

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

Senate Bill 544 (Senator Salling, *et al.*)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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Education - No-Zero Grading Policy - Prohibition

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This bill prohibits a local board of education from establishing a no-zero grading policy. “No-zero grading policy” is defined as a grading policy that does not allow a teacher to issue a zero grade. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None.

**Local Effect:** None. Those local school systems that must revise grading policies can do so with existing resources.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** According to State regulations, each local school system must develop a written policy on grading and reporting that complies with student record requirements. By October 1 of each school year, each local school system must file its policies on grading and reporting with the State Superintendent of Schools.

**Background:** Proponents of no-zero grading policies have argued that assigning a zero on a 100-point scale for an assignment that is not submitted on time can quickly result in a course grade that does not properly reflect a student’s knowledge and ability and can reduce student morale, sometimes putting students on a path to failure and dropping out of school. Conversely, non-zero grades can encourage a student to try to recover from poor initial results.

Opponents of no-zero grading policies generally find that the possibility of a zero grade can be a considerable motivator for students to try and to turn in assignments and that zero grades prepare students for an adulthood that does not reward lack of effort and teach students to respect deadlines. A no-zero grading policy, they argue, undermines the importance of a student's work habits, such as class participation, meeting deadlines, and working diligently on assignments.

Grading policies vary considerably across local education agencies (LEAs) in Maryland, according to a February 2018 Maryland State Department of Education [document](#). Close to half of Maryland's LEAs allowed for a grade of zero, and at least four other LEAs allow for a zero grade if no effort is made on an assignment. For some LEAs, the grading policy varies depending on the grade level of the students and/or the credit offered in the course. In at least two LEAs, the grading policy differed from one school to another. At least some grading policies make distinctions between the minimum grade allowed for a given assignment versus the grade that may be given for a quarter or marking period.

LEA grading policies can be quite complex. Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) advises that it encourages teachers to use the actual grade earned when recording grades, which would include scores of zero. However, for grades 6-12, a final marking period grade may not be less than a 50. Final course grades may be less than 50 after final exam grades are incorporated. If a BCPS student receives an F as a marking period grade, the numerical equivalent of that grade cannot be lower than a 50 when used to calculate the student's final grade. If a student failed a marking period by earning a 51-59, that score should remain unchanged when calculating the student's final grade. According to BCPS, this requirement is meant to allow a student to improve their grade through diligent work in subsequent marking periods in order to pass the course.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) assumes that given grading policies outlined in the MSDE document discussed above, there will be no operational or fiscal impact on approximately half of Maryland's LEAs. For example, Anne Arundel County Public Schools advises that because its public schools allow for a zero grade, there is no fiscal impact. Given that some grading policies make distinctions between the grade for a given assignment and the grade for a given quarter or marking period, the policy impact on some LEAs will depend on whether the no-zero grading policy defined by the bill refers to particular assignments or to course grades for a given period.

BCPS advises that if this bill prohibits its current grading practice around failing grades, it could contribute to lower attendance rates in secondary grades, and ultimately increase the number of students who are retained each year, decrease the graduation rate, and increase the dropout rate; the fiscal effect of any such changes is difficult to project and estimate. Generally, it is assumed that school systems that must make policy changes can do so using existing resources.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** SB 667 of 2018 was withdrawn after receiving a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore City Public Schools; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 12, 2019  
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Analysis by: Scott P. Gates

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