

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 893 (Delegate Hill, *et al.*)
 Ways and Means

Primary and Secondary Students - Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), to convene a workgroup to study, evaluate, and make recommendations regarding specified topics related to vision screening and services for students. Workgroup members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under standard State travel regulations. The bill also requires the Maryland State School Health Council (MSSHC) to evaluate certain issues and policies to address the needs of students with hearing or vision difficulties. Both the workgroup and MSSHC must submit a report by December 31, 2025. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024, and terminates June 30, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE general fund expenditures increase by a total of \$200,000 to contract for staffing of the workgroup and completion of the study. These expenditures are likely incurred as \$133,300 in FY 2025 and \$66,700 in FY 2026. Expense reimbursements for workgroup members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	133,300	66,700	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$133,300)	(\$66,700)	\$0	\$0	\$0

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

Local Effect: Representatives of local boards of education and local health departments (LHDs) can participate in the workgroup with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The workgroup must include representatives of local boards of education, LHDs, the Maryland Optometric Association, the Maryland Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons, Vision for Baltimore, and any other relevant State and local vision service providers such as public libraries that host eye exams and eyeglass distribution events.

The workgroup must study:

- the jurisdictional incidence and prevalence of students who fail vision screening tests and the percentage of students who receive specified follow-up testing and supports;
- the jurisdictional incidence and prevalence of the correlation between having insurance coverage and whether students receive recommended comprehensive vision testing, eyeglasses, and other vision support treatments or services;
- the jurisdictional incidence and prevalence of other factors that contribute to students not receiving vision support treatments and services, as specified;
- the policies and programs each jurisdiction uses to identify children who have or have not received recommended vision support treatments or services;
- for each jurisdiction, the resources available for ensuring that vision deficits are adequately addressed, and students are visually equipped to learn, as specified;
- the role and responsibilities of the LHD and school system in tracking and ensuring students are visually equipped to learn;
- programs and policies in other states and local jurisdictions that give priority to ensuring that school children are visually equipped to learn; and
- other factors the workgroup considers necessary to ensure all students are visually equipped to learn.

The workgroup must evaluate and make recommendations regarding:

- whether additional mandatory school vision screening tests are necessary and, if so, how the additional tests might be funded;
- the feasibility and benefits of developing a mechanism to facilitate reporting eye exam findings to the local school system or LHD in a manner similar to how eye exam results are reported to the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA);
- how to better educate families about the importance of diagnosing and treating vision deficits;
- how to better partner with community eye professionals to address the needs of the community;
- the feasibility and necessity of a vision support program, as specified;

- how the State can assist local jurisdictions to ensure all students are visually equipped to learn;
- annual funding levels for vision support programs and options for sustaining the funding; and
- how a vision support program would give priority to referring students to specified providers, partnering with community providers to provide specified care, and ensuring vision support treatment and services are provided, as specified.

MSSHC must evaluate:

- how it can partner with interested parties to address issues that may arise when students are inadequately equipped to learn due to vision or hearing difficulties;
- the number of students with hearing difficulties who have not received the auditory aids necessary for them to learn; and
- whether statutory support programs similar to programs studied by the workgroup would assist public school students who have hearing difficulties.

Current Law:

Required Hearing and Vision Screenings

Each local board of education or LHD must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in public schools, and each LHD must provide and fund the screenings for private and nonpublic schools in the jurisdiction. Unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested within the past year, the screenings must take place in the years that a child enters a school system, enters the first grade, and enters the eighth or ninth grade. Further screenings must be done in accordance with the bylaws adopted by the State Board of Education or policies adopted by a local board of education or LHD. A student whose parent or guardian objects in writing to a hearing or vision screening on religious grounds may not be required to take the screening.

Results of screenings go in each child's permanent record and are reported to the local board of education or LHD. Additionally, the parents or guardians of each student must be provided with the results of the hearing and vision screenings, regardless of whether the student passes or fails the screenings, as well as educational materials that include (1) a disclaimer that a vision screening is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination; (2) an overview of visual impairments and an explanation of the potential educational impact of untreated visual impairments; and (3) a list of at-risk groups that are encouraged to have a comprehensive eye examination.

Additional information must be provided to the parents or guardians of a student who fails the vision screening that includes (1) notice that the results of the screening indicate that the student may have a vision disorder; (2) a recommendation that the student be tested by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist; (3) a description of the warning signs, symptoms, risk factors, and behavioral problems associated with vision disorders or eye conditions; (4) a description of the difference between eye examinations and vision screenings; (5) information on how to enroll in Medicaid; and (6) information on locally available free or low-cost programs that provide eye examinations and eyeglasses for children, if any.

The parent or guardian of a student who does not pass a screening must report on the recommended services received by the student, and the report must be submitted on a form provided by the local board of education or LHD. The local board of education or LHD must report the results of screenings and the number of students receiving recommended services to MDH. MDH is required to (1) review hearing and vision screening reports from local boards of education and LHDs and (2) in counties where fewer than 50% of students who have failed the screenings are receiving recommended services, coordinate with the local board of education or LHD to implement measures to improve the number of students receiving the recommended services.

Maryland State School Health Council

MSSHC includes representatives of MSDE, MDH, local education agencies, and LHDs. MSSHC provides leadership for school health programs and supports local school health councils and State and local agencies. The Maryland [Vision Screening Guidelines](#) is a collaboration of the council, MSDE, and MDH.

Motor Vehicle Administration Vision Program

MVA operates an online vision certification service that allows authorized online vision certification providers to submit an individual's vision results electronically to MVA. Authorized providers (licensed eye care practitioners who complete an MVA-approved online application and have their credentials verified with MDH) are included in MVA's provider list and may submit a patient's examination results electronically to MVA via an online portal. The results can be used for individuals eligible to renew their driver's license or identification card, or to apply for a learner's permit or driver's license.

State Expenditures: MSDE advises that existing resources at the agency are not sufficient to convene the workgroup, conduct the study, and complete the required report given the broad scope of the bill. Based on projects of a similar size, MSDE estimates that contractual expenditures increase by a total of \$200,000 for temporary support to convene the workgroup, complete the study, and submit the mandated report. Given the bill's July 1, 2024 effective date and the report's December 31, 2025 deadline, this analysis

assumes that MSDE general fund expenditures increase by \$133,300 in fiscal 2025 and \$66,700 in fiscal 2026.

MDH similarly advises that the department cannot implement the bill with existing resources. Therefore, MDH estimates that it requires an additional 1.25 full-time contractual employees in its Office of School Health at a total cost of approximately \$200,000 across both years. However, the Department of Legislative Services advises that, since the bill places primary responsibility for the workgroup on MSDE and MSDE plans to contract for additional support to convene the workgroup and complete the study, any impact on to MDH is likely absorbable with existing resources.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Association of County Health Officers; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Legislative Services

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