

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 771
Ways and Means

(Delegate Harrison)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Student Health - Program for Student Dental Health - Established

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to establish a Program for Student Dental Health, which must include standards for recommended periodic dental examinations of students and information for students and parents on how to find insurance that will cover dental health care, lists of pediatric dentists, and the importance of dental health to a student’s overall health and well-being. MDH must adopt regulations to carry out the program. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must support and facilitate each local board of education in publishing information on student dental health that is created by the program on local school system’s websites and in student handbooks.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: To the extent additional students use Medicaid or Maryland Children’s Health Program (MCHP) dental services as a result of the bill, Medicaid expenditures (53% federal funds, 47% general funds) increase by an indeterminate amount beginning as early as FY 2026. Federal fund revenues increase accordingly. MDH can establish the program and adopt regulations with existing resources. MSDE can support and facilitate local boards with existing resources.

Local Effect: To the extent that additional students use public dental services provided by local governments, local expenditures increase beginning as early as FY 2026. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: In general, for a child to enter a Maryland public school for the first time, the following are required:

- a physical examination by a physician or certified nurse practitioner completed within nine months prior to entering the public school system or within six months after entering the system, as specified;
- evidence of specified immunizations; and
- evidence of blood-lead testing for all students who reside in a designated at-risk area when first entering prekindergarten, kindergarten, or first grade.

According to Maryland regulations, an effort should be made to facilitate students and their families obtaining a physical examination. However, if a student is unable to obtain a physical examination, the student may not be excluded from school.

Exemptions from a physical examination and immunizations are permitted if they are contrary to a student's or the family's religious beliefs. Students may also be exempted from immunization requirements if a physician or nurse practitioner or health department official certifies that there is a medical reason not to receive a vaccine. Exemption from blood-lead testing is permitted if it is contrary to a family's religious beliefs and practices. The blood-lead certificate must be signed by a health care practitioner stating a questionnaire was done.

For each school year, each public school must report to the local board of education or local health department (LHD) the number of children entering the public school system for the first time who have not had a physical examination due to lack of access to health care, insufficient financial resources, or any other reason, including a religious reason, as the public school deems appropriate. The local board of education or LHD must report the information to MDH.

Each local board of education or LHD must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in local 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.

State Fiscal Effect:

Program for Student Dental Health

Establishing the Program for Student Dental Health will have an operational impact for MDH to adopt regulations, establish standards as specified, generate lists of pediatric dentists, and draft information on the importance of dental health. However, MDH advises that the agency can accomplish these tasks with existing resources.

Dental Services and Medicaid

To the extent the bill results in increased utilization of Medicaid and MCHP dental services, MDH expenditures (53% federal funds, 47% general funds) increase beginning as early as fiscal 2026. Federal fund revenues increase accordingly. MDH advises that there are currently as many as 229,384 school-aged children (ages 4 through 20) enrolled in Medicaid and MCHP who have not had a recent dental exam. MDH further advises that dental screenings for that age range cost \$56.34 per exam.

Assuming information is promptly posted on local school system websites following the bill's October 1, 2025 effective date, the bill may result in additional children seeking dental screenings as early as fiscal 2026. *For illustrative purposes only*, for every 1,775 children enrolled in Medicaid and MCHP who receive a dental screening as a result of the bill, Medicaid expenditures increase by \$100,000 (\$53,000 federal funds, \$47,000 general funds) beginning as early as fiscal 2026. To the extent more students receive a dental exam as a result of the information provided or the total number of students in need of dental services covered by Medicaid and MCHP changes, actual costs may differ. To the extent local boards are not able to provide the required information until the start of the 2026-2027 school year, additional expenditures are incurred beginning in fiscal 2027.

Local Expenditures: Montgomery County provides dental services to uninsured school-aged children through the Care for Kids program. Therefore, to the extent additional students visit public dental services operated by local governments, local expenditures increase.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 167 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: None.

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

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