

BILL:	House Bill 893	DATE:	February 21, 2024
SUBJECT:	Primary and Secondary Students - Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations	COMMITTEE:	Ways and Means
POSITION:	Information Only		
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EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information for consideration regarding House Bill (HB) 893 – *Primary and Secondary Students – Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations*, which requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to convene a workgroup to study and make recommendations on vision and hearing screening and follow-up services.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.05.05.07 requires that the local board of education or the local health department provide and fund hearing and vision screenings and document the screening and any follow-up services in the student’s record. Students are required to receive vision and hearing screening at entry to the school system, first grade, and eighth or ninth grade. The local health department or school system must also ensure that all students who have Individual Education Programs, or a Sec. 504 plan, or who evidence a decline in academic or social skills are screened (Ed. Art. 7-404(a)(1)).

Some of the data needed for the workgroup is reported and collected annually, in collaboration with the MDH Office of School Health, via the MSDE Annual School Health Services survey. Under the Annotated Code of Maryland Education Article Section 7-404 – Hearing and Vision Screening Tests, the data collected, including the results of the hearing and vision screenings and the number of students screened, is required to be reported to the MDH. The school nurse is responsible for communicating with the parent /guardian(s) when a student has failed screening. This includes providing parent(s)/guardian(s) of a student who has failed screening with a recommendation/referral to see an optometrist or ophthalmologist. Additionally, the school nurse will assist the students and parent(s)/guardian(s) in selecting recommended services and identifying a healthcare provider for students with a usual source of care. Documentation of the screening results and receipt of services and interventions recommended by the optometrist, ophthalmologist, or other professional are provided on the Student Record Card 5 (SR5), including informing the appropriate school personnel of students who have vision concerns which may impede learning and/or require special care.

HB 893 requires new data collections including the collection of policies and programs in each jurisdiction and available follow up services by jurisdiction, which will require new surveys.

Following the collection of data, the workgroup created by HB 893 is charged with evaluating and making recommendations regarding: whether additional mandatory school vision screening tests are necessary and, if so, how the additional tests might be funded; finding and tracking whether students are receiving recommended eye exams and other vision support treatments and services, the feasibility and benefits of developing a mechanism to facilitate reporting eye exam findings to local school systems or public health departments in a manner that is similar to how eye exam results are reported to the motor vehicle administration; how to better educate families

about the importance of diagnosing and treating vision deficits; how to better partner with community eye professionals to address the needs of the community; the feasibility and necessity of a vision support program; how the State can assist local jurisdictions to ensure all students are visually equipped to learn; annual funding levels for vision support programs and options for sustaining the funding; and how a vision support program would set priorities.

Neither MSDE nor MDH can perform the work of HB 893 with current staffing levels. MSDE estimates the to accomplish the goals of HB 893, additional consultant support is needed to facilitate the workgroup, manage additional data collection, assess the availability of services, and develop fiscal projections for the cost of additional screening and follow up services.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 923**. For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne at 410-767-0504 or Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov.