
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 795 - Education – Curricular Content Standards – Peace and Conflict Studies

DATE: February 14, 2024

POSITION: Oppose

Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully oppose **HB 795**, which would require MSDE to develop curriculum content standards for a high school course on peace and conflict studies that includes at least eight hours of related student service hours. By the 2025-26 school year, each public high school in the state must implement the course and have a trained mediator to teach the course and provide other education and support services.

We do not oppose the bill based on the merits of the proposed subject matter but on the grounds that the legislative requirement runs counter to the process that is entrusted to the State Board, MSDE, and LEAs.

While the State Board and MSDE are supportive of the fundamental principles outlined in the requirements of the bill, the State Board and MSDE have an established process for reviewing, revising, and adopting standards, frameworks, and curricular resources. Both entities are strident in ensuring that the development of standards, frameworks, and curricular resources is conducted through this process, which includes collaboration between the State Board, MSDE, LEAs, and stakeholders.

Separate processes and timelines for the review and approval of standards, frameworks, and curricular resources could be counterproductive to both MSDE and to local education agencies. Additionally, HB 795 would allow for a short timeline for LEAs to complete the required curricular resource development, training, and procurement of new materials.

They will be required to:

- Rewrite curriculum guides, including writing, review, and piloting;
- Procure new instructional materials aligned to the revised standards and curriculum; and
- Train teachers in appropriate teaching pedagogy, implementation of the new curriculum, and implementation of the new instructional materials.

Beyond this, the changes required by this bill would alter the construction of numerous content standards. These changes would require substantial revisions, in many cases, beyond the inclusion of content required by HB 795 to ensure that the standards reflect an accurate, equitable representation of content and topics.

Further, HB 795 introduces a requirement that eight service-learning hours dedicated to topics covered by one course be counted towards students' service hours graduation requirement rather than allowing LEAs to implement the service-learning requirements in ways that are informed by the needs of the local community

and guided by student interest. While the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.03.02.05 states that to graduate from a Maryland high school, students must complete 75 hours of student service through a locally designed program, it is atypical that the method for attaining those hours would be prescribed in this manner.

MSDE, in partnership with teachers, supervisors, parents, institutes of higher education, and other stakeholders will continue to undertake significant reviews of state standards and frameworks. In this process, MSDE will be certain to include our critical partners in the General Assembly.

The State Board and MSDE respectfully requests that the committee consider this information on **HB 795**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Education Policy, and Government Relations, at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.