

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 950 (Delegate Kittleman, *et al.*)
 Ways and Means

Public Schools - Civics Education Award Program

This bill establishes the Civics Education Award Program to provide \$1,000 awards to 40 grade 12 public school students randomly chosen from among those who answer correctly at least 90% of the questions on the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS). Beginning in calendar 2023, each local board of education must offer the civics test to each public school student in grade 12. By the first day of the 2022-2023 school year, the State Board of Education (SBE) must determine the means of providing each high school student an opportunity to take the civics test. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide funding for the awards. **This bill takes effect July 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Beginning in FY 2023, general fund expenditures increase by \$40,000 annually for awards. In addition, *based on one set of assumptions*, general fund expenditures increase by an additional \$1.6 million only in FY 2023 to hire a contractor to develop an accessible statewide online test. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	1,680,300	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Net Effect	(\$1,680,300)	(\$40,000)	(\$40,000)	(\$40,000)	(\$40,000)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: *Based on one set of assumptions*, local school system expenditures are not materially affected. However, costs depend on implementation choices made by SBE and local school systems. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A public school student in grade 12 is eligible to participate in the Civics Education Award Program. A student may not take the civics test more than twice as a participant in the program.

SBE must administer the program. Each year, each local board of education must compile a list of the public school students in grade 12 who answer correctly at least 90% of the questions on the civics test. By March 31, 2023, and each March 31 thereafter, each local board must submit to SBE the list of students who meet the requirement. Each year, in a public forum, SBE must select at random 40 students from the list of names submitted to receive \$1,000 awards.

Current Law: To become a naturalized U.S. citizen, qualified applicants must pass a civics test in addition to English speaking, reading, and writing tests. During an applicant's naturalization interview, the applicant is asked up to 10 questions from a list of 100 history and government questions. An applicant must answer correctly 6 of the 10 questions to pass the civics test. The list of 100 questions from which the interviewer may choose are provided by the federal government on its website so that applicants can learn the material.

The questions are asked and must be answered orally. The 100 questions have set answers, although some answers such as "Who is one of the applicant's U.S. Senators?" change due to elections, and some questions such as "What is *one* right or freedom from the First Amendment?" have multiple answers (*i.e.*, speech, religion, assembly, press, and petition the government). The 100 questions and answers can be found on CIS's [website](#). CIS also has developed a quick civics lessons [handbook](#) that explains the answers.

State Expenditures: Beginning in fiscal 2023, general fund expenditures increase by \$40,000 annually for awards. In addition, general fund expenditures increase by an additional \$1.6 million in fiscal 2023 to hire a contractor to develop an online portal to administer the test in a way that is assessable to *all* grade 12 students.

The bill requires MSDE to provide funding for 40 awards of \$1,000 each beginning with the 2022-2023 school year; thus, general fund expenditures increase by \$40,000 annually beginning in fiscal 2023. If additional funding is not appropriated to MSDE for the program, funding may need to be redirected from existing projects and responsibilities.

In addition, the bill specifies that SBE must determine the means of providing each high school student an opportunity to take the civics test. MSDE advises that for *all* students to have an equal opportunity to participate in the award program, MSDE must develop a version of the civics test that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act compliance expectations for braille, American sign language, text to speech technologies,

large print, and be available for administration in Spanish. MSDE advises that it expects to issue a request for proposals for a contractor to develop an accessible version of the test.

MSDE advises that the contractor would also develop a statewide online portal for students to take the test in conjunction with the development of the assessable test versions. The online portal would score the test and presumably compile a list of students who have answered at least 90% of the questions correctly. MSDE estimates a cost of \$27 per student on average. There are approximately 60,750 public school grade 12 students in the State; thus, *based on one set of assumptions*, general fund expenditures increase by an additional estimated \$1.6 million to develop the statewide online testing portal. Actual costs depend on the actual bids received to develop the test. Although the bill does not specifically require the development of a statewide testing portal, it is assumed that ultimately it is the most cost-effective implementation method due to the long-term local savings. It is assumed that the statewide online portal development costs are one-time.

It is assumed that SBE can select award winners from the list compiled through the statewide online portal using existing resources.

Local Expenditures: Beginning in 2023, each local board of education must offer the civics test to all of their grade 12 students. Local school systems have between 120 (Kent County) and 11,680 (Montgomery County) grade 12 students. By March 31 each year, each local board of education must submit to SBE a list of students who have answered at least 90% of the questions correctly. Ultimately, local school system expenditures depend on SBE and local school system implementation choices.

If MSDE develops a statewide online portal for students to take the test online, as described above, local school system expenditures are not materially affected. In that case, it is assumed that the statewide online portal compiles a list of students eligible for the award.

However, if a statewide online assessment is not developed, local school system expenditures increase, likely meaningfully, to test, track, and compile a list of students who have answered at least 90% of the questions correctly. Baltimore City Public Schools estimates costs of \$50,000. Local school system costs likely increase an additional amount to make the test accessible to all students. These costs at the local level cannot be reliably estimated; however, they are likely significant. Any local costs are likely ongoing.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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