

Mohammed Choudhury

State Superintendent of Schools

BILL: House Bill 1306 DATE: March 10, 2022

SUBJECT: Howard County – Public Schools **COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means

- Alternative Instruction Model

Policy

POSITION: Oppose

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EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully opposes **House Bill 1306** - **Howard County** – **Public Schools** – **Alternative Instruction Model Policy**, which would allow the Howard County Board of Education to adopt an alternative educational model policy that allows public schools in the jurisdiction to provide instruction outside of the classroom.

MSDE supports school systems having the ability to provide alternate educational options when severe weather conditions or other extreme circumstances are likely to prevent normal attendance at the public school. However, MSDE believes it is critical that definitions and requirements be consistent across all of Maryland's local school systems and that those definitions and requirements preserve quality learning opportunities for all students.

Creating different requirements for one school system in the State could lead to inequitable outcomes and opportunities, and this bill as drafted does not include sufficient quality guardrails. A number of bills have been introduced related to this issue during this legislative session, and MSDE has supported one that takes a statewide approach and with amendments would provide necessary guardrails.

As it currently stands, local school systems have the necessary flexibility to declare virtual education days in the event of inclement weather. MSDE has established a process with clear standards to ensure meaningful and equitable virtual instruction during inclement days that is designed to serve as a template for what school systems must demonstrate in order to ensure that alternative instructional models maintain high quality learning opportunities for all students.

In order to receive this flexibility solely for inclement weather days, local school systems must submit a Public School Virtual Inclement Weather Day Plan that includes:

• an assurance that students will be able to make up assigned work missed during virtual days when they return to in-person school;

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- assent that there will be four hours of synchronous instruction on a virtual education day;
- acknowledgement that daily attendance will be taken;
- how students and staff will have access to devices and Wi-Fi;
- the continued implementation of IEPs during virtual instruction (including specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aides and services, and accommodations);
- public presentation and discussion at a local school board meeting;
- the establishment of a communication plan to students, teachers, parents/guardians, etc., that the inclement weather day will or will not be virtual and the plan for instruction; and
- any other factors that are unique to their local school system.

Seventeen local school systems (Allegany, <u>Anne Arundel</u>, <u>Baltimore County</u>, <u>Carroll</u>, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, <u>Garrett</u>, <u>Kent</u>, <u>Montgomery</u>, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, <u>Somerset</u>, <u>Talbot</u>, Washington, <u>Wicomico</u>, and <u>Worcester</u>) submitted these plans to MSDE. This statewide approach protects high quality learning opportunities for students. The Department is supportive of including other extreme circumstances beyond inclement weather in the list of situations where resorting to an alternative instructional model may be appropriate.

Research from across the country has made it clear that for the vast majority of students virtual learning is not an effective form of instruction. Therefore, ensuring that consistent and comprehensive guardrails are in place for any alternative instructional models that may involve the use of virtual instruction is crucial to ensure that these programs do not adversely affect the learning of the majority of students.

MSDE encourages the committee to look at the statewide legislation that the Department has offered robust feedback and amendments on in the opposite chamber that enhances this concept to meet positive outcomes for students.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **House Bill 1306.** Please contact Ary Amerikaner, at 410-767-0090, or ary.amerikaner@maryland.gov, for any additional information.