

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2012 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Revised**

Senate Bill 689

(Senator Shank)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

**Education - Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning - Establishment**

This bill establishes the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). MSDE must provide staff support for the council. By December 1 of each year, the council must report its recommendations to the State Superintendent of Schools and the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by \$36,000 in FY 2013 for MSDE to hire a part-time education specialist to staff the council and to reimburse council members for travel expenses. Future year expenditures reflect annualization and inflation. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	36,000	45,400	48,300	50,500	52,700
Net Effect	(\$36,000)	(\$45,400)	(\$48,300)	(\$50,500)	(\$52,700)

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

**Local Effect:** Local school system employees appointed to the council can participate without affecting local expenditures.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The mission of the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning is to encourage and support the education of students in accordance with national standards of online learning and State law.

### *Composition of the Council*

The council consists of 23 members: the State Superintendent of Schools or the State Superintendent's designee; the director of the Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Office; 2 members of the Senate appointed by the Senate President; 2 members of the House of Delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House; 11 members that meet specified qualifications to be appointed by the Governor, and 6 members appointed by MSDE that are employees of local school systems that have excelled in the ability to incorporate technology into the classroom.

In making the appointments to the council, the Governor and MSDE must ensure that the council is representative of all geographic areas of the State; and all levels of education, including early childhood learning, elementary school, middle school, and high school.

Members serve staggered three-year terms. At the end of a term, a member must serve until a successor is appointed. A member who is appointed after a term has begun serves for the remainder of the term or until a successor is appointed. The Governor or MSDE must appoint a successor in the event of a vacancy on the council. From among its members, a chair must be elected for a three-year term.

Council members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

### *Council Meeting Requirements*

A majority of the members then serving on the council constitutes a quorum. The council must meet at least four times during each academic year. The council may hold additional meetings in order to carry out its responsibilities.

### *Duties of the Council*

The council is required to make recommendations on the following:

- high quality professional development for teachers and principals regarding digital instruction or blending digital content with traditional classroom instruction;

- funding strategies to provide high quality, innovative options in course providers and delivery;
- student assessment and accountability;
- infrastructure necessary to support digital learning;
- mobile learning and mobile learning applications;
- aligning resources and digital learning initiatives of all State agencies;
- coordination of digital learning programs to prevent redundancy and inefficiency;
- planning for changes in technology and digital learning;
- expanded curriculum for mathematics, science, foreign language, and advanced placement courses;
- increasing education opportunities for at-risk, home-bound, special needs, and alternative education students; and
- implementation plans for providing digital learning opportunities to all students in the State.

The council must also perform any other tasks to carry out the mission of the council.

**Current Law:** MSDE must provide Maryland virtual learning opportunities that include (1) offering a distance-learning program to provide Maryland public school students with equal opportunities to develop a strong academic foundation; (2) offering expanded educational choices not otherwise available to students through online courses and services; and (3) expanding the professional development opportunities available to educational staff in Maryland public schools through online courses and services.

With the approval of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools, MSDE must:

- develop online courses and services;
- procure online courses and services;
- develop standards for teachers and other school system employees for the offering of courses or services on the Internet or through other developing technologies; and
- review courses and courseware to assure quality and alignment with the Maryland content standards and other appropriate standards.

There is a Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Fund. The State Board of Education may set reasonable fees for online courses and services. The fees charged must be set so as to produce funds to support maintenance of Maryland virtual learning opportunities.

According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), consistent with local school system policy and procedure, credit may be given for correspondence courses and for MSDE-approved online courses. If credit is to be applied toward minimum graduation requirements, the correspondence course or the MSDE-approved online course must be provided by the local school system.

**Background:** In Maryland, supplemental online courses are offered through the Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Program (MVLO). MVLO is managed by MSDE and is designed to expand the access of Maryland public school students to challenging curricula aligned to the Maryland Content Standards and other appropriate standards through the delivery of high quality online courses. MVLO offers approximately 62 online courses through the Maryland Virtual School (MVS) in collaboration with the local school systems. While MVS offers online courses, it is not authorized to grant high school diplomas and does not offer a full high school curriculum. Students may only take a course through MVS with the permission of the local school system and their school principal, and credit can only be awarded for MSDE-approved courses. MVLO is designed for use by high school students; Maryland does not offer online learning opportunities designed for elementary and middle school students.

However, MSDE does not have the staff or funding to approve any new online courses for MVS and currently has a backlog of 17 courses that need to be reviewed. MSDE anticipates that the number and variety of online courses will continue to grow and local school systems and online course vendors will continue to ask MSDE to review online courses for approval.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase by \$35,955 in fiscal 2013 for MSDE to hire a part-time education specialist to staff the council and to reimburse council members for travel expenses. This estimate reflects the bill's October 1, 2012 effective date.

	<b><u>FY 2013</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2014</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2015</u></b>
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$31,210	\$42,035	\$44,938
Operating Expenses	207	278	281
Travel	2,295	3,091	3,122
Start-up Costs	2,243	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$35,955</b>	<b>\$45,404</b>	<b>\$48,341</b>

Future year expenditures reflect a part-time salary with annual increases, and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating and travel expenses.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 745 (Delegate Serafini, *et al.*) - Ways and Means.

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

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 29, 2012  
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