



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 206

TITLE: Education - Student Behavior - Parent and Guardian Notice and Required Counseling (Parent and Guardian Accountability Act)

DATE: January 31, 2024

POSITION: Oppose

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four Maryland local school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 206.

HB 206 would establish parental notification requirements for school administration in response to multiple violent and disruptive incidents by a student. This bill also establishes criminal penalties for parents who fail to seek either school-based or private counseling as a result of their child's behavior.

Local superintendents strongly support high levels of parental engagement in childrens' education, and in response, highly prioritize the establishment of policies and procedures concerning student discipline. However, the positive outcomes resulting in parental engagement are not met by the approach proposed in this legislation.

State law reflects the Legislature's long standing recognition that principals and superintendents have broad discretion to make student discipline decisions "as warranted" (Section 7-305 of the Education Article). State regulations mirror this deference to local decision making, as well as place a clear emphasis on maintaining a safe learning environment for all students. Local school systems take very seriously the need for strict and comprehensive student discipline and school safety policies that focus on controlling and/or preventing bullying, verbal threats, student fights, and numerous other actions that can disrupt effective classroom environments.

In line with State regulations and local decision making, PSSAM strongly supports the implementation of restorative approaches to discipline -- approaches that were mandated by the legislature in 2019 for all Maryland public school systems, but that are not apparent in this legislation. The law defines “restorative approaches” as a relationship-focused student discipline model that:

1. Is preventative and proactive;
2. Emphasizes building strong relationships and setting clear behavioral expectations that contribute to the school community well-being;
3. In response to behavior that violates clear behavioral expectations, focuses on accountability for any harm done by the problem behavior; and,
4. Addresses ways to repair the relationships affected by the problem behavior with the voluntary participation of an individual who was harmed.

While this legislation aims to provide a response and accountability measure for student discipline, it fails to meet other outlined objectives that are essential parts of a restorative approach. Proactive practices that are implemented following appropriate professional development and training of all teachers, board members, superintendents, students, parents, and the larger community can make significant improvements in school climate and learning conditions. In conjunction with local discretion, proactive and restorative student discipline approaches allow positive parental and student engagement in the discipline process without threat of criminal penalties.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 206 and requests an unfavorable report.