

February 28, 2023

Senate Bill 681

Support

There is a great deal of research demonstrating that participation in extracurricular activities and athletics, especially at the high school level leads to greater student success. For example, the US Dept of Education states that extracurricular activities improve social skills as well as school success. Further, college applications and scholarships have students list not only their GPAs and test scores but also their participation outside the classroom as they seek “well rounded students.” Unfortunately, Maryland law currently precludes high school students who are participating in virtual academies from attending sports at their boundary schools. While this law was certainly put in place to keep students from boundary hopping to be on the “best” teams, there is a need for it to evolve with the advent of virtual academies.

During the 2021-2022 school year, there were 12,472 Maryland students participating in virtual academies throughout all but two counties representing over 1% of the student population. While these families may have varied reasons for choosing a virtual academy, the absence of extracurricular opportunities may have been a deterrent for participation for students who may have thrived in a virtual environment academically.

My son, Xander, a senior at North County High School is one such student. On October 11, 2018, Xander awoke with a headache that has never gone away. Something about the school buildings makes it worse. It was worse while he attended Lindale middle school, better during COVID virtual learning and is worse every day he is at North County High School. We have tried blue blocker glasses, fluorescent light blocker glasses, etc. to no avail. We considered the virtual academy offered by AACPS but, Xander also likes to play tennis and participating with the drama club as part of their tech support and these were not an option for students in the virtual academies. As such he goes to school each day knowing his headache will worsen at times dealing with debilitating vision loss and confusion which makes learning more difficult as well as painful. While this change in law will not affect my son as he graduates this year, our hope is that students like Xander will have the opportunity he did not have.

There are many students who have medical, social or psychological reasons that make a virtual academy a good choice for their learning who may also want to participate in sports opportunities. The intent of this bill, which has no fiscal impact, is to simply allow the students who are enrolled in virtual academies to be able to participate in the extracurricular and athletic opportunities at their boundary schools. Maryland law must continue to evolve as technology advances and as alternate learning modes are available.

Thank you,

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<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/web/95741.asp#:~:text=Extracurricular%20activities%20provide%20a%20channel,of%20a%20well%2Drounded%20education.>

<https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports/facts>