
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 8 - Education - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

DATE: March 19, 2025

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) would like to extend our support to SB 8. The State Board and MSDE support the opportunity to recognize students who demonstrate a commitment to civic involvement. The program would be advantageous to any local education agencies (LEAs) and schools that choose to participate, and it will grant well-deserved recognition to students who are awarded with the Seal of Civic Excellence.

SB 8 establishes a student and school recognition program as an optional program for local education agencies (LEAs). MSDE may provide guidance to LEAs on aspects of the program as needed. Upon request from participating LEAs, MSDE will create a process for requesting and awarding a citation for schools that earn a designation as a “Center of Civic Excellence” through the efforts of their community.

The criteria for a student to receive the Civic Excellence endorsement from the local board of education includes meeting existing course requirements for high school graduation and a specific service-learning requirement. The Civic Excellence endorsement includes a requirement that of the 75 hours of service learning required for Maryland High school graduates, at least 30 would be completed on a project with a focus on community and civic engagement. These are minimum criteria, however, and the LEA can tailor the program to its local community. The 30-hour requirement can support the goals of Maryland’s current Service- Learning program.

COMAR 13A.03.02.05 states that to graduate from a Maryland High School, students must complete: (a) 75 hours of student service that includes preparation, action, and reflection components and that, at the discretion of the local school system, may begin during the middle grades; or (b) a locally designed program in student service that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

In Maryland, service-learning is an instructional strategy that combines meaningful service to the community with curriculum-based learning. It is a form of civic education that provides students with opportunities to explore and reflect on what it means to be an active, engaged citizen. LEAs make decisions regarding where and what types of service-learning projects students may engage in to earn credit toward the service-learning graduation requirement.

Community and civic engagement are a pillar of the proposed Maryland Civic Excellence Program, and they are at the heart of the service-learning graduation requirement in Maryland. MSDE will aid any LEA

that would like to participate in the Maryland Civic Excellence Program and provide support in the development of service-learning projects. MSDE is available to assist LEAs as needed in confirming that at least 30 of the required 75 hours of service-learning needed to meet the service-learning graduation requirement are devoted to community and civic engagement.

The State Board and MSDE hope that the committee will consider this information as it deliberates SB 8. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.