

During the 2025 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly enacted House Bill 1204 (Chapter 339), entitled “Public and Nonpublic Schools – Student Elopement – Notice and Reporting Requirements (Ace’s Law).” This legislation establishes new statutory obligations for both public and nonpublic schools regarding the timely notification and documentation of incidents in which a student elopes — that is, leaves school grounds or supervision without authorization (see MD Code Ann., Education § 7-11A-03). House Bill (HB) 1204 reflects growing legislative and public concern over student safety, particularly for students with disabilities or behavioral health needs who may be at increased risk when unsupervised. Schools are responsible for developing policies and procedures in response to Ace’s Law. This memo provides a summary of the law’s key provisions, outlines compliance requirements for educational institutions, and identifies areas where implementation and guidance may be necessary.

Effective July 1, 2025, HB 1204 mandates that all public schools and nonpublic schools that receive state funds for special education in Maryland implement policies and procedures for:

- Same-day notification of a student’s parent or guardian when the student is discovered to have eloped or attempted to elope from school property or supervision.
- Annual updating of a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) to review and address wandering or elopement behaviors.

To ensure effective implementation of this law, local education agencies (LEAs) and nonpublic schools:

- Review and update school safety and supervision policies to include elopement-specific procedures.
- Work with school administrators to develop or update internal notification protocols to meet the same-day parent contact requirement.
- Ensure IEP teams are trained to evaluate and update IEPs and BIPs for students with known elopement or wandering behavior.
- Consider designating personnel responsible for parent/guardian notification and internal reporting.
- Develop standardized incident reporting forms and retain records as required by law or policy.
- Train all relevant staff on recognizing, preventing, and responding to student elopement.

Is the law only applicable to students with IEPs?

No. The law applies to all students enrolled in all public schools and nonpublic schools that receive state funds for special education. While there are specific provisions related to students with IEPs or BIPs, the general notification and reporting requirements apply broadly.

Is the law only applicable to students with cognitive disabilities or other vulnerable populations?

No. The law is not limited to students with cognitive disabilities or other particular disabilities. It applies to all students regardless of disability status.

Does the law include students without disabilities who are still vulnerable (for example, students under age 5)?

Yes. The law applies to all students in elementary, middle, and high schools, including younger students.

How is skipping school addressed for upper grades (middle/high school)?

The law defines “elopement” specifically as leaving the school campus without the permission of a school staff member who has responsibility for the student. It does not address truancy or class-cutting that occurs without campus departure. Thus, skipping school would fall outside the scope of HB 1204 unless it involves an unauthorized departure from the school campus.

Are there guidelines in the law for wandering, in addition to elopement?

“Wandering” is defined in the law as the act of a student leaving a classroom or area on the school campus, but not leaving the school campus itself, without the permission of a school staff member who has responsibility for the student. The law notes that IEP teams should address wandering behaviors annually but doesn’t establish a specific parental notification requirement for wandering. If a student is

wandering, it is best practice to keep their parent or guardian informed and to have a plan in place to address the behavior.

What is the state's definition of "school campus"?

A "school campus" means the buildings and grounds of a school, including playgrounds.

How many instances of elopement must occur before the IEP or BIP must address it?

Ace's Law does not establish a minimum of elopements. If a student with an IEP or BIP has documented elopement behavior, the law states that the team must review and address this behavior at least once annually. However, it is best practice to address any behaviors impacting access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as soon as they arise; it is better to develop a plan for elopement the first time a student displays this behavior rather than wait and see if it becomes a pattern.

What are the notification requirements?

Each time a student attempts or accomplishes an elopement, the school must notify the student's parent or guardian on the same day as the elopement incident. Nonpublic schools should also notify the local education agency on the same day as the elopement incident.

Is leaving a message for a parent sufficient to fulfill the law's notification requirement?

The law requires that schools notify parents or guardians on the same day as the elopement. It does not specify the method, but to ensure compliance, direct confirmation of receipt (e.g., phone conversation, written acknowledgment, or electronic confirmation) is advisable over leaving a voicemail message.