

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2016 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader**

Senate Bill 651

(Senator Bates)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

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**State Department of Education - Virtual Learning Opportunities - Survey and Report**

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This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to conduct a survey of the local boards of education to determine each local school system's current use of virtual learning opportunities. By December 1, 2016, MSDE must report to the General Assembly on the current utilization of virtual learning opportunities for students across the State. Using the results of the survey, MSDE must develop and adopt guidelines and policies that enhance the utilization of virtual learning opportunities for all students in the State.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. MSDE can conduct the required survey of virtual learning opportunities and develop guidelines and policies that will enhance the utilization of virtual learning opportunities using existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** Depending on the guidelines and policies developed by MSDE, local school system expenditures may increase.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** MSDE must provide Maryland virtual learning opportunities that include (1) offering a distance-learning program to provide Maryland public school students with equal opportunities to develop a strong academic foundation; (2) offering expanded educational choices not otherwise available to students through online courses and

services; and (3) expanding the professional development opportunities available to educational staff in Maryland public schools through online courses and services.

According to the Code of Maryland Regulations, consistent with local school system policy and procedure, credit may be given for correspondence courses and for MSDE-approved online courses. If credit is to be applied toward minimum graduation requirements, the correspondence course or the MSDE-approved online course must be provided by the local school system.

**Background:** In Maryland, supplemental online courses are offered through the Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Program (MVLO). MVLO is managed by MSDE and is designed to expand the access of Maryland public school students to challenging curricula aligned to the Maryland College- and Career-Ready Standards and other appropriate standards through the delivery of high-quality online courses. As of April 2015, MVLO offered 76 online courses through the Maryland Virtual School (MVS) in collaboration with the local school systems. While MVS offers online courses, it is not authorized to grant high school diplomas and does not offer a full high school curriculum. Students may only take a course through MVS with the permission of the local school system and their school principal, and credit can only be awarded for MSDE-approved courses. MVLO is designed for use by high school students; Maryland does not offer online learning opportunities designed for elementary and middle school students.

MSDE reports that although a similar survey was conducted during the 2015 school year, the importance and emphasis local school systems place on the inclusion of virtual learning opportunities in instruction results in constant changes to school system reports. An older report on the topic entitled [The State of Online Learning in Maryland 2010-11](#) can be found on MSDE's website.

**State Expenditures:** MSDE can conduct the required survey of virtual learning opportunities and develop guidelines and policies that will enhance the utilization of virtual learning opportunities using existing resources. MSDE advises that the Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) within MSDE currently has access to survey applications that can be used for this purpose. OIT is also in contact with the instructional technology liaisons statewide who will be able to provide this information.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** HB 1079 of 2012 received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee, but no further action was taken.

**Cross File:** None.

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

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 1, 2016  
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