

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 230

(Senator Conway, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Education - Instruction of Blind and Visually Impaired Students - Use of Braille

This bill requires the State Board of Education to establish standards for the mastery of Braille for use in English, language arts, and mathematics instruction of students who are blind or visually impaired in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 by September 1, 2012. By September 1, 2013, the State board and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board must review and, as appropriate, modify certification and recertification requirements for teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) advises that it will need to convene a committee to develop the required standards. Due to federal special education funding, MSDE staffing expenditures can be handled with existing resources; however, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$1,900 in FY 2011 to reimburse committee members for expenses and for supplies. Future year expenditures reflect committee expenditures continuing through September 1, 2013. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	1,900	2,600	1,900	300	0
Net Effect	(\$1,900)	(\$2,600)	(\$1,900)	(\$300)	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: Local school systems can implement Braille standards for English, language arts, and mathematics using existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: In developing the individualized education program (IEP) for a child who is blind or visually impaired, provisions must be made for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP team determines after an evaluation that such instruction or use is not appropriate for the child.

A child may not be denied the opportunity for instruction in Braille reading and writing solely because the child has some remaining vision. However, the exclusive use of Braille is not required if other reading and writing media are appropriate to the child's educational needs. The use of other reading and writing media does not preclude the use of Braille or the instruction of Braille.

The State Board of Education and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board must adopt certification standards for teachers of blind and visually impaired students. By regulation, to receive an initial certification to teach students with visual impairment, an applicant must have course work that includes Braille code and methods of teaching Braille reading and writing. A teacher certified for teaching students with visual impairments must present at least one course, continuing education, or professional development activity indicating maintenance of Braille proficiency.

Background: According to the National Federal of the Blind, 90% of legally blind children are not being taught Braille, which is the only system that allows blind people to read and write independently and to do both interactively. A decline in teachers' knowledge of Braille and the methods of teaching it have been cited as reasons that the number of Braille readers has declined since 1963. Although the number of Braille readers has declined, technology has made Braille more available in recent years; computer software can translate any document into Braille quickly and accurately. One study found that 44% of those who had grown up learning Braille, as compared to 77% of those who had relied primarily on print, were unemployed.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 413 (Delegate Hixson, *et al.*) – Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, National Federal of the Blind, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 8, 2010
mlm/mwc Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 18, 2010

Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510