

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1297

(Delegate McKay)

Ways and Means

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Education - Public High Schools - Agriculture Science

This bill encourages each county board of education, beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, to implement an agriculture science curriculum in at least one public high school in the local school system or career and technology education center in the county. If offered, the curriculum must be selected from existing curricula developed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) or developed by a county board and approved by MSDE.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. MSDE has already approved use of at least one national agricultural science curriculum that is in use in Maryland public high schools, the Curriculum for Agriculture Science Education (CASE). MSDE can carry out any additional responsibilities arising from the bill's mandate with existing resources. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: County boards of education in Howard and Somerset counties, the only two counties that currently do not offer an agricultural science curriculum, are encouraged to develop and/or implement agriculture science education programs in at least one high school or career and technology center in the 2018-2019 school year. All other county boards of education already offer an agricultural science curriculum in at least one school, although Allegany County is considering ending its current program due to lack of enrollment. No effect on local revenues.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: With the advice of the State Superintendent of Schools, the State Board of Education establishes basic policy and guidelines for the program of instruction for public schools. Subject to State law and the bylaws, policies, and guidelines established by the State Board of Education, each local board of education must establish the curriculum guides and courses of study for schools in its jurisdiction.

According to the Code of Maryland Regulations, each local school system must provide in public schools a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education program infused within current curricular offerings and aligned with the Maryland Environmental Literacy Curriculum. As part of that curriculum, a student must make decisions that demonstrate understanding of natural communities and the ecological, economic, political, and social system of human communities and must examine how their personal and collective actions affect the sustainability of these interrelated systems.

Background: Chapter 672 of 2012 required the State Board of Education and the University of Maryland Extension, after consultation with local boards of education, specified local agriculture groups, and other organizations that promote education about agriculture, to create a task force by December 31, 2014, to explore options for incorporating the subject of agriculture, including sustainable agriculture and other agriculture issues, in all existing curricular areas. The task force completed a final report in May 2015, when authorization for the task force terminated.

The task force's final report included four recommendations:

- establish a free online interactive venue for students entitled the Maryland Agriculture Academy, which includes multimedia resources and activities;
- provide a curriculum and professional learning resource system for educators on the integrated teaching of agriculture, aligned to Maryland content standards;
- expand the pipeline to agriculture careers and education through elementary and middle school programs; and
- expand the State's rigorous high school agricultural programs of study that lead to postsecondary credit and industry certification as well as increased readiness for entry into college and careers.

The task force identified 51 Maryland public high schools and career and technology centers that currently offer instruction in agricultural science. Of these, 26 offer the CASE curriculum, 14 offer district-developed programs, and the remaining 11 schools offer other national programs. The report does not identify the counties in which the schools are located, but MSDE advises that it is aware of only two local school systems

(Somerset and Howard counties) that do not currently offer agricultural science education at the high school level. MSDE also advises that Allegany County may discontinue its existing program due to lack of enrollment.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 770 (Senators Bates and Norman) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

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

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