
**Informational Testimony regarding House Bill 1022
Education—Alternative Schools—Reporting Requirements**

**Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on House Bill 1022, legislation that requires county boards of education to report data and information related to the alternative schools within their jurisdictions.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. 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).

Recent and persistent issues associated with school climate and student discipline have been at the center of a considerable amount of discussion and deliberation during this legislative session and several preceding it. There have also been numerous reports of people across the state dealing with issues related to student discipline and disrupted learning environments. The public reporting of state, district, and school level data revealing significant and persistent student discipline disparities between student groups—particularly along racial and ethnic lines, special needs classification, and English language proficiency—has motivated many across our state and across the country to take definitive steps to correct this gross inequity. It goes without saying that without data and transparency, it is highly probable that the school-to-prison pipeline would have seen more students from vulnerable populations than the school-to-college- and career-pipeline would have.

Unfortunately, however, this transparency has not come without considerable costs. In an effort to avoid being labeled as persistently failing in the area of school discipline and student behavior management, far too many districts and schools have responded by hiding the real school discipline and student behavior challenges they face, and have chosen instead to downplay the presence of disrupted learning environments existing in their districts and schools. This has led to even more challenging school climate conditions for all members of the school community—students and educators alike.

It goes without saying that policies focused on “naming and shaming” will never lead to successful school discipline practices and healthy teaching and learning environments. Providing on-going training, resources, and supports at the district and school building level are what is required to bring about systemic change in how school discipline is handled.



The members of the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices Commission recommended that steps be taken to make school discipline data transparent and publicly available and to conduct on-going data analysis.¹ Having data will no doubt provide the information necessary to improve district and school level decision making related to how best to mitigate disruptive learning environments. However, doing away with disruptive learning environments will take much more than just transparent data. It will require on the ground resources and supports for educators who are interacting with our children every day. We know that the funding proposed in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future dedicated to increasing the number of behavioral and mental health resources and staff in schools will go a long way toward helping districts to get a handle of the issues impacting our students and leading to adverse learning and teaching environments. But we must guard against compiling and reporting data and failing to follow up with funding and supports that address the issues laid bare by said data.

MSEA members appreciate the end goal of this legislation. We realize that it is a part of an overall effort to shed light on a serious problem and to seek lasting solutions. Our concern, however, is that this could potentially exacerbate an already untenable situation where school staff feel like they are not supported, that they do not have the resources they need to deal with challenging and increasingly violent student behavior, and who feel that ownership for student behavior and accountability rests solely on their shoulders. Given that the passing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the successful implementation of the policies and funding therein are essential to the ultimate success of the overall effort to effectively address disruptive learning environments and disparate discipline practices, it would be prudent to refrain from making sweeping judgements about our schools and districts until such time as the Blueprint becomes law and has been given sufficient time to be implemented.

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<https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20Report.pdf> (Pages 83-84) (Accessed February 2, 2020)