

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 343
(Senator King)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

**County Boards of Education - Post College and Career Readiness Pathways -
Payment of Costs**

This bill authorizes a local school system to develop and establish income eligibility guidelines and procedures for payment of costs for the competitive entry college preparatory post-college and career readiness (post-CCR) pathway available to high school students. Guidelines must specify that a student with a family income below 400% of the federal poverty level must be provided access to the competitive entry college preparatory post-CCR pathway at no cost to the student or the student's parents or guardians. The bill also makes a technical clarification to consistently refer to parents *or* guardians in reference to the cost of access to specified post-CCR pathways. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill does not alter State education aid funding formulas. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: Local school system expenditures may decrease, potentially significantly, due to not having to cover post-CCR pathway program fees for some students, but a reliable estimate is not feasible, as discussed below. No effect on revenues as the bill does not alter education aid formulas.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Blueprint for Maryland's Future

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (the Blueprint) legislation (including Chapter 771 of 2019, Chapters 36 and 55 of 2021, and Chapter 33 of 2022) established new programs, updated education funding formulas, and, among other provisions, included mechanisms for holding units of State and local government accountable for implementing the Blueprint.

State and local government units responsible for implementing an element of the Blueprint must develop implementation plans consistent with a specified Comprehensive Implementation Plan that describe the goals, objectives, and strategies that will be used to improve student achievement and meet the Blueprint recommendations for each segment of the student population.

College and Career Readiness Standard

The State Board of Education (SBE) was required to adopt a CCR standard as specified in English language arts, mathematics, and, when practicable, science. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) was required to develop and begin to implement a plan to publicize the standards by January 1, 2022.

It is the goal of the State that students enrolled in public school meet the CCR standard before the end of grade 10 and no later than the time the student graduates from high school. It is also the goal of the State that each student enrolled in public school, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, gender, address, socioeconomic status, or the language spoken in the student's home, have equitable access to CCR and meet the CCR standard at an equal rate.

Each student must be assessed no later than grade 10 by a method adopted by SBE to determine whether the student meets the CCR standard. Meeting the CCR standard initially required a student to achieve the equivalent of a score of 4 or 5 in the mathematics and English portions of the Partnership for Assessment for College and Career Readiness grade 10 assessments, on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) grade 10 assessments, or any successor assessments. Statute required MSDE to conduct an empirical study of the interim CCR standard to determine whether the standard adequately measured students' readiness for college or careers. After completion of the required empirical study, the CCR standard was required to reflect the results of the study.

On January 23, 2024, SBE adopted a new CCR standard, informed by the study's results. Proficiency under the new CCR standard can be demonstrated in two ways. The first method is for a student who has earned a high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.00 or higher. Such a student must also earn a grade of A, B, or C in Algebra I, or score proficient or above on the Algebra I MCAP. The second method entails a student scoring proficient or above on both the English Language Arts 10 and the Algebra I MCAP.

These standards were expanded in the State board's adoption of a March 2025 [CCR Standard Policy Document](#). The policy document specifies that, beginning with the graduating class of 2030-2031, the Math Mastery option of the CCR standard is altered to define math mastery as at least either (1) earning a final course grade of A,B, or C in *both* Algebra I and II; (2) scoring proficient or above on the integrated Algebra statewide assessment; or (3) earning a final course grade of A, B, or C in an Advanced Mathematics Pathways course in which integrated Algebra is a prerequisite. The updated policy document also outlines a number of alternative CCR measures students may meet to be considered CCR ready, including meeting either:

- Earning a one-year high school GPA of 3.00 or higher in their 11th grade or 12th grade year (with a grade of A, B, or C in a high school level math course);
- Earning an A, B, or C in two dual enrollment or dual credit courses (one math and one English language arts course);
- Meeting performance thresholds on at least two advanced academics (Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs) at any points in the student's high school career (one math and one English language arts, science, or social studies);
- Meeting College and Career Readiness Benchmarks on the SAT, PSAT, or ACT;
- Obtaining a score of "at Target" on both the math and English language arts Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessments (for students determined eligible in accordance with the student's individualized education program teams);
- Earning silver or better on the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate assessment;
- Earn a State-approved Industry-Recognized Credential, aligned with a career and technology education (CTE) or Comprehensive Arts pathway;
- Completing a high school level of a registered apprenticeship program; or
- Earning a score of at least 50 on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.

