

Maryland Education Coalition

The Maryland Education Coalition is dedicated to raising the academic achievement of students in Maryland public schools by promoting adequate funding and systemic accountability for improving results.

Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee Senate Bill 1058 Education – The Reasonable School Discipline Act of 2013

March 20, 2013

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The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) wants to ensure that all children are kept in school and given an opportunity to succeed.

Highly publicized accounts of students being suspended for typical adolescent behavior are concerning. Whether it is young children making a gun with their food or older children being disrespectful, suspensions and expulsions are not the answer. Removal from school causes a loss of critical academic time as well as an increased engagement in delinquent activities outside of the school.

In addition, the effectiveness of out-of-school punishments is questionable. Over 51,000 students having 85,000 suspensions is far too many, especially given over half of those are for 'soft' non-violent offenses. In addition, African American students and students with disabilities are almost three times as likely to experience a suspension or expulsion. Some counties have a suspension rate over 15% for these groups.

Under the direction of the state board, MSDE is leading a process inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders to identify best disciplinary and school climate practices. Effective strategies include utilizing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice practices, and building school climates with high expectations. While MEC wholeheartedly supports the intent of this bill, we believe the legislature should support the efforts already underway and ensure the timely implementation of the new proposed regulations.

MEC would support making this bill a resolution and continuing to highlight the need for sensible discipline and the utilization of strategies to improve behavior and keep more kids in school.