

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 529
(Senator Harris)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and Program Workgroup - Establishment

This bill establishes the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program as a regional pilot in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties to create a structured, credit-bearing, tuition-free early college pathway for high school students to begin preparation for teaching careers. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in consultation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), must administer and implement the program following development by the University System of Maryland (USM). Program students are considered dually enrolled and may not be charged tuition or mandatory fees. USM must develop the program, convene a workgroup, and report by June 30, 2029, on implementation and any legislative or regulatory changes needed. For each of fiscal 2028 and 2029, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$250,000 for the program. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: No effect in FY 2027. General fund expenditures increase by \$352,100 in FY 2028 and \$349,200 in FY 2029. To the extent participation in the program expands dual enrollment activity, USM higher education revenues and expenditures may increase, likely beginning in FY 2030. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation for FY 2028 and 2029.**

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Higher Ed Rev.	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
GF Expenditure	\$0	\$352,100	\$349,200	\$0	\$0
Higher Ed Exp.	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Net Effect	\$0	(\$352,100)	(\$349,200)	\$0	\$0

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

Local Effect: To the extent participation in the program expands dual enrollment activity beyond existing levels in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties, local school systems may incur additional expenditures related to dual enrollment tuition obligations. Revenues are not affected. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The purpose of the program is to:

- create a structured, credit-bearing pathway for high school students to begin preparation to teach primary and secondary education;
- expand access to and ensure the affordability of higher education for high school students who are historically underrepresented in higher education and from rural areas of the State;
- build a strong and diverse teacher pipeline to serve the State's public primary and secondary schools; and
- serve as a model to be replicated for regional implementation statewide.

MSDE must adopt regulations to carry out the bill.

The bill establishes the membership of the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program Workgroup.

By June 30, 2029, USM must report to MSDE, MHEC, the Governor, and the General Assembly on the structure and implementation of the program, including any legislative or regulatory changes necessary for successful implementation.

Current Law:

Dual Enrollment

A public institution of higher education may not charge tuition to a dually enrolled student. Generally, however, 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 of 2021) expanded dual enrollment to include noncredit courses leading to an industry-recognized certificate or license.

Teacher Academy of Maryland

The Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM) is a statewide Career and Technical Education high school educator pipeline program offered by nearly all local school systems, including Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. TAM is designed to introduce students to teaching as a profession and prepare them for postsecondary teacher education programs; however, it is not a teacher certification or degree-granting program and is not inherently a dual enrollment program. TAM operates pursuant to memoranda of understanding between local school systems and institutions of higher education, which may provide benefits such as articulated credit, transfer pathways, or scholarships; these benefits vary by institution. TAM does not articulate to a single teacher certification area and instead serves as a general educator pipeline into multiple postsecondary teacher preparation pathways.

Associate of Arts in Teaching

According to Maryland regulations, an institution may award an Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree aligned with the first two years of a bachelor's program in teacher education. Students who complete the AAT and meet specified GPA and basic skills assessment requirements are eligible to transfer up to 70 credit hours into in-State public and participating independent four-year teacher education programs without further review. Community colleges also offer Associate of Arts transfer pathways into teacher education across multiple prekindergarten through grade 12 certification areas.

State Expenditures:

Maryland State Department of Education

Under the bill, MSDE, in consultation with MHEC, must administer and implement the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and adopt regulations to carry out the program. MSDE advises that these responsibilities include overseeing a new regional early college program; coordinating with USM, MHEC, and participating local school systems; approving and monitoring program design; developing guidance; and managing data collection and reporting requirements.

MSDE advises that these responsibilities create a new and ongoing administrative workload that cannot be absorbed using existing resources. Based on this assumed implementation approach, MSDE estimates the need for at least two coordinator positions to manage program administration, policy development, regulation enforcement,

communications, and data management, as well as one contractual employee for up to 12 months during initial implementation to support program design, guidance development, and regulatory updates. MSDE also advises that site visits would be required to support program implementation and estimates minimal additional travel costs of approximately \$1,000 annually.

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) advises that the requirements of the bill are likely met with one full-time contractual employee for two years to support program coordination, regulatory development, and interagency collaboration during the pilot development and early implementation period.

This estimate assumes the contractual employee begins on July 1, 2027, to align with the USM funding mandated under the bill. Under this assumption, general fund expenditures for MSDE increase by \$102,131 in fiscal 2028 and \$99,160 in fiscal 2029, reflecting contractual salary and fringe benefits, minimal communications and supplies costs, and a one-time equipment purchase in the first year.

Contractual Position	1.0
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$92,268
Operating Expenses	<u>9,863</u>
Total MSDE FY 2028 Expenditures	\$102,131

Future year expenditures reflect a full year of contractual salary and fringe benefits, as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses and termination of the position on June 30, 2029, once the program has been established. This estimate reflects the cost of the pilot program only; a larger scale program (if replicated elsewhere in the State) may require additional staff.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

DLS notes that the bill does not specify the scope or intensity of MSDE's administrative role beyond general implementation and regulatory requirements. Accordingly, while MSDE's estimate reflects the costs associated with administering the program as a distinct *statewide* initiative layered onto existing early college activity, actual costs depend on implementation decisions made by MSDE in coordination with MHEC and USM. To the extent that funding provided to USM is sufficient to develop and administer the program, costs are less.

Maryland Higher Education Commission

Under the bill, MHEC is required to consult with MSDE and USM regarding development and implementation of the program and to participate in the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program Workgroup. MHEC advises that these responsibilities can be accommodated using existing staff and resources and that the bill does not have a fiscal or operational impact on the agency.

University System of Maryland

The bill requires an appropriation of \$250,000 in both fiscal 2028 and 2029 to USM to support development of the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and the associated teacher preparation pathway. Under the bill, USM must develop the program in consultation with MSDE and MHEC, convene and staff the program workgroup, and submit a report by June 30, 2029, on program structure, implementation, and any legislative or regulatory changes needed.

USM advises that implementation of the pilot program requires staffing, administration, coordination, consultant services, reporting, and use of facilities at the USM Southern Maryland regional higher education center. USM indicates that near-term costs can be supported through the bill's required appropriations of \$500,000 over the two years and in-kind contributions from the university, including staff time, project management, consultant services, and use of facilities. USM further advises that continuation or expansion of the program beyond the pilot period would require additional funding beyond fiscal 2029.

To the extent participation in the program expands dual enrollment activity, USM higher education expenditures may increase. It is assumed that any such increases begin after June 30, 2029, (fiscal 2030) when the program is fully established, although increases are possible earlier. The magnitude of any such increases is dependent on the program developed and student participation, which cannot be accurately estimated.

Local Expenditures: To the extent participation in the program expands dual enrollment activity beyond existing levels, the local school systems of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties may incur additional expenditures related to their dual enrollment tuition obligations. Under current law, a local school system is generally responsible for 75% of tuition costs for dually enrolled students attending public institutions of higher education, subject to existing agreements. St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) advises that, currently, for SMCPS, the cost for dually enrolled students is approximately \$450 to \$500 per student. This does not reflect the costs of expanding this pilot program to a statewide program.

MSDE advises that local expenditures may increase due to tuition costs and wrap-around supports associated with program participation. The magnitude of any local fiscal impact depends on participation levels and whether the program supplants or expands existing dual enrollment and teacher pipeline programs.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: HB 479 (Delegate Patterson, *et al.*) - Ways and Means and Appropriations.

Information Source(s): Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties; Accountability and Implementation Board; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Higher Education Commission; University System of Maryland; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Legislative Services

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sj/ljm

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