Post College and Career Ready Pathways

Each local board of education must provide all students who meet the CCR standard with access to specific post-CCR pathways *at no cost (including fees) to them or their parents* (emphasis added). These pathways include (1) a competitive entry college preparatory

program chosen by the local board of education, as specified; (2) a program that allows a student, through an early college program or dual enrollment at a student's high school and an institution of higher education to earn an associate degree or at least 60 credits toward a bachelor's degree; and (3) a robust set of CTE programs, as specified, that allow a student to complete specified credentials or apprenticeships.

A public high school must provide access to these programs directly or through another public school in the county. A student meeting the CCR standard must enroll in at least one post-CCR pathway, with counseling and advising services offered to help each student choose at least one pathway aligning with the student's goals. SBE must adopt regulations that guarantee, to the extent practicable, statewide uniformity in the quality of the post-CCR pathways, meeting the specified CCR pathway requirements, and granting high school graduation credit for the CCR pathway programs.

College and Career Ready Funding

In addition to funding for non-CCR and CCR students provided within the foundation formula, funding is provided for students who have met the CCR standard adopted by SBE. Per-pupil funding, covered by both State and local shares, begins at \$517 in fiscal 2022 and is adjusted for inflation each subsequent year. Post-CCR funding is based on the number of students in grades 9 through 12 who have met the post-CCR standard. For fiscal 2026, this per-pupil funding is providing local school systems with an estimated total of \$31.8 million in State funds and \$31.8 million in local funding to facilitate provision of post-CCR pathways to students through the Blueprint funding formula. Fiscal 2027 funding will be \$594 for each student in grades 9 through 12 meeting the CCR standard in spring 2025.

Each fiscal year, the State must distribute the State share of the CCR program amount to each local board of education. The local board of education must distribute to each school the minimum school funding amount for CCR, which is 75% of the per-pupil amount.

Dual Enrollment

A public institution of higher education may not charge tuition to a dually enrolled student. A public school system must pay 75% of the cost of tuition for a public institution of higher education for its students. If there is an agreement before July 1, 2020, between a public school and a public institution of higher education in which the public institution charges less than 75% of tuition to a dually enrolled student, the local board must pay the cost of tuition under the existing agreement. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Revisions (Chapter 55) expanded dual enrollment to include noncredit courses leading to an industry-recognized certificate or license.

Federal Poverty Level

In 2025, the federal poverty level for a family of four is \$33,000, so 400% of that level is \$132,000.

Local Expenditures: The bill authorizes, but does not require, a local school board to require students who meet the CCR standard and have family incomes above 400% of the federal poverty level to pay fees associated with the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, the Cambridge AICE Diploma Program, or a comparable program consisting of Advanced Placement courses specified by the College Board (*i.e.*, the competitive entry college preparatory pathway programs). To the extent that a local school system institutes such a requirement, and to the extent that eligible students opt for one of these post-CCR programs, local school system expenditures decrease due to not paying related fees for those students. A reliable estimate is not feasible because it cannot be known which school systems elect to adopt such policies, or how many eligible students opt for those post-CCR pathway programs in those counties. The savings may be significant in some local school systems that elect to adopt guidelines authorized by the bill.

The bill has no effect on the post-CCR dual enrollment or CTE pathways, which remain free of charge to all students, as specified by current law.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1262 of 2025.

Designated Cross File: HB 29 (Delegate Wilkins) - Ways and Means.

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

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