

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2000 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 514 (Delegates Zirkin and Minnick)

Appropriations

Baltimore County - Education - Wireless Communications Technology - Pilot Program

This bill establishes a pilot program to implement wireless communication technology in all Baltimore County public schools. The purpose of the program is to: (1) provide a useful educational medium for all students in the county; (2) develop student familiarity with the uses and advantages of wireless communications; and (3) promote the more efficient use of faculty time. The Baltimore County Board of Education must develop a plan to implement wireless communications technology in all county schools and submit the plan to the State Superintendent of Schools for approval.

The State Superintendent must award a grant to the county board to implement the pilot program upon approval of the plan and the Governor must include funds in the State budget for the grant. The Baltimore County Board of Education must issue a report on the status of and the benefits accrued from the pilot program to the Governor and the General Assembly. The bill takes effect July 1, 2000.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures could increase by \$215,000 in FY 2001, assuming five public schools are selected for the pilot program and the Governor provides funding in the State budget for the pilot program.

Local Effect: Baltimore County school expenditures would increase by \$215,000 in FY 2001 to implement a wireless communications technology network at five public schools; however, State grants authorized under the pilot program would offset the local costs.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: A wireless communication technology program for public schools has not been developed or implemented by the State.

Background: Public schools are being wired with voice, video, and data networks. For several years the State has included funds in the school construction program to upgrade the wiring in schools to provide access to on-line computer resources. At this time the wiring at 490 schools still needs to be upgraded; 62 of these schools are in Baltimore County. The fiscal 2001 budget includes funds to accelerate the wiring and to increase the State's share of the costs. The goal is to wire all the remaining schools in the next two years.

The physical layout and the condition of a public school building can generate problems which could increase the cost of wiring; however, a wireless network could eliminate many of these problems. A wireless communications network could eliminate problems associated with asbestos abatement, reduce the time required to provide network services to a school, reduce classroom disruptions, eliminate the number of wiring closets, and eliminate or reduce infrastructure changes necessitated by the need to run large bundles of wires through school hallways.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: Providing a wireless voice and data network connection for each classroom would cost approximately \$1,000. In addition, each computer would have to be equipped with a networking card costing between \$90 and \$180. A wireless voice and data network for a school with 25 classrooms and 100 computers would cost approximately \$43,000. It is assumed that the pilot program would phase in the implementation of the wireless network at a few public schools. Upon a positive evaluation, the pilot program would be extended to other public schools in the county.

Assuming five public schools are selected in the first year and the State assumes the total cost of the program, State expenditures would increase by \$215,000 in fiscal 2001. Future year expenditures would depend upon the number of schools selected for the pilot program. Providing this technology at all public schools in Baltimore County could total approximately \$7.2 million. There are 168 public schools in Baltimore County: 102 elementary, 27 middle, 30 senior high, 3 combined, and 6 other.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

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