

Using federal grant resources, the MSDE is currently working to provide training and technical assistance to local school systems in initiatives such as trauma-informed approaches, mental health first aid, restorative approaches, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) to address the mental health needs of students and improve overall school climate. Upon release of the guidelines, the MSDE will continue to work with school systems to integrate these initiatives to create and enhance a trauma-informed environment in schools.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) requires mental health supports for students, which are currently being provided by local school systems. Student support staff are available in all Maryland schools. Student services personnel, including school counselors, school psychologists, pupil personnel, school social workers, and school nurses are required under COMAR 13A.05.05 to provide a program of coordinated student services that focuses on a student's health, personal, interpersonal, academic, and career development. School counselors and school psychologists in particular are required to enhance awareness of mental health and promote positive, healthy behaviors (COMAR 13A.05.05.02 – *School Counseling Program*) and provide direct educational, behavioral, and mental health services for children and youth as well as work with families, school administrators, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all students (COMAR 13A.05.05.04 – *School Psychology Program*).

Strategies such as classroom lessons on managing stress, dealing with conflict, and other mental health challenges are provided by student support staff in schools. Health education provides students with the opportunity to learn about mental health strategies and discuss concerns. Social and emotional learning skills are taught by classroom teachers across the State. Restorative and mindfulness practices, such as circles, and mindfulness spaces, are being implemented in many schools across the State. These practices provide students with strategies to self-manage stress and to develop community and peer support. More than 7,000 members of school staff including teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and other school staff have been trained by the MSDE and local school systems to look for warning signs of mental health distress and how to refer students and families for help. The MSDE and local school systems are continuing to provide training to a variety of staff to address student mental health needs.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 425**. For further information, please contact Zachary Hands, at 410-767-0504, or zachary.hands1@maryland.gov.