

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

Senate Bill 666 (Senator Robinson)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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Task Force to Study Grading Policies in Maryland Schools

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This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Grading Policies in Maryland Schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide staff for the task force. By December 1, 2018, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2018, and terminates after June 30, 2019.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** MSDE can staff the task force and provide expense reimbursements with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The task force must study the impact of different grading policies on student learning and of a no-zero grading policy on student learning and on teacher instruction. The task force must study any other matters relating to a no-zero grading policy that the task force deems relevant and must make recommendations regarding:

- whether any curriculum changes will be needed based on the task force's findings;
- whether the State should prohibit a county board of education from implementing a no-zero grading policy; and
- any other findings of the task force.

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:** According to State regulations, each local school system must develop a written policy on grading and reporting that complies with student record requirements. On October 1 of each school year, each local school system must file its policies on grading and reporting with the State Superintendent of Schools.

**Background:** Proponents of no-zero grading policies have argued that assigning a zero on a 100-point scale for an assignment that is not submitted on time can quickly result in a course grade that does not properly reflect a student's knowledge and ability and can reduce student morale, sometimes putting students on a path to failure and dropping out of school. Conversely, nonzero grades can encourage a student to try to recover from poor initial results.

Opponents of no-zero grading policies variably find that the possibility of a zero grade can be a considerable motivator for students to try and to turn in assignments, that zero grades prepare students for an adulthood that does not reward lack of effort and teach students to respect deadlines. A no-zero grading policy, they argue, undermines the importance of a student's work habits, such as class participation, meeting deadlines, and working diligently on assignments.

MSDE advises that the State Superintendent of Schools has established the High School Graduation Task Force, which is generally studying what courses/content students need prior to moving on to postsecondary education or the workforce and, in 2018, analyzing local grading policies.

Montgomery and Prince George's counties advise that their local school system policies currently allow for zero grades. Baltimore City advises that a zero grade is allowed and encouraged when appropriate on individual assignments, but for grades 6 through 12 there is a minimum course grade of 50 before final exam grades are incorporated to allow a student to improve his/her grade through diligent work in subsequent marking periods in order to pass the course. Baltimore City advises that any changes in policy made under the bill can be handled using existing resources. It is assumed that other school systems that must make policy changes can do so using existing resources.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Baltimore City; Montgomery and Prince George's counties; Maryland State Department of Education; National Education Association; National School Boards Association; *Washington Post*; Department of Legislative Services

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