

Senate Bill 362

Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Introduction:

The Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium (ESMEC) consists of the nine public school systems on Maryland's Eastern Shore. In the spring of 2020, to address student and family needs, with the recommendation, advice, and consent of the State Superintendent of Schools, ESMEC began to develop a plan to implement a Blended Virtual Program (BVP) to offer a blend of synchronous and asynchronous instruction to interested students and families.

Knowing that this was the first multi-district BVP in Maryland, we spent the fall of 2020 researching the characteristics of a variety of models offered in other states with a special emphasis on rural areas. Given the size, needs, and resources available to rural school systems, it was quickly recognized that the best pathway to create a multi-district BVP was to partner with a vendor to support the program. We secured the services of a **program coordinator**, a teacher who is on-loan from Wicomico County Public Schools, created an **advisory committee with representatives from each Shore school system**, and developed and issued a request for proposals (RFP) from vendors to provide resources to support the BVP. Based on responses to the RFP, the advisory committee selected a vendor.

In the spring of 2021, working with school system representatives, we developed an application process, aligned course offerings, and created a BVP calendar. With the start of the 2021 – 2022 school year, we launched the ESMEC BVP with an enrollment of 352 students in grades 6 through 12. **At the end of the first year of the BVP, our students had a pass rate of 83%. For the 2022-23 school year, we began with 218 students and currently seeing an 86% pass rate as of first semester.**

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* encourages **innovative programs in education**. The ESMEC BVP is a primary example of innovation in public education as it has established the first multi-district blended virtual learning program in the state. The ESMEC BVP offers an equitable solution to many children who are unable to attend traditional in-person learning, regardless of family income, race, and/or ethnicity.

The Eastern Shore proposes three recommendations for **virtual programs** in Senate Bill 362:

- 1). 7-1402 (3) (D) – Propose to have local school systems remain accountable by reporting student data from the virtual program to their home school not using a separate school code.
- 2). 7-1402 (3) (E) (1) – Propose to accept contracts with for-profit vendors to provide virtual programming for our MSDE approved courses pending successful pass rates.
- 3). 7-1406 (A) (2) (1) - Propose if a vendor is used for primary instruction of a collaborative virtual program the teacher does not need to be an employee of the county.

ESMEC BVP Overview:

1. Background information about ESMEC BVP

- a. 2021 – 2022 Enrollment: 350 students in grades 6-12 (**2022 – 2023 Enrollment: 218 students in grades 6-12**)
- b. Initiated by former Maryland State Superintendent, Dr. Karen Salmon, who approached ESMEC to develop this program and supported it with funding
- c. ESMEC BVP was developed **in compliance with state requirements** for a blended program requiring a minimum of 20% of synchronous, live instruction (*COMAR 13A.04.15*). (**Currently having 40% of synchronous, live instruction for the 2022-2023 school year**)
- d. ESMEC BVP offers over 65 courses
 - i. All High School core courses offered by the ESMEC BVP to fulfill graduation requirements have been **approved by MSDE** for the MSDE Maryland Virtual Student Learning Opportunities (MVSLO) program
- e. Students stay **enrolled in their local public school** allowing them to:
 - i. Participate in co-curricular and/or extracurricular activities (athletics, clubs, music and drama programs, honor societies, and more)
 - ii. Graduate from their local school with their peers
 - iii. Access any resources available to students participating in in-person instruction
- f. **Local school is responsible and accountable for student success**
 - i. ESMEC BVP students must report to their local school to take state assessments
 - ii. Local schools are accountable for BVP student results

2. ESMEC BVP Teachers & Support Staff

- a. ESMEC BVP partnered with a vendor to provide teachers due to:

- i. Current national **teacher shortage**
- ii. Maryland State Board of Education has declared a teacher shortage in all areas of certification and geographic locations
- b. All ESMEC BVP teachers are **Maryland-certified**
- c. ESMEC BVP teachers attend IEP/504 meetings as needed
- d. Student Success Coordinators provided by the vendor– **meet 1 on 1 with students** weekly to check in on academic performance, social-emotional wellbeing, and to provide additional support and resources to students in need
- e. When surveyed:
 - i. **95%** of students feel supported by teachers and that they receive good feedback on their assignments
 - ii. **94%** of parents say their child feels supported in the program and is satisfied with the BVP teachers
 - iii. **95%** of students feel the Student Success Coordinators (SSCs) care about them and help them be more successful

3. Student Services

The ESMEC BVP currently collaborates with local schools to ensure students receive the same supports and services as in-person students.

