

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2001 Session

**FISCAL NOTE**

House Bill 57 (Delegate Zirkin)  
 Appropriations

**Baltimore County - Education - Wireless Communications Technology - Pilot Program**

This bill establishes a pilot program to implement wireless communications technology in Baltimore County public schools. The purpose of the program is to: (1) provide a useful education 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 public schools and submit the plan to the State Superintendent of Schools. Upon approval of the plan, the State Superintendent must award a grant to the county board to implement the program. Beginning in fiscal 2002, the Governor must include funds in the State budget for the grant. Two years after this grant is awarded, the board must report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the status of the program and on the program's benefits.

The bill is effective July 1, 2001.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures could increase by \$215,000 in FY 2002, assuming five public schools or all portable elementary classrooms are selected for the pilot program. Revenues would not be affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	215,000	-	-	-	-
Net Effect	(\$215,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

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

**Local Effect:** Baltimore County school expenditures could increase by \$215,000 in FY 2002 to implement a wireless communications technology network at five public schools; however, State grants authorized under the program would offset the local costs.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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## Analysis

**Current Law:** The State and Baltimore County have no programs to implement wireless communications technology through special grants.

**Background:** Public schools are in the process of being wired with voice, video, and data networks. For several years the State has included funds in the school construction program to upgrade wiring in public schools. By the end of fiscal 2002, every school in the State will either meet or approach Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) standards for telecommunications infrastructure, except schools scheduled for major renovations or closure within the next couple of years. Baltimore County has 68 schools scheduled for wiring in fiscal 2001.

Wiring can be a problem in some schools, depending on the physical layout and condition of the school building. A wireless network could alleviate some of the problems and disruptions associated with school renovations necessary for wiring and could reduce the time needed to complete the projects.

**State and Local Fiscal Effect:** Providing a wireless voice and data network connection for a classroom would cost approximately \$1,000. In addition, each computer would need to be equipped with a networking card at a cost of \$90 to \$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. If it is successful, the pilot program would be extended to other public schools in the county.

Assuming five schools are selected for participation in the first year with the State covering the total cost of the program, State expenditures would increase by approximately \$215,000 in fiscal 2002. Future year expenditures would depend on the number of schools selected for the program. There are 168 public schools in Baltimore County. If funding for wireless networks in all of the county's public schools is provided, the total cost for the program would be approximately \$7.2 million.

Baltimore County advises that a plan for the use of grant funds could potentially include the furnishing of portable elementary school classrooms with wireless technology. Portable classrooms are not wired because they are temporary and are not attached to school buildings, making wiring more difficult. There are 128 portable elementary classrooms in use in the county. The estimated cost to fund wireless networks in portable elementary school classrooms is about the same as the cost to pilot the program in five county schools.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** An identical bill, HB 514, was introduced in the 2000 legislative session. It was not reported out of the House Appropriations Committee.

**Cross File:** None.

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

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader – January 24, 2001  
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