

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 521 (Delegate E. Burns. *et al.*)

Ways and Means

Education - Counseling for Potential Dropouts

This bill requires a student who is at least 16 years old and who has not received a high school diploma to attend a counseling program before withdrawing from a public school. The program must provide advice relating to issues and problems associated with early withdrawal and must be attended by the child's parent or guardian. This bill takes effect July 1, 1998.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Indeterminate. Most public school systems already provide counseling services to students at-risk of dropping out of school. However, to the extent that State requirements for the counseling program are more comprehensive than locally designed guidance programs, local school expenditures may be affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Fiscal Analysis

Background: Each local school system provides guidance programs to help resolve student problems; however, the extent of these programs and services provided to students and parents varies across the State. The Howard County Public School System provides four counselors and two guidance support staff in each high school. In addition, the school system has 16 psychologists and 8 pupil personnel workers to assist troubled or at-risk students. In sum, Howard County spends approximately \$7.3 million on guidance, psychological, and pupil personnel services. In Prince George's County, 139 guidance counselors work in the county's 48 middle and senior high schools. The guidance program

provides student intervention services and assistance to students identified as having academic difficulties. The county also has 49 psychologists which provide various student and staff support services. Based on information from Prince George’s County, this service helps to promote student achievement and reduce discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, all of which could result in students withdrawing from school. In sum, Prince George’s County spends approximately \$18.9 million on guidance and psychological services.

In addition, the State has developed dropout prevention programs to reduce the number of students withdrawing from Maryland schools. For example, the State’s Maryland Tomorrow Program is designed to identify at-risk youth enrolled in public schools and provide them with individualized educational, training, and support services to prevent school dropouts. In fiscal 1998, State funding for the Maryland Tomorrow Program totaled \$10 million.

Local Effect: Around 11,500 students drop out of public schools each year. State regulations require each secondary school to provide guidance programs to its students, with one goal being to prevent students from dropping out of school. Assuming local school guidance programs satisfy the counseling requirement stipulated in the bill, local school expenditures would not be substantially affected since most students already receive some form of guidance instruction from the school system prior to withdrawing from school.

Furthermore, most school systems make every attempt possible to prevent students from dropping out of high school. For example, in Montgomery County the school system conducts an exit interview with each student prior to them withdrawing from the school. In addition, the school system counsels the students on the effects of dropping out of school, which includes a discussion on the potential loss of earnings by not obtaining a high school diploma. For the most part, school systems provide students with advice relating to issues and problems associated with dropping out of school. Thus local school expenditures should not be affected. However, to the extent that State requirements for the counseling program are more comprehensive than locally designed guidance programs, local school expenditures may be affected.

Additional Comments: The school dropout rate for the 1996-1997 school year for grades nine through twelve totaled 4.7% statewide. Baltimore County had the State’s lowest dropout rate at 1.25%, whereas Baltimore City had the highest at 13.5%. The next highest dropout rate occurred in Somerset County at 7%. **Exhibit 1** shows the dropout rate for the 1996-1997 school year for each local school system.

Exhibit 1
Local School Dropout Rates
(1996-1997 School Year)

School System	Dropout Rate	School System	Dropout Rate

Allegany	3.2%	Harford	3.5%
Anne Arundel	4.3%	Howard	2.6%
Baltimore City	13.5%	Kent	3.3%
Baltimore	1.25%	Montgomery	2.2%
Calvert	5.0%	Prince George's	4.2%
Caroline	6.0%	Queen Anne's	5.3%
Carroll	3.0%	St. Mary's	3.3%
Cecil	3.5%	Somerset	7.1%
Charles	4.1%	Talbot	2.1%
Dorchester	5.2%	Washington	5.1%
Frederick	2.8%	Wicomico	6.5%
Garrett	4.1%	Worcester	4.0%

Source: 1997 Maryland School Performance Report, MSDE

Information Source(s): Department of Legislative Services, Howard County Public School System, Prince George's County Public School System, Montgomery County Public School System, Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Maryland State Department of Education

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