

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 639 (Delegate Jacobs. *et al.*)

Ways and Means

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**Education - Reading Programs - Phonics Requirement**

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This bill requires each public elementary school to use phonics as the primary method of reading instruction. The bill takes effect July 1, 1998.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None.

**Local Effect:** Minimal impact on local school expenditures. Revenues would not be affected.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Fiscal Analysis**

**Background:** Maryland has approximately 390,000 public school students enrolled in grades one through six. Statewide, less than 35% of third graders who took the Maryland School Performance Assessment tests in 1996 received a satisfactory score in reading and less than 29% of eighth graders received a satisfactory score.

**State Effect:** The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) advises that three additional positions (two Staff Specialists and one Office Secretary) at an annual cost of \$125,000 would be required to coordinate the development of curricular guidelines and to provide technical assistance to local school systems. However, MSDE has stated that the department is already moving ahead with a strong approach to phonics which would require all elementary school teachers to be proficient in phonics instruction. Therefore, since MSDE is already moving in this direction, this bill should not result in any additional State personnel expenditures.

**Local Effect:** The impact on local school systems depends upon whether the school system already has a phonics program in place and whether additional reading materials must be purchased to implement a phonics based reading curriculum. As a point of reference, two school systems' reading programs are discussed below.

In Wicomico County, the local school system already places a strong emphasis on the phonics reading method. Since many elementary reading series lack a strong phonics approach, the Wicomico County School System has developed its own phonics instructional program called *Sound Signals*. Accordingly, the county advises that there would be no fiscal impact by designating phonics as the primary method of reading instruction. Further, county school officials contend that most teaching manuals provide adequate instructions on teaching phonics to students and that only minimal training would be required for staff with limited experience in phonics. In sum, this bill would have no fiscal impact on the Wicomico County School System.

In Baltimore County, most of the public elementary schools utilize a reading curriculum called *Word Identification Program for Beginning Readers* that combines both word identification and phonics. This program went into effect in August 1996 at an average cost of \$30,000 per school. Baltimore County Schools advise that the existing reading series satisfies the bill's phonics requirement, therefore the county would not need to purchase a new reading series for its elementary schools. In addition, the Baltimore County School System already has an ongoing teacher training program in place; therefore, additional teacher training expenses resulting from implementing the phonics program would be minimal. In addition, Baltimore County Schools advises that curriculum guidelines are primarily established internally at the central office. Consequently, this would reduce the need for MSDE to develop comprehensive guidelines and training programs at the State headquarters.

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**Information Source(s):** Department of Legislative Services, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Baltimore County Public School System, Wicomico County Public School System

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