

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 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 a break in instruction to develop community and peer support. More than 7,000 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. MSDE and local school systems are continuing to provide training to a variety of staff to address student mental health needs.

Allowing absences from school for mental health needs, without parental or medical permission, removes students from the very environment that can provide them support.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate HB 461. For further information, please contact Zachary Hands, at 410-767-0504, or zachary.hands1@maryland.gov.