

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 277
State Department of Education—Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach**

**Ways and Means Committee
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2:00 PM**

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MSEA Board of Directors**

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 277, which would establish the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). We believe this initiative will address the trauma-related struggles students and educators experience that have an adverse impact on school climate, teacher effectiveness and student success.

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).

MSEA believes that every Maryland child is a whole child—one that needs to feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged in order to eventually see success in college, career and life. In advocating for the needs of the whole child, MSEA members advocate to ensure that every public school in our state is a great public school—one that has updated technology; small manageable classes; safe and modern school buildings; proper healthcare and nutrition; and highly qualified and highly effective educators. Given access to these resources, we know all of Maryland's students can achieve their full potential.

Unfortunately, many of our students come to school laboring under myriad issues that impact their ability to function well. For some, these issues are the product of the stresses and trauma associated with systemic poverty. For others, they may have domestic problems within their families or neighborhoods. Still others might be struggling with issues related to peer pressure, bullying, and feeling like they just don't fit in at their school. And all Maryland communities are familiar with the trauma inflicted by the opioid crisis as it has spread across wide swaths of our state. All of these are examples of trauma that our students and educators bring with them into the school building, which impacts not only their ability to function normally, but the school community's ability to establish and maintain a healthy school climate for all. The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, conducted between 1995-1997, looked at the long-term impacts childhood abuse and neglect had on the health and well-being of



patients¹. ACEs were categorized into three groups: abuse, neglect, and family/household challenges. A patient's ACE score was calculated, with the score serving as an indicator of cumulative childhood stress. The study's findings revealed "a graded dose-response² relationship between ACEs and negative health and well-being outcomes across the course of life."³ In short, as the number of ACEs increases, the risk of several negative outcomes—including, but not limited to, poor academic outcomes, poor work performance, and suicide attempts—also increases.

This has an enormous impact on the lives of our students and educators and has measurable effects on school climate and student learning outcomes. Trauma-informed practices take into account the stresses that students and educators are bringing to school and seeks to address the ways in which these stresses are properly and effectively addressed.

Once schools understand the educational impacts of trauma, they can become safe, supportive environments where students make the positive connections with adults and peers they might otherwise push away, calm their emotions so they can focus and behave appropriately, and feel confident enough to advance their learning—in other words, schools can make trauma sensitivity a regular part of how school is run.⁴

We now have ways to quantify how our students and educators feel about their school learning and teaching environment thanks to the school climate survey data that is part of the annual state report card. Students and educators participate in the survey and their responses are rated on a scale of 1 (least favorable) to 10 (most favorable). In 2019, the statewide average of a selection of the school topics according to the responses from students were as follows: physical safety = 3.5; emotional safety = 5.4; bullying = 4.5; and student-student relationships = 3.1. These numbers are proof that an effective, research-based approach to improving the entire school climate is necessary in Maryland.

This type of practice is currently in use in states such as Massachusetts, Washington and Missouri. We are also using it here in Maryland, in Baltimore City and in Prince George's and Frederick Counties. This legislation would allow for these practices to expand into other parts of the state via grant funding and resource and training supports from MSDE. It also requires data to be collected on the academic and nonacademic outcomes at the selected schools, so that we can see the real impacts being experienced by the schools utilizing this approach. This legislation—coupled with the programs, funding, and supports included in the Kirwan Commission's recommendations as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future—will have a

¹ [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/abstract) (accessed on February 3, 2020)

² A dose-response describes the change in an outcome (e.g. alcoholism) associated with differing levels of exposure (or doses) to a stressor (e.g. ACEs). A graded dose-response means that as the dose of the stressor increases the intensity of the outcome also increases.

³ *ibid*

⁴ <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/trauma-and-learning/the-solution-trauma-sensitive-schools/> (accessed on February 4, 2020)



significant positive impact on all of Maryland's students and will provide yet another tool for ensuring that all of Maryland's students receive a world-class education.

MSEA members work hard every day to create and maintain the optimal learning and work environments for our students and colleagues. By passing this legislation and allowing for the expansion of this research-based practice into more of our schools and districts, we are confident that we will see far-reaching and long-lasting results for our students, schools and communities. **We urge a favorable report on HB 277.**