January 29, 2025

HB 57
Ways & Means Committee
POSITION - INFORMATIONAL

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) was founded over 40 years ago (1980) and is Maryland's oldest, most experienced, and diverse public education advocacy coalition. MEC advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide for all public school students in Maryland.

The Maryland Education Coalition recognizes that research on best practices for cell phone use in schools is continually evolving. While there is broad agreement on the need to limit young people's screen time and regulate the contexts in which cell phones are used, we believe cell phone policies are most effective when designed and enforced locally by school districts and individual schools.

To ensure these policies are effective and equitable, we recommend that they align with guidance provided by the Maryland State Department of Education and adhere to the following principles:

1. **Grounded in High-Quality Research**
   The latest research should inform policies on child development, education, and technology use.
2. **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement**
   Cell phone policies should be developed with meaningful input from students, staff, teachers, and families, reflecting the needs and perspectives of those directly impacted.
3. **Equitable and Non-Punitive Accountability**
   Accountability measures for violations should avoid overly punitive consequences. Policies must not result in unnecessary disciplinary actions, including suspension, exclusion, or expulsion, which can disproportionately harm students.
4. **Support for Diverse Needs**
   Policies must accommodate the technology needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. Where cell phones are required or used for services, appropriate accommodations must be provided.
5. **Flexibility for Exceptions**
   Clear guidelines should address when staff and faculty may exercise discretion to allow exceptions, ensuring policies remain practical and context-sensitive.

Ultimately, students deserve a classroom environment that prioritizes focus and learning. Technology rules should reflect the latest research and best practices to support student success while respecting diverse needs and circumstances.

ACLU of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, Arts Every Day, Attendance Works, CASA, Children's Behavioral Health Coalition, Free State PTA, Decoding Dyslexia of Maryland, Disability Rights Maryland, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, Maryland Coalition for Gifted & Talented Ed, Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition, MSC-NAACP, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Maryland School Psychologists' Association, Parent Advocacy Consortium, Public Justice Center, School Social Workers of MD, Strong Schools Maryland, Kalman R. Hettleman, David Hornbeck, Rick Tyler, Jr., Sharon Rubinstein