

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 97
Ways and Means

(Delegate McConkey, *et al.*)

Education - Hearing and Vision Screenings

This bill requires the parent or guardian of a public school student to ensure that the student has been screened for hearing and vision problems *before* entering a public school system. Each local board of education must develop a procedure to determine compliance.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill is directed at local school systems.

Local Effect: Local boards of education can develop procedures to determine compliance using existing resources. Any cost savings from requiring parents or guardians to ensure that a student has been screened for hearing and vision problems *before* entering a public school system are offset by administrative expenditures needed to track compliance. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Each local board of education or the local health department must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in local public schools, and each local health department must provide and fund the screenings for private and nonpublic schools in the jurisdiction. Unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested *within the past year*, the screenings must take place *in the years* that a child enters a school system (normally kindergarten); enters first grade; and enters eighth or ninth grade. Thus, in practice, only students who did not attend public kindergarten are

tested in first grade. Further screenings must also be done in accordance with policies adopted by local boards of education and local health departments.

Results of the screenings go in each child's permanent record and are reported to the local board of education or the local health department. Parents of students who fail the screenings are likewise given the results and are required to report back on the services received by the student. The local board of education or the local health department must report to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) the results of the screenings and, to the extent practicable, the number of students receiving the recommended services. A student may be exempted for religious reasons.

A child entering the Maryland public school system for the first time must have a physical examination within the period nine months before entrance or six months after entrance. According to regulations, an effort should be made to facilitate students and their families in obtaining a physical examination; however, if a student is unable to obtain a physical examination, the student may not be excluded from school. In addition, the physical examination form designated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and DHMH must be used.

Background: The *Maryland State School Health Guideline: Hearing and Vision Screening Manual* states that "School hearing and vision screening programs have clearly demonstrated that, all too frequently, some children enter school with impaired vision and hearing." The manual also notes that a vision or hearing impairment can affect a student's ability to learn and that early identification of an impairment can prevent detrimental educational effects. The manual says that the screenings attempt to identify problems that may need additional attention and help to determine appropriate referrals for students who may have impairments.

MSDE advises that the physical examination form designated by MSDE and DHMH for the physical examination required nine months before entrance or six months after entrance into a Maryland public school system includes an area for the health care provider to note hearing and vision problems.

Local Expenditures: Local school system or local health department expenditures for providing hearing and vision screenings do not decrease significantly by requiring parents or guardians to ensure that a student has been screened for hearing and vision problems *before* entering a public school system because the screenings that are currently provided to all entering kindergarteners would instead be required to be provided to all first graders. Currently, many local school systems or local health departments provide hearing and vision screenings to all kindergarteners to ensure that all students receive a quality screening and to avoid administrative expenditures associated with tracking which students received a hearing within the past year. Since the schools have evidence that

students were tested within the past year for all kindergarteners in their system, they only provide screenings for first grade students new to the system.

Under the bill, local governments report that, instead of providing screenings for all kindergarteners, screenings would be provided for all first graders because they would not have evidence that a student had a screening within the past year. Any savings from not providing screening to students entering a public school system after kindergarten would be mitigated by administrative expenditures to track compliance.

Additional Comments: As is currently the case with the requirement that a student have a physical examination, students who do not obtain a hearing and vision screening as required by the bill will not be excluded from school and will therefore still be included in the September 30 enrollment count that is used to determine State aid for education.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Kent, Montgomery, and Washington counties; Baltimore City; Department of Legislative Services

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