

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 244 (Senator Robinson, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Task Force to Study Suspension Rates of African American Prekindergarten Students

This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Suspension Rates of African American Prekindergarten Students. The State Superintendent of Schools must designate the chair of the task force, which is to be staffed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). By December 1, 2018, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017, and terminates June 30, 2019.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for MSDE are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force is required to:

- study the suspension rates of prekindergarten students in public schools;
- determine whether African American prekindergarten students are suspended at higher rates than students of other races and the reasons for the suspensions;

- determine the resources available to remedy suspensions of African American prekindergarten students, including the availability of special education needs teachers in public schools; and
- make recommendations to deter suspensions of African American prekindergarten students.

A member of the task force may not receive compensation but is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

Current Law/Background: The suspension of prekindergarten students has received increased attention in recent years, with news articles in 2013 reporting that students in the State had been suspended for behavior ranging from physical attacks on teacher or students to insubordination, disrespect, and classroom disruption. The U.S. Department of Education advises that these suspensions have broad-ranging impacts on children and families. For example, removing children from prekindergarten may hinder their academic and socioeconomic growth and cause stress for parents who have to find urgent child care or miss work. A 2016 report from the Office for Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education noted that African American public prekindergarten children in the United States are 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as White students.

MSDE adopted regulations in 2014 that required local school systems to review and revise student discipline policies and regulations (for all grade levels) with the goal of maintaining an environment of order, safety, and discipline necessary for effective learning. Pursuant to these regulations, policies and regulations of local school systems must, at a minimum, meet specified requirements, including (1) reflecting a discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching, and acknowledging positive behavior; (2) explaining why and how long-term suspensions or expulsions are last resort options; and (3) addressing the ways the educational and counseling needs of suspended students will be met.

According to MSDE, a total of 89 prekindergarten students were suspended or expelled from school in the 2015-2016 school year. This includes in-school and out-of-school suspensions. The highest amounts were in Prince George's County (17) and Baltimore City (11). The data is not available by race.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 561 of 2014, a similar bill, received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; U.S. Department of Education; *The Baltimore Sun*; Department of Legislative Services

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md/rhh

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