Provided by ESMEC BVP	Provided by Local Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Synchronous instruction (live with Maryland-certified teachers via Zoom) in all regular and honors core and elective courses b. Asynchronous instruction (including online modules, tutorials, projects, and assessments) c. ESMEC BVP Coordinator (on loan from Wicomico County Public Schools) d. ESMEC BVP liaison from each participating school system on the shore e. Student Success Coordinators f. Live tutoring (Monday-Friday 8 am to 8 pm) g. Teacher provided study halls & office hours for small group/individual support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Administrator(s) b. Counselors c. State and local testing d. Special Educators (IEP/504/English Language Learner support) e. Technology f. Co-curricular/extra-curricular activities (athletics, clubs, music and drama programs, honor societies, and more) g. Meals h. Health Services

4. Student Achievement

- a. **83.3% pass rate** at the end of the 2021-22 school year, an increase of 17% from the end of quarter 1
- b. Students who are not being successful are
 - i. **provided additional support by the local schools,**
 - ii. **offered additional help during virtual study halls and teacher office hours,**
 - iii. **and/or returning to in-person learning**
- c. **Student progress is continuously monitored** by (1) ESMEC BVP Coordinator; (2) Local District ESMEC BVP liaison, (3) School-based Counselors & Administrators; (4) Special educators (if applicable); (5) Student Success Coordinators; (6) Parents/Guardians (receive a weekly report showing student's grades, missing assignments, and upcoming assignments)
- d. **81% of families want their child to continue** in the program for the next year

5. ESMEC BVP Parent & Student Feedback

- a. *"I have watched my son blossom from a depressed, unmotivated, distant boy into a confident, highly intelligent, whole person and I cannot be more happy with it."* (Parent of a 7th grade student)
- b. *"The BVP has put [my child] in a position where he is in complete control of his education. This opportunity at this stage of his education is very beneficial. The online structure is preparing him for the rigors of the collegiate environment."* (Parent of an 11th grade student)
- c. *"My grades this year are way better than when I did my own homeschool program last year because of the amazing help from my teachers."* (9th grade student)
- d. *"I like learning at my own pace and being able to do work on my own schedule."* (6th grade student)
- e. *"My Student Success Coordinator meets with me every week to see how I am doing and if I need help with anything. She also talks to me about things I am interested in like creating music and video games. When I was going to in person school, there wasn't anybody there who did that."* (7th grade student)
- f. *"When (my child) was in-person, his sensory was extremely overstimulated which caused him to shut down, refuse to participate, and be unable to control his emotions (frustration, anger, and sadness). His grades were D's and E's and he was removed from the classroom often. With the BVP his grades are A's and B's. He never experiences any emotional breakdown's during school and is always present in his classes for their entirety."* (Parent of a 6th grade student)

Summary

In summary, **MSDE encouraged ESMEC to create the BVP**. To create a virtual option for students in our rural area, we partnered together to form the ESMEC BVP. **All students participating in the ESMEC BVP must be enrolled in their local public school**. Consequently, **the local school is accountable for the success of each student**. Students have access to services and activities provided by their local school while receiving synchronous and asynchronous instruction and supports through the ESEMC BVP. **If this bill as drafted becomes law, the ESMEC BVP will cease to exist, and more than 200 students will be forced to find alternative pathways such as homeschooling or private school or public school.**

We were asked to be innovative in providing opportunities for students and that is what we did create a **Blended Virtual Program** option. Governor Hogan stated, "I believe that every parent and child should have the option to choose the best learning opportunity that works for their circumstances and abilities. This bill will erode that choice by limiting the types of providers local school systems can partner with to deliver a full-time education program." (Letter dated May 27, 2022)

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly L. Griffith, Ed.D.

Executive Director of ESMEC