

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 423 (Senator Benson, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Task Force to Study the Impact of Student Cell Phone Use in the Classroom

This bill establishes the Task Force to Study the Impact of Student Cell Phone Use in the Classroom staffed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The task force must study (1) the impact of student cell phone use in the classroom on student learning; (2) the impact of student cell phone use in the classroom on teacher instruction; (3) whether there are any benefits associated with student cell phone use in the classroom; and (4) any other relevant matters relating to student cell phone use in the classroom. The bill specifies the membership of the task force and requires it to report its findings by December 1, 2019. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2019, and terminates June 30, 2020.**

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.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: According to a 2017 *Washington Post* article, there is little data on the prevalence of cell phone use in local school systems nationwide. However, approaches seem to vary considerably, with some schools banning usage outright and others actively incorporating them into classroom instruction. According to the article, Montgomery County Public Schools recently relaxed existing rules on cell phone usage. Prior to the recent policy change, students in fifth grade or lower were not permitted to

carry cell phones at all. In Prince George’s County, cell phones are allowed with a principal’s approval.

According to a 2015 research paper published by the London School of Economics and Political Science, many countries are debating how schools should address mobile phone usage, with some advocating a complete ban and others encouraging usage in classrooms as a teaching tool. The paper examined the impact on a complete cell phone ban on student test scores using a survey of schools in four English cities. The researchers found that student performance increased significantly after the ban was imposed, with the increase driven by gains among low-achieving students. Thus, the authors concluded that “restricting mobile phone use can be a low-cost policy to reduce educational inequalities.”

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 103 of 2018 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science; *Washington Post*; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 7, 2019
mag/hlb

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