

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 227
Ways and Means

(Delegate Chang)

Education - High School - Graduation Honor System

This bill authorizes a local board of education to establish a high school graduation honor system that consists of *summa cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *cum laude* distinctions. A local board of education that establishes a graduation honor system must establish the grade point average required for each level of distinction. The distinction must be printed on the student's official transcript and high school diploma.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill is directed at local school systems.

Local Effect: Under the bill, establishing a high school graduation honor system is optional; thus, any impact on a local school system is due to local choices and cannot be estimated.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: With the advice of the State Superintendent of Schools, the State Board of Education must establish minimum requirements for issuing certificates and diplomas by public and private high schools. The promotion of students in a public school and graduation from a public high school must be in accordance with (1) policies established by the local board of education and (2) the rules and regulations of the State board. Each student who graduates from a public high school must receive the same type of diploma or

certificate, regardless of the high school attended or the course taken. The diploma or certificate must state that the student has completed a program of studies satisfactorily in accordance with the requirements of the State board. According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), to be awarded a high school diploma, a student must complete the enrollment, credit, and service requirements; complete any local school system graduation requirements; and meet the graduation assessment requirements.

High School Diploma Requirements

According to COMAR, to be awarded a high school diploma, a student must be enrolled in a Maryland public school system and have earned a minimum of 21 credits in specified subjects as detailed in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1
Distribution of Credits Required to Graduate High School

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Credits</u>
English	4.0
Fine Arts	1.0
Mathematics ¹	3.0
Physical Education	0.5
Health Education	0.5
Science	3.0
Social Studies	3.0
Technology Education	1.0
World Language <i>or</i> American Sign Language <i>or</i> Advanced Technology Education ²	2.0
Electives ²	3.0

Note: The credits must meet other requirements specified in the Code of Maryland Regulations. Elective programs and instruction must be developed at the discretion of the local school system, open to enrollment for all students, and focus on in-depth study in required subject areas, exploration, or application and integration of what has been learned. In addition, all students must complete a locally designed high school program of environmental literacy approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

¹ However, beginning with students entering grade 9 in the 2014-2015 school year, each student must enroll in a mathematics course in each year of high school that the student attends, up to a maximum of four years of attendance, unless in the fifth or sixth year a mathematics course is needed to meet a graduation requirement.

² Alternatively, a student may successfully complete a State-approved career and technology program for four credits and one credit in an elective.

Source: Code of Maryland Regulations; Department of Legislative Services

Background: Latin phrases *summa cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *cum laude* are primarily used in the United States to indicate the level of distinction with which an academic degree (usually a bachelor’s degree) was earned based on the grade point average or class rank. The phrases are generally translated as follows: *summa cum laude*, meaning “with highest honor”; *magna cum laude*, meaning “with great honor”; and *cum laude*, meaning “with honor.”

Local Expenditures: Under the bill, establishing a high school graduation honor system is optional; thus, any impact on a local school system is due to local choices and cannot be estimated. Baltimore City Public Schools reports that updating its student data system to track student honors would cost \$10,000. On the other hand, Montgomery and Prince George’s county public school systems report that establishing an honor system could be absorbed within existing budgets.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City; Caroline, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 7, 2017
mm/rhh

Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

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