

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

House Bill 1100  
Ways and Means

(Delegate Hill, *et al.*)

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School Counseling Program - Counseling Services - Requirements

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This bill requires each local board of education to require the School Counseling Program in the county to provide counseling services to students during the entire calendar year. The local board of education, in consultation with each public school within its jurisdiction, must (1) determine the student needs for counseling services during the period of time when schools are not in session for summer break, prioritizing the needs of at-risk students; and (2) develop a plan for meeting those student needs, including consideration of costs, transportation, and continuity of care. By July 1 each year, a local board of education must report to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) on the utilization of the counseling services required under the bill, including the costs of providing the services.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None. MSDE can review the annual reports using existing resources.

**Local Effect:** Local school system expenditures may increase significantly to provide counseling services to students during summer breaks (and other times when services are currently not provided) and to transport students to services. Costs will depend on local needs and current capacity of each school system; thus, an accurate cost estimate cannot be calculated at this time. However, costs may be significant. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Current Law:** Regulations require a planned, systematic program of counseling, consulting, appraisal, information, and placement services for students in prekindergarten through grade 12. The program must be designed to address three goal areas: (1) personal and academic growth; (2) educational and career decision making; and (3) social/emotional growth and interpersonal relations.

With the assistance of local health departments, each local board of education must provide adequate school health services, instruction in health education, and a healthful school environment.

### **Background:**

#### *Children and Youth Mental Health*

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, up to one in five children experience a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year. Behavioral and emotional issues can act as a barrier to academic success and high school graduation, as well as create disciplinary and attendance problems in school. In addition, research indicates that school mental health programs can improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, decreasing discipline referrals, and improving test scores.

A recent white paper by the National Association of School Psychologists entitled [School Psychologists: Qualified Health Professionals Providing Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Services](#) stated that, “[s]chool psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and health services.” The report further stated that 75% to 80% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them because existing mental health services are inadequate. Of those who do receive services, 70% to 80% receive mental health services in schools. In addition, students were found to be 21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for mental health concerns than community-based centers. The white paper advises that for students in need of more intensive services, school psychologists can help coordinate school-based and community-based services to facilitate a wraparound system of services.

#### *School Guidance Counselors*

School guidance counselors are the school staff responsible for counseling students with regard to their academic, self-management, education/career decision making, interpersonal, or related needs that impact directly on educational and career choices. As of October 2015, there were approximately 2,403 public school guidance counselors

making an average of \$73,400 annually. Statewide there are approximately 1.7 guidance counselors per school.

### *Psychological Personnel*

Psychological personnel are the school staff who evaluate a student's cognitive and emotional development, diagnose educational and personal disabilities, and provide appropriate follow-up in the form of consultation or direct intervention. As of October 2015, there were approximately 775 public school psychological personnel making an average of \$86,000 annually. Statewide there are approximately 0.5 school psychological personnel per school.

**Local Expenditures:** Local school system expenditures may increase significantly to provide counseling services to students during summer breaks (and other times when services are currently not provided) and to transport students to services. Costs will depend on local needs, and current capacity in each school system; thus, an accurate cost estimate cannot be calculated at this time. However, costs may be significant.

It should also be noted that it is unclear whether a local board of education must provide the services of guidance counselors or school psychological personnel. Due to the difference in average salary for these two positions, the interpretation of this requirement will impact the costs.

As discussed further below, counselors who are employed by Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) work 10 months of the year plus 15 days of summer supplemental employment (SSE). Assuming the statewide average salaries for these positions as of October 2015 and that these employees are on 10 month plus 15 days of SSE contracts, it will cost approximately \$7,400 to convert a school guidance counselor to a 12-month employee and approximately \$10,000 to convert a school psychologist to a 12-month employee. However, it is unknown how many additional days of counseling will be required to meet student needs beyond those that can be met using existing resources. It is also unknown if counselors in all jurisdictions have SSE days or how many SSE days they currently have. Transportation costs will also increase.

### *Montgomery County*

MCPS reports that its elementary school counselors work 10 months plus 15 days of SSE; secondary and English for speakers of other languages work 10 months plus 21 SSE days. Counselors work in consultation with their school principals to meet the needs of the school during the summer months to determine when to work their SSE days. MCPS estimates its expenditures would increase by \$8.1 million to convert its 10-month counselors to 12-month counselors. This estimate does not include any increases for benefits. To the

extent that counseling needs of MCPS students can be met using the existing practice of counselors working SSE days, the increase in MCPS expenditures will be less.

MCPS advises that to operate a school bus for six hours per day and a travel distance of 60 miles per day during the summer will cost approximately \$321. Assuming one school bus operating for this program once per week during the summer break (*i.e.*, approximately 9 weeks) to each school in the county (*i.e.*, 203), the total MCPS transportation costs increase by an estimated \$586,500.

Thus, under these assumptions MCPS expenditures increase by a total of \$8.7 million per year. To the extent, that counseling needs of MCPS students can be met using the existing practice of counselors working SSE days or less transportation is required, MCPS expenditures will be significantly less. However, to the extent that additional transportation services are required, costs will be more.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Montgomery County Public Schools, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Association of School Psychologists, Department of Legislative Services

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