

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 699 (Senator Jennings)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Primary Education - State Standardized Assessments - Moratorium

This bill requires the State Board of Education to place a moratorium on State standardized assessments in prekindergarten through grade 2 from the 2015-2016 through the 2016-2017 school years. During the moratorium, the State Board of Education may pilot a State standardized assessment in kindergarten in conjunction with a required report. By December 31, 2016, the State Board of Education, in consultation with stakeholders, including kindergarten teachers, local superintendents of education, and local boards of education, must report to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on specified information related to State and local prekindergarten through grade 2 readiness assessments and Kindergarten Readiness Assessments (KRA).

The bill takes effect July 1, 2015, and terminates June 30, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: A moratorium on the KRA will put the State out of compliance with the grant terms of the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTTT-ELC) Grant and the federal Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG), thus, jeopardizing the remaining \$7.7 million in RTTT-ELC funds for FY 2016 (and FY 2017 if a federal no-cost extension is granted) and \$1.1 million in EAG consortium funds in FY 2016.

Local Effect: Local school system expenditures to improve Wi-Fi connectivity for tablets to administer the KRA may be delayed due to the moratorium.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: During the moratorium, a public school may not be required to administer a State standardized assessment in prekindergarten through grade 2.

Specifically, the State Board of Education must report on:

- the local school system assessments currently used in prekindergarten through grade 2;
- the instructional value of any current local school system assessment as compared to the instructional value of the KRA for a teacher;
- the overall value of any local school system or State assessment results to a teacher, student, and parent, respectively;
- whether an assessment is developmentally appropriate for students;
- the efficiency of the administration of an assessment;
- methods to minimize a testing window for an assessment in order to minimize the impact on instruction;
- whether the KRA is duplicative of other rating and improvement systems for prekindergarten programs, including the Maryland EXcellence Counts in Early Learning and School-age Child Care (MD EXCELS);
- whether the technology needed to administer an assessment exists in all classrooms in the State; and
- the quality and consistency of training provided to educators charged with the administration of any State standardized assessment in prekindergarten through grade 2.

Current Law/ Background:

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant

In December 2011, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) received a federal RTTT-ELC grant of \$50 million over four years. The program is designed to narrow the school readiness gap for children in poverty, English language learners, and those with disabilities. Although fiscal 2015 represented the fourth State fiscal year of RTTT-ELC appropriations, the grant funds may be expended until December 31, 2015. MSDE is anticipated to receive nearly \$7.7 million in federal RTTT-ELC funding in fiscal 2016. MSDE is requesting a fifth year no-cost extension for 8 of the 10 projects funded by the grant.

Enhanced Assessment Grant

MSDE received a federal EAG in 2013 to enhance the KRA as part of a state consortium including Ohio, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, and Connecticut. MSDE acts as the fiscal agent for the consortium. The grant requires the states in the consortium to administer an enhanced KRA (Version 2.0) by the 2016-2017 school year. MSDE has received a total of nearly \$3.2 million in EAG funds in fiscal 2014 and fiscal 2015 and anticipates an additional \$1.1 million in fiscal 2016.

Ready for Kindergarten

Through the RTTT-ELC, Maryland developed an enhanced assessment system for determining the preparedness and achievement levels of Maryland's early learning population. The program, Ready for Kindergarten: Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive System, includes two components: an Early Learning Assessment (ELA) for children ages three to six and a KRA for all incoming kindergarteners. The ELA and the KRA are designed to align with the new Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards. The ELA is still in development, with rollout anticipated for late spring/summer 2015. Beginning in fiscal 2015, the KRA replaces the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) Kindergarten Assessment System (described below).

In fall 2014, more than 3,500 public school kindergarten teachers across the State administered the KRA for the first time. The KRA is designed for online administration, although there was variance among the jurisdictions in terms of the availability of tablets and/or computers for use during the testing period. Some negative feedback was received in response to the first administration of the test. Issues raised by teachers included the length of the assessment and the amount of time required to administer the test, problems with technology, and the requirement to administer multiple assessments in meeting both State and local requirements. MSDE is attempting to make adjustments to the KRA in response to these concerns. MSDE has also established a workgroup with curriculum and data specialists from local school systems to coordinate the use of locally devised assessments, address any data uploading and connectivity issues, and introduce other measures designed to reduce the burden on kindergarten teachers. The KRA is currently in the standard-setting phase, and the statewide and local reports are scheduled to be released at the Maryland State Board of Education meeting in April 2015.

Maryland Model for School Readiness

To measure kindergarten readiness, MSDE currently uses the MMSR assessment, a standardized assessment with seven domains: personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; scientific thinking; social studies; the arts; and physical development.

MMSR data has been collected since the 2001-2002 school year. Teachers evaluate and rate student performance during the first eight weeks of school according to a checklist of 30 indicators. If a student is rated “fully ready,” it means that the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to meet kindergarten expectations are consistently demonstrated. “Approaching” readiness means the necessary skills and behaviors are inconsistently demonstrated. “Developing” means the skills and behaviors are not demonstrated, and considerable instructional support is needed.

MD EXcellence Counts in Early Learning and School-age Child Care

MD EXCELS is the State’s tiered Quality Rating Improvement System for licensed child care centers, family child care providers, and public prekindergarten programs. Under this system, an early care program achieves a specific quality rating level, on a 1 to 5 scale, according to its ability to meet a predetermined set of quality criteria. Due to Maryland’s stringent licensing and regulation requirements, all licensed and registered child care programs/providers are considered a Level 1 upon acceptance into the program. Ratings are made available to the general public through an online portal at www.marylandexcels.org. Once registered with MD EXCELS, a program has 12 months to achieve and publish a rating. As of January 1, 2015, participation in MD EXCELS became mandatory for all programs receiving childcare subsidy reimbursements.

As of January 2015, over 3,700 programs/providers were participating in MD EXCELS, with over 1,200 of those participants published. Approximately 58% of participants were family child care providers. Center-based providers accounted for 29% of participants, and less than 1% of public prekindergarten programs were participating. The majority of the published ratings (69%) were Level 1. Less than 20% of the ratings were Level 3 or higher.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1137 (Delegate Shoemaker, *et al.*) - Rules and Executive Nominations.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

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