376 Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Education - Requirements**. This bill requires a teacher preparation program that includes training in the pedagogy of virtual education to include certain best practice principles. It requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to provide local school systems with guidance related to the periodic professional development and support for teachers to achieve virtual education best practice principles. It also establishes the Flip the Classroom Pilot Program to be implemented and administered by MSDE. The bill authorizes a public school to choose to participate in the Pilot Program. This bill also requires MSDE to establish a statewide universal learning management system on or before July 1, 2022. It authorizes a county board of education to create a permanent virtual school or to transition a school to virtual learning on a temporary basis in the event of a sustained event that prevents normal attendance at a school over several days. The bill also requires a county board of education to establish plans, methods, and processes for temporary and permanent virtual schools.

AACPS appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students. We believe that there is value in a statewide universal learning management system and in the additional clarity around the use of virtual learning – whether temporary or permanent – in a crisis. AACPS also appreciates the standards, resources, and professional development that are provided in the legislation.

It is important to note that local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing State 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. It is also important to recognize that school systems already do many of the things identified in the bill during the current virtual environment. For example, AACPS has equity and attendance plans, has a process to provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities, provides students with access to the same curriculum and standards, provides regular assessments, conducts regular check-ins with students, provides for virtual tutoring, has a plan to focus on students with the greatest need and the most learning loss, and uses multiple methods of communications amongst many other things.

With regards to the Flip the Classroom Pilot Program established under the bill, AACPS believes that a local school system should be the entity determining whether a school or schools participate in the program. Accordingly, the bill should be amended to provide this option to a local school system in lieu of a school independently making this choice as provided in Section 7-128(d)(2) of the bill. Similarly, AACPS

recommends that the language in Section 7-1406(a)(1) authorizing a school administrator of a temporary virtual school to establish learning centers be amended to authorize a local school system to establish additional learning centers. Alternatively, this language can be stricken in its entirety as school systems are already authorized to establish learning centers.

AACPS does have concerns that this legislation will have a fiscal impact and, therefore, creates an unfunded mandate. For example, AACPS would be required to hire a dedicated employee to coordinate the use of the universal management system. AACPS is also concerned that a shift to such a 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. As such, it is imperative that statewide universal learning management system selected by MSDE is compatible with the existing learning management systems utilized by the 24 local education agencies.

AACPS also has questions regarding the provision in the bill that would require a temporary administrative office in the State for a temporary virtual school. Presumably this school would already be in the county and the administrator and staff would be accommodated as any other administrator and staff is currently accommodated by a local school system.

Thank you for consideration of the information provided regarding HB1376.