

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2023 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 5
Ways and Means

Education – Playground Accessibility – Communication Boards

This bill requires each local board of education to construct a “communication board” in each playground under its jurisdiction by October 1, 2028. “Communication board” means a device that displays photos, symbols, or illustrations to enable individuals with limited language skills to express themselves and communicate.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill affects only local school board operations and finances.

Local Effect: Local school board expenditures increase significantly, by as much as \$1.3 million statewide, over a period of five years, as discussed below. Local revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Every public school must have a program of physical education that is given in a planned and sequential manner to all students in order to develop their good health and physical fitness and improve their motor coordination and physical skills. The specific curriculum and course of study is set by each local board of education. Maryland regulations require a physical education comprehensive program to provide a developmentally appropriate instructional program that advances student knowledge, confidence, skills, and motivation to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

Local Fiscal Effect: County boards of education expenditures increase to install and maintain communication boards. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) advises that there are approximately 900 public elementary and middle schools in the State, which on average have at least one playground. MSDE estimates that it costs between \$800 and \$2,000 (averaging to \$1,400) to construct a communication board and, therefore, the *minimum* costs to construct communication boards at all public school playgrounds totals \$720,000 (900 playgrounds at \$800 per board) but may be closer to \$1.3 million assuming an average cost of \$1,400. School systems with greater numbers of elementary schools will incur greater total costs. This estimate does not include costs to maintain or repair communication boards or to replace them as needed in the future.

Costs to local school systems under the bill are mitigated to the extent that communication boards are already installed at public school playgrounds. Anne Arundel Public Schools advises that it is presently installing communication boards at 112 locations at a cost of approximately \$1,000 per board. According to MSDE, Howard County has installed communication boards at 8 public schools. Given the bill's October 1, 2023 effective date, school systems have five years to meet the bill's requirements, so they will be able to spread the costs over multiple years.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses that construct, install, and/or maintain communication boards may experience increased demand for their products and services.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1332 and SB 680 of 2022.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

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