



ESMEC

Serving the Public County School Systems of
Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent
Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester

Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium

February 14, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Committee Members:

Ref: **Senate Bill 362** – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Revisions – **Support with Amendments**

On behalf of the Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium (ESMEC) consisting of the nine public school systems on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, we are concerned that the bill as drafted will impede our ability to continue to offer our students and families our Blended Virtual Program (BVP). We offer the following background information for your consideration.

To address our student and family needs, with the encouragement, advice, and consent of the State Superintendent of Schools, in the spring of 2020, ESMEC began to develop a plan to implement a Blended Virtual Program (BVP). Given the size and resources available to rural school systems, it was quickly recognized that the best pathway to create a BVP was to adopt a multi-district model. Knowing that this was the first multi-district BVP in Maryland, we spent the fall of 2020 researching the characteristics of a variety of models offered in other states with a special emphasis on rural areas, securing the services of a program coordinator who is on-loan from Wicomico County Public Schools, creating an advisory committee with representatives from each Shore school system, and developing and issuing a request for proposals from vendors to operate the BVP.

In the spring of 2021, we reviewed vendor proposals. After reviewing proposals from vendors and considering the needs and resources of our school systems, it was determined to offer the ESMEC BVP to students in grades 6 – 12. Working with school system representatives, we developed an application process, aligned course offerings, and created a BVP school calendar. With the start of the 2021 – 2022 school year, we launched the ESMEC BVP with an enrollment of 352 students.

The following is an overview of the ESMEC BVP:

- To participate in the ESMEC BVP, students shall:
 - be enrolled in their local public school
 - reside in one of the nine ESMEC school systems
 - be in grades 6-12
 - apply and be accepted by their local school system
 - agree to report in-person to their local school of record for any required state testing
- The ESMEC BVP:
 - supports students who need or desire an alternative to in-person instruction
 - provides an alternative pathway to graduate with a Maryland diploma
 - offers a blend of synchronous and asynchronous instruction
 - aligns with the Maryland state curriculum
 - is a full-time program allowing students to take 7-8 courses per academic year
 - offers regular, honors, and AP courses

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The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair


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- provides parents, local school counselors/administrators, and students with a weekly student progress report including past due and upcoming assignments, attendance, and current grade to date
- BVP teachers:
 - are Maryland-certified teachers
 - provide office hours to tutor students
 - respond to emails within 24 hours
 - participate in IEP meetings
 - offer parent teacher conferences as needed
 - have access to high-quality and relevant professional development
- BVP attendance requirements:
 - BVP students follow a custom BVP calendar ensuring 180 days of instruction
 - BVP students do not have weather related closures or delays
 - Daily attendance is reported to the local school of record
- Local School System provides students with:
 - Special support services (IEP, 504, ELL Plans)
 - Technology needed to participate in the program
 - Health services equivalent to services available to in-person students
 - Counseling services
 - Food and nutrition services
 - Service-learning opportunities
 - Opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and athletics through their school of record
- The ESMEC BVP provides additional student supports such as:
 - Weekly one-on-one meetings with a Student Success Coordinator to check student progress and social-emotional wellness
 - Live tutoring M-F from 8 am - 8 pm

In summary, the ESMEC BVP is not a separate school. All students participating in the ESMEC BVP must be enrolled in their local public school. Students have access to services and activities provided by their local school while receiving synchronous and asynchronous instruction. We are concerned that the bill as drafted and potentially interpreted threatens our ability to continue to provide critically needed educational services through the ESMEC BVP to the students and families that we serve on the Shore. If the bill continues to be considered, we respectfully request that we be included in a workgroup to provide critical input. If you need additional information or clarification, please contact us.

Sincerely yours,



Louis H. Taylor, President of ESMEC
Superintendent of the Worcester County Public Schools

Sincerely yours,



Jon M. Andes, Ed.D.
Executive Director

PC: Eastern Shore Superintendents of Schools
Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director of PSSAM