

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Joint Resolution 13 (Senator Haines, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Public Schools - Character Education Program

This joint resolution encourages local boards of education to develop character education programs in their schools that include discussions of the following character traits: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Local school system expenditures could increase for systems that choose to expand character education programs.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Local school systems are not statutorily required to include character education programs in school curricula; however, all local school systems include some type of character training in their courses.

Background: Five local school systems (Baltimore City and Baltimore, Calvert, Frederick, and Prince George's counties) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) initially established the Maryland Partnership in Character Education in 1996 with funding awarded by the federal government through Title X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Also involved in the partnership are the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and

Mental Hygiene, and the Abell Foundation. Although federal funding for the program ceased after fiscal 2000, the partnership has continued with funding from the State and the Abell Foundation.

The partnership, which operates from MSDE headquarters, provides staff development, resource materials, technical support, and funding for character education programs. The partnership has worked with all 24 school systems. “Lab schools” have been established in each of the original five participating school systems for teachers, principals, student leaders, parents, and community leaders from other jurisdictions to visit and observe schools that have implemented character education curriculums. The proposed fiscal 2003 State budget includes \$300,000 for character education grants and conferences.

At least 25 states, including Virginia and West Virginia, mandate or encourage character education in public schools, and 37 states have received federal grants to develop character education initiatives. *State Legislatures* magazine lists several common guidelines for character education instruction:

- identification of the core ethical values to be taught;
- instruction in the definition of moral behavior and the process for making decisions based on ethical values;
- reinforcement of the core values throughout a student’s school experiences;
- opportunities for students to demonstrate the values being taught;
- commitment to character education values by both students and staff;
- recruitment of parents and community members as partners; and
- evaluation of the program’s effectiveness.

State Fiscal Effect: There is no cost for the State to encourage the development and implementation of character education programs in local school systems. However, MSDE advises that the State cost to support, expand, and maintain effective, research-based character education programs and strategies would be \$750,000 to \$800,000 per year.

Local Fiscal Effect: The cost to develop, implement, and sustain a character education program in a local system is estimated at approximately \$125,000 annually. This estimate assumes that one full-time curriculum specialist would be hired to maintain the program. Additional funding could be used to: provide instructional materials, field trips, and speakers for students; provide professional development in character education instruction to teachers and school personnel; promote community involvement in character education programs; and evaluate character education programs. Nine school

systems -- Allegany, Baltimore, Calvert, Carroll, Frederick, Kent, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, and Talbot counties -- have implemented districtwide character education programs, although the extent of the implementation varies from school to school. The bill does not require local school systems to develop character education programs.

It is assumed that this bill would not impact local funding for public school systems.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Bills to establish mandatory character education programs in all local school systems were introduced in the 2000 and 2001 legislative sessions as SB 737 and SB 754, respectively. Both bills received unfavorable reports from the Senate Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee.

Cross File: None.

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

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