
TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 204 - Public Schools – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

DATE: February 4, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information regarding SB 204, which establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program within the State Department of Education and authorizes local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in the program to recognize student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. MSDE recognizes the bill's intent to elevate civic readiness and engagement as a valued outcome of public education and to create a statewide framework to support local implementation.

SB 204 places responsibility for administering the Maryland Civic Excellence Program with MSDE and directs the Department to develop, by no later than the 2027–2028 school year, guidelines to assist participating LEAs in determining student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. The bill further authorizes LEAs to voluntarily establish a local Maryland Civic Excellence Program aligned to these state-developed guidelines, including application criteria and criteria for awarding a Seal of Civic Excellence to eligible students.

Under the bill, participating LEAs may award a Seal of Civic Excellence and recognize student achievement through cords, medals, or other insignia affixed to the student's high school diploma. LEAs may also collaborate with nonprofit organizations, civic organizations, or institutions of higher education to support program implementation. Beginning July 1, 2028, participating systems would be required to submit annual reports to MSDE on program participation and outcomes.

The State Board and MSDE have started discussions on how to develop a comprehensive, equitable framework for recognizing civic engagement, modeled, in part, on the Seal of Biliteracy. In these discussions, the State Board and MSDE have considered embedding the program in Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) and believe that the procedures and processes related to the program are better suited for regulations than statute.

As this work continues, the State Board and MSDE emphasize that statewide consistency coupled with local flexibility, clear definitions of civic knowledge and civic participation, multiple pathways for students to demonstrate proficiency, required reflection, and safeguards to ensure equitable access for all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners is critical.

In considering statewide development and implementation of a coherent civic excellence program, we feel

that convening a group of stakeholders to discuss how to execute this with fidelity in COMAR is necessary for its success. The State Board and MSDE are committed to engaging with stakeholders in the coming months to further discuss the civic excellence program.

As we build on this work, careful consideration will be given to how statewide guidelines can support local innovation while minimizing unintended disparities across jurisdictions. MSDE is also examining implementation considerations, including professional learning needs, documentation and verification processes, and reporting requirements, to ensure that participation in the program is feasible for LEAs and accessible to students across diverse communities.

MSDE respectfully offers this information for consideration as the committee deliberates SB 204 and looks forward to continued collaboration with the Legislature, State Board, and LEAs to advance civic readiness and civic literacy in Maryland in a rigorous, equitable, and sustainable manner.

For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 443-571-5461 or Laurel.Cratsley@maryland.gov.