



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: SB 681

TITLE: Education – Virtual Schools – Access to Extracurricular Activities and Athletics

DATE: March 1, 2023

POSITION: Support with Amendments

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports with one amendment**, Senate Bill 681.

This bill requires a virtual school to provide each enrolled student with access to (1) extracurricular activities at the public school the student would otherwise be required to attend and (2) notwithstanding any other law or regulation, and subject to a participation agreement between the public school and the parent of the student, participation in organized athletics and on athletic teams at the public school the student would otherwise be required to attend. A virtual school must also provide to parents of enrolled students informational materials on the access to extracurricular activities and athletic participation provided for under the bill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges in the delivery of public education. However, it has highlighted the value and potential of virtual learning. There is no doubt that virtual learning will continue as an important component of public education, well past the end of this pandemic. As the state's top educators, superintendents embrace this new mode of learning and feel it is a welcome supplement to the high-quality education already provided in Maryland schools.

PSSAM supports the intention to offer equal access to virtual students to all services at a brick and mortar schools. However, provisions requiring virtual schools to offer enrolled students access to extracurriculars, wrap-around services, food and nutrition services, and equivalent health care services is important but may be too restrictive. We seek language that allows that

these may be provided by the entire LEA and not just at the student's "home school," and in accordance with local board policies and procedures, and offered to the "extent practicable." While many of our programs for the last two years have provided many of these amenities, this is not happening 100% across all LEAs. Some have focused on the food and wrap-around services, while others have limited participation in sports and extracurriculars for various reasons including operational difficulties with transportation.

It is important to remember that virtual schools are a choice for families and expectations should be clear that this is a different opportunity compared to traditional in-person schools with some trade-offs. As such, local boards and superintendents should have the right to set the criteria for participation in a virtual program.

For these reasons, PSSAM **supports Senate Bill 681 with amendments discussed above.**