

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 872 (Senator Young)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Education - Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Assessments - Administration

This bill requires a statewide kindergarten assessment that is administered to measure school readiness to be limited to a random *sample* of kindergarten students from within each local school system. The bill also prohibits a standardized test from being administered to a prekindergarten student. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must adopt regulations to implement the requirements of the bill.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: It is assumed that MSDE can develop a sampling methodology and modify its online system using existing resources; however, developing a more sophisticated methodology may increase expenditures. Minimal annual savings may be realized from administering the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) to a sample of students instead of all public kindergarteners.

Local Effect: None. Reducing the number of kindergarten assessments administered and prohibiting the administration of a standardized prekindergarten assessment does not materially affect local school system finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (13A.08.01.02-3), by December 1 of each year, each local school system must give MSDE information about the school readiness of students entering kindergarten as measured by a MSDE-approved kindergarten assessment system in the following areas: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, arts, and physical development.

Background: The KRA was administered for the first time to all kindergarteners entering public school during the 2014-2015 school year. The assessment is part of the new Ready for Kindergarten: Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (R4K) that was developed to align with Maryland's more rigorous PreK-12 College- and Career-Ready Standards. R4K builds on the Maryland Model for School Readiness, which was the statewide kindergarten assessment tool in use since 2001. Based on the 2014-2015 KRA results, 47% of all Maryland public school children displayed the foundational skills indicating they were fully ready for kindergarten, in contrast to 83% from the 2013-2014 administration of the previously used Maryland Model for School Readiness.

R4K was developed as part of the \$50 million Early Learning Challenge federal grant that Maryland received. It was developed by the Divisions of Early Childhood Development and Special Education/Early Intervention Services at MSDE in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education. The R4K provides one system for recognizing the needs and measuring the learning progress of all children from three to six years of age in four domains of child learning.

The R4K has two components: (1) Early Learning Assessment (ELA) (*i.e.*, formative assessment) gauges the progress of learning in young children, 36 to 72 months, in seven developmental domains; and (2) KRA is administered to kindergarteners, measuring school readiness in four developmental domains. The four developmental domains for the KRA are social foundations, physical well-being and motor development, language and literacy, and mathematics.

In response to concerns about increased testing and specific concerns with the first KRA administration, as well as in response to the Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools (Chapter 421 of 2015), MSDE reported that it has reduced the number of items on the KRA by 20%, made improvements to the data transfer of enrollment information and connectivity, and updated reporting features for teachers. In addition, MSDE reported that students in kindergarten spend less than one hour per year taking the State-required KRA.

In a *Joint Chairmen's Report* (JCR) submitted by MSDE in December 2015, MSDE reported that survey feedback from the second KRA administration in fall 2015 indicated that although the overall experience was better in the second year, a number of concerns were raised in open-ended comments about the value of the assessment, as it takes away from instructional time, the length of time required to administer the KRA, and the timing of the assessment. Respondents were concerned that kindergartners were being assessed numerous times within the testing window and raised questions about whether an assessment of kindergarten readiness should take place *before* children enter kindergarten.

MSDE advises that the purpose of the KRA is to consistently provide information about each student's school readiness skills across critical domains of learning in order to address any gaps and learning needs of students and school readiness gaps for subgroups of student at the school, district, and State levels.

MSDE also reported in the JCR that, due to changes and enhancements to the KRA, the timeline for implementing ELA has been delayed. The 2016-2017 school year will be the pilot year for the administration of the ELA to preschool children with disabilities, with revisions based on teacher feedback to be incorporated into the ELA, with a full rollout on a *voluntary* basis projected for the 2017-2018 school year. MSDE advises that the ELA is formative with indirect measures (*i.e.*, observational rubrics) and does not include standardized items.

State Fiscal Effect: Under the bill, MSDE advises that its online system for the KRA will need to be modified and MSDE will need to develop a methodology to sample kindergarten students from within each local school system. MSDE was unable to provide a cost estimate. The Department of Legislative Services assumes that costs to modify the online system will not be significant since capability will need to be reduced not increased. It is further assumed that administering the KRA to a sample of students rather than all students will result in some annual savings, although the funds to develop the KRA have already been spent.

It is assumed that MSDE can develop a sampling methodology using existing resources, although a sophisticated sampling methodology that would be capable of providing additional information to MSDE, local school systems, and teachers may cost more to develop.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None. However, SB 794 (Senator Jennings *et al.* – Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs) and HB 657 (Delegate Shoemaker *et al.* – Ways and Means) are identical.

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