

Informational Testimony regarding Senate Bill 814 Promise Schools - Establishment

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony regarding Senate Bill 814, which would require the State Department of Education to designate 10 community schools that are identified as low-performing or in need of comprehensive support and improvement as promise schools each year, require a county board of education to perform a comprehensive analysis of key factors and causes that led to a school being low-performing or in need of comprehensive support and improvement, and require the Governor to include \$2,000,000 in the annual budget bill to support technical assistance and support for promise schools.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

We appreciate the intent of this legislation, which is to provide targeted resources to community schools in need of additional support. Universal school meals, for example, undoubtedly support students' learning. However, some of the measures required by the Promise School Plan would be challenging to implement. The school calendar is an illegal subject of collective bargaining in Maryland, meaning that unions representing school employees could not negotiate around an extended school year in a Promise School Plan.¹ It would also be essential to ensure that the

¹ Maryland Educ. § 6-510(c)(3).

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Laws/StatuteText?article=ged§ion=6-510&enactments=False&archived=False>



proposed educator bonuses are implemented equitably between current and incoming teachers and are reflective of an extended work schedule and expanded in-school professional development requirements.

Our greatest concern is with the proposed outcome for a Promise School that is determined by MSDE to have made insufficient progress at the end of its three-year plan. This legislation would permit the family of a student enrolled at an “unsuccessful” Promise School to transfer their child to another school at the county board’s expense, including to a school in another county. Such an arrangement could rapidly destabilize enrollment, wreaking havoc on funding, wraparound supports, and school culture by creating de facto school closures – an approach which research shows is “not a promising strategy for remedying low student performance” and carries risks to students’ well-being.²

While we continue to enthusiastically support investment in community schools, we urge the committee to consider these concerns while evaluating this legislation.

² School Closure as a Strategy to Remedy Low Performance. National Education Policy Center (2017). <https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB%20Sunderman-Coghlan-Mintrop%20Closures.pdf>