

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 795 (Delegate Bhandari)
 Ways and Means

Education – Curriculum Content Standards – Peace and Conflict Studies (Peace and Conflict Studies Education Act)

This bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop curriculum content standards that include specific elements for a course on peace and conflict studies for high school students. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, each local board of education must implement a course taught by a certified mediator on peace and conflict studies using the curriculum content standards developed by SBE in each public high school. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, each public high school in the State must have a mediator to provide education and support to students and school personnel relating to conflict resolution and peaceful communications in resolving disputes arising at the high school, as specified. For each fiscal year, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill an appropriation in an amount sufficient to employ and train mediators in each public high school in the State. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Beginning in FY 2026, general fund expenditures may increase by an estimated \$21.5 million to employ and train mediators in each public high school in the State. Future years reflect inflation. Revenues are not affected.

(\$ in millions)	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	0	21.5	21.9	22.4	22.8
Net Effect	\$0.0	(\$21.5)	(\$21.9)	(\$22.4)	(\$22.8)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Beginning in FY 2026, local school system expenditures increase to implement a course on peace and conflict studies in each public high school; however, costs to employ and train the mediators *may* be reimbursed by the State, as explained

below. Local school system expenditures may increase minimally in fiscal 2026 to update their service-learning tracking systems to ensure that students earn the eight hours dedicated to conflict resolution training. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The peace and conflict studies curriculum content standards must:

- enable students to navigate conflicts and engage in productive conversations through instruction on the following skills: active listening, mediation, and negotiation;
- include instruction on specified topics including cybersecurity, environmental justice, and social work; and
- require completion of at least eight student service hours dedicated to conflict resolution training and related activities.

The course must be taught by a certified mediator who has conflict resolution skills. A high school may establish partnerships with community remediation centers to assist students in completing the service hours required for the course. The required student service hours must count toward a student's service hour graduation requirement.

Each local superintendent of schools must ensure compliance with the requirements of the curriculum provisions of the bill. SBE may adopt regulations to implement the curriculum related provisions of the bill.

Current Law: With the advice of the State Superintendent of Schools, SBE establishes basic policy and guidelines for the program of instruction for public schools. Subject to State law and the regulations, bylaws, policies, and guidelines established by SBE, each local board of education must establish the curriculum guides and courses of study for schools in its jurisdiction. Policies, rules, and regulations for the graduation of students from Maryland public schools are established by local boards of education and SBE.

State/Local Fiscal Effect: The bill requires the Governor to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation in an amount sufficient to employ and train mediators in each public high school in the State. However, as this figure is not calculable, the funding is not considered mandated. For the purposes of this estimate, it is assumed State general funds are provided to employ and train mediators in each public high school.

Thus, as shown in **Exhibit 1**, general fund expenditures increase by an estimated \$21.5 million in fiscal 2026. This estimate is based on there being approximately 256 high schools in the State (including combined, charter, and special schools) and the assumption that in fiscal 2026 it costs approximately \$83,500 in salary and benefits to employ a mediator and \$500 in training costs. Those costs increase each year with inflation.

This analysis assumes that these funds are distributed to local school systems to hire these mediators (or pay existing staff to be trained as certified mediators) and thus, local school system revenues and expenditures increase. However, the bill does not explicitly require that local school systems be reimbursed for these costs.

Under the bill, the mediators hired teach the required course on peace and conflict studies course. To the extent that additional mediators are required to teach the required class, local school system expenditures increase by an undetermined amount. To the extent that existing staff are no longer required to teach existing courses, expenditures are less.

Local school system expenditures may increase minimally in fiscal 2026 to update their service-learning tracking systems to ensure that students earn the eight hours dedicated to conflict resolution training. However, any such costs cannot be reliably estimated.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the most recent [State Standards and Frameworks in Social Studies](#) includes or alluded to the topics required by the bill; thus, MSDE can develop the content standards that include specific elements for a course on peace and conflict studies using existing resources.

Exhibit 1
Estimated General Fund Expenditures for Mediators
Fiscal 2026

<u>Local School System</u>	<u>Number of High Schools</u>	<u>Mediator and Training</u>
Allegany	4	\$336,000
Anne Arundel	19	1,596,000
Baltimore City	35	2,940,000
Baltimore	35	2,940,000
Calvert	5	420,000
Caroline	2	168,000
Carroll	11	924,000
Cecil	5	420,000
Charles	7	588,000
Dorchester	2	168,000
Frederick	12	1,008,000
Garrett	2	168,000
Harford	13	1,092,000
Howard	14	1,176,000
Kent	1	84,000
Montgomery	29	2,436,000
Prince George's	30	2,520,000
Queen Anne's	2	168,000
St. Mary's	3	252,000
SEED	1	84,000
Somerset	2	168,000
Talbot	2	168,000
Washington	11	924,000
Wicomico	5	420,000
Worcester	4	336,000
Total	256	\$21,504,000

SEED: School for Education Evolution and Development

Note: Based on an estimated cost of \$83,500 per mediator in salary and benefits and \$500 in training.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1110 of 2023.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Budget and Management; Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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