

Public Schools - Student Health - Certificate of Dental Health
House Bill 15
Ways and Means Committee

Good Afternoon Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee. I am Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison and I'm here to present House Bill 15, Public Schools - Certificate of Dental Health. The purpose of this bill is to encourage the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Health to develop a policy for all students enrolling in the state of Maryland public school system to have a dental screening before entering school by providing a certificate of verification, standards for periodic dental exams. Children's oral health is a key public health priority. Dental screenings, just like physicals, ensure that students are prepared for school without any dental issues that will prevent their abilities to learn and succeed.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) Council on Clinical Affairs adopted a policy on mandatory school-entrance oral health examinations in 2003. The policy was to encourage policy makers, public health and education officials to recognize that "unmet oral health needs can impact a child's ability to learn". In 2017, the Council revised this policy to state that "an oral health examination prior to matriculation into school may improve school readiness by providing a timely opportunity for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral conditions. According to the AAPD, tooth decay or cavities, known as caries, are the most common chronic disease of childhood in the United States.

Here are some of the statistics:

- Early childhood caries affect 23% of children 2 – 5 years of age

- By the ages 6 – 8, caries increases to 56%
- In 33% of low income children, the number of caries increases to 75%

In various other studies conducted with regard to school attendance and performance due to oral health, the following issues were identified:

- 1) 36% of students with access to oral care missed two or more days due to dental problems as compared to 73% of children who missed the same number of days who could not afford dental care.
- 2) The US Dept. of Health and Human Services estimates that 51 million school hours are missed each year because of dental problems, and
- 3) Children with poor oral health and general health were 2.3 times more likely to have poor academic performance.

The Maryland Department of Health conducted an oral health survey of Maryland school children from 2015-2016. Here are some of its key findings:

- Third-grade students had significantly higher dental caries history compared to kindergarten children (41.3% vs 30.2%)
- The prevalence of dental caries in third-grade students slightly improved from 2012 to 2016, whereas, the prevalence of dental caries in kindergarten students increased by 22% during the same period
- Maryland's Eastern Shore had the highest percentage of dental caries (44.4%) and Western Maryland had the lowest (28.8%)

- Children in schools with high proportions of free/reduced meals have a higher lifetime caries experience (45.4%)

Currently, eleven states and the District of Columbia have adopted policies for dental screenings for school-aged children. These policies range from requiring a certificate of dental screening to enter kindergarten to mandating a screening annually. A summary of these state laws is included with my written testimony for your review (Appendix A).

This bill proposes the State of Maryland to continue the process of encouraging school-aged children to receive and maintain better oral health, cut down on absenteeism in our school systems, and give our children a healthy start for academic success. It is not intended to punitive and restrict children from entering school. Rather, it is intended to adopt a standard policy across the state to encourage parents to ensure our children begin a regime of maintaining good oral health. I respectfully encourage you to vote favorably on House Bill 15.