

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 556 (Delegate Healey, *et al.*)
Ways and Means

Education - Task Force to Study the Optimum Size for School Districts in Maryland

This bill establishes a 19-member Task Force to Study the Optimum Size for School Districts in Maryland. The task force must study the relationship between the size of school districts and student performance and behavior, school and school system staffing patterns, parental and community involvement in schools, school system functions, and State and local fiscal issues. The task force must submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by November 1, 2003. The Maryland State Department of Education, the Department of Budget and Management, and the Department of Legislative Services must staff the task force.

The bill is effective July 1, 2002.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Costs associated with the task force would be minimal and absorbable within the existing resources of the involved departments.

Local Effect: The required local officials could participate in the task force with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There are 24 local school systems in Maryland, one in each county and Baltimore City.

Background: The number of school districts within states ranges from 1,052 in Texas to 1 in Hawaii. Maryland with 24 school districts has the fourth fewest school districts in the country, exceeding only Delaware (19), Nevada (17), and Hawaii (1). The small number of school districts in Maryland results in some of the nation's largest school districts. For example, over one-third of the school districts in Maryland have enrollment over 25,000, compared to only around 1% nationally. Further, all of Maryland's school districts are within the top twenty-fifth percentile for school district size. For example, while Caroline County with 5,600 students is one of the smallest school districts in Maryland, it is larger than over 85% of the school districts in the nation. **Exhibit 1** displays the number of school districts and students per district in Maryland and several neighboring states.

Exhibit 1
Number of School Districts and Average Student Enrollment Per District
in Maryland and Neighboring States

| State | School Districts | Average Size |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Maryland | 24* | 35,900 |
| Delaware | 19 | 6,000 |
| New Jersey | 581 | 2,200 |
| New York | 705 | 4,100 |
| North Carolina | 120* | 10,800 |
| Pennsylvania | 500 | 3,600 |
| Virginia | 132* | 8,300 |
| West Virginia | 55* | 5,300 |

*School districts are conterminous with county and city boundaries.

Source: *Education Week*, Jan. 2001

One of the perceived benefits of smaller local school systems is better student performance. **Exhibit 2** shows Maryland's school system enrollments and results from the 2001 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP).

Exhibit 2
2001 Enrollment and MSPAP Composite Index Scores
by Local School System

| School System | Sept 30, 2001 Enrollment | 2001 MSPAP Scores | School System | Sept 30, 2001 Enrollment | 2001 MSPAP Scores |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Kent | 2,684 | 54.7 | Calvert | 16,651 | 55.6 |
| Somerset | 3,061 | 34.2 | Washington | 19,962 | 52.1 |
| Talbot | 4,516 | 38.9 | Charles | 24,002 | 44.9 |
| Garrett | 4,869 | 41.1 | Carroll | 28,127 | 50.7 |
| Dorchester | 4,884 | 36.8 | Frederick | 38,022 | 51.9 |
| Caroline | 5,609 | 48.9 | Harford | 39,966 | 53.3 |
| Worcester | 6,884 | 52.6 | Howard | 46,257 | 61.2 |
| Queen Anne's | 7,232 | 48.1 | Anne Arundel | 75,084 | 46.6 |
| Allegany | 10,181 | 45.7 | Baltimore City | 97,919 | 22.5 |
| Wicomico | 14,513 | 38.9 | Baltimore | 107,221 | 49.5 |
| St. Mary's | 15,483 | 45.5 | Prince George's | 135,074 | 28.3 |
| Cecil | 16,098 | 50.6 | Montgomery | 136,895 | 51.0 |

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

A potential disadvantage for smaller school districts is that fiscal disparities among school districts could increase. Since a county's wealth base is not evenly distributed across the jurisdiction, dividing a county into multiple school districts could impact local resources for many public schools.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

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