

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 545
Primary and Secondary Education – Public School Employees – Salaries

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
February 28, 2024

Samantha Zwerling
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association strongly supports Senate Bill 545, which seeks to take targeted steps aimed at improving the educator shortages that are impacting school systems and job types across the state. This bill is one of MSEA's top 2024 legislative priorities to help address the educator shortage and excessive workloads.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. 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 is excited to continue to partner with legislative leaders to build on the legislature's strong record of commitment to our public schools with policies to meet this moment and ensure that no Marylanders are left behind. Educators are focused on helping students excel after the pandemic, yet are doing so in the face of excessive workload issues which are exacerbated by staffing shortages in every school building.

The staffing shortage affects the academic achievement, emotional wellness, and safety of our students. Students and families are faced with more trauma, unaddressed social emotional needs, societal divisiveness, and high levels of stress. These have contributed to more disciplinary issues that too often lead to violence between students and sometimes against staff members. To provide additional student support, targeted interventions, trainings, and restorative practices, our schools need more qualified mental health professionals and support staff. Schools must be the safe and supportive learning and teaching environments they are meant to be, and that students, educators, and families deserve. House Bill 789 takes limited but strategic reforms to better recruit and retain the outstanding educators that all students and schools deserve and depend on.

The bill would expand eligibility for all salary increases that are currently limited to Nationally Board Certified (NBC) teachers to additional highly qualified educators.

There are many teachers, who are not directly the teacher of record, who have National Board Certifications but are currently not eligible for the state portion of the salary increases (\$10,000 for NBC and \$7,000 more for teaching in an identified low-performing school). This bill would expand eligibility for these increases to those teaching in critical shortage areas like reading and math specialists, school counselors, literacy interventionists, gifted and talented specialists, and more who are just as important to the daily instruction and success for students as the classroom teacher/teacher of record. Leveling the playing field is important to making sure that highly qualified educators in these roles stay in them rather than move to NBC-eligible roles and exacerbate shortages in non-NBC-eligible roles. They've earned the national certifications, they work directly with students daily, and they should not be left out of the salary enhancement.

The bill would expand eligibility for these salary increases to behavioral health and other school-based student service providers who obtain highly regarded national accreditation in their profession.

School psychologists, speech pathologists, and others who work directly with students are not eligible for National Board Certification but have the ability to gain national certification from other accreditation bodies. Under the bill, the Maryland State Board of Education and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board would vet and determine what the appropriate and applicable accreditations are in each job type. Educators in these fields face often staggering caseloads and shrinking pipelines to fill these critical positions, underscoring the importance of our efforts to recruit and retain them through simple changes like this bill proposes. This would also incentivize our most experienced professionals to stay and serve students and mentor colleagues who are earlier in their careers. Again, they've earned the top accreditation it's just not under the National Board because National Board doesn't offer it for their subject area.

~~The bill would remove unworkable language concerning the career ladder requirement that assistant principals spend 20% of their time as a teacher of record and the remainder of their time engaged in other teaching activities.~~

~~Schools need assistant principals to address student discipline, lead special education team meetings, serve as observers in the evaluation system, and support good teaching and strong professional growth systems. They also handle emergencies that can occur throughout the day with no warning. The current statute precludes such duties being assigned to an assistant principal on the career ladder. Adding teaching duties to already overworked assistant principals while preventing them from carrying out key functions of their job is a recipe for increasing rather than addressing shortages among these important educators. This change will encourage assistant principals to take part in classroom instruction~~

through co-teaching, model teaching, substituting, but won't require them to be the teacher of record.

The bill would remove limitations on who can write curriculum and assessments for content areas in a district. Currently, the statute only permits distinguished and professor distinguished teachers to be selected to write curriculum and assessment items and to develop model lessons. Given how few educators would find themselves on these rungs of the career ladder due to its relatively recent introduction, this language is not workable. If the current statute is maintained, it would lead to severely overburdening a small number of educators and burning them out extremely quickly. It could also result in a delay in curriculum and assessment creation and delivery.

MSEA strongly urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 545.