

BILL: House Bill 386
TITLE: Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program -
Alterations (Maryland Meals for Achievement Flexibility Act of 2024)
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 31, 2024
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's boards of education, supports House Bill 386, which will authorize reasonable flexibility in the operations of the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program.

MABE recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, afterschool meals, and vending machine policies. The Maryland Meals for Achievement program, which began as a pilot in 1998, provides funding for schools with high concentrations of poverty to offer breakfast in the classroom daily to all students, regardless of family income. The program began in 1998 with six schools and today is benefitting students in more than 580 schools.

MABE supports House Bill 386 because it would authorize, through the actions of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and local boards, the practice of serving breakfast in any broadly accessible part of the school, including from "grab and go" carts after the arrival of students to the school, provided that students would be allowed to consume their meals in the classroom after the start of the school day.

Research has determined that the classroom breakfast program has a positive impact on student achievement and is associated with decreases in tardiness and suspensions. Thousands of children from low-income households in Maryland depend on school meals for the nutrition they need to learn and grow. Federal and state standards for school nutrition continue to be reformed and enhanced to address the national epidemics of juvenile diabetes and obesity. At the same time, child hunger and inequitable access to healthy meals impacts far too many students as an obstacle to learning. Therefore, MABE also supports federal legislation and actions by the federal government to improve and increase funding for expanded access to high quality school meal programs.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 386.