
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 204 - Public Schools – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

DATE: March 25, 2026

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are pleased to provide information in support of Senate Bill 204 as amended, which establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program and authorizes local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in the program to recognize student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. As amended, the bill reflects the recommendations offered by the State Board and MSDE and provides an appropriate statutory framework for the development of the program through regulation.

SB 204 establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program and requires the State Board to adopt regulations establishing the criteria and requirements for awarding a Seal of Civic Excellence to qualified students in the State. The State Board and MSDE support the bill’s intent to elevate civic readiness and engagement as a valued outcome of public education and to create a statewide framework that supports local implementation while maintaining statewide consistency.

Participating LEAs may award a Seal of Civic Excellence and recognize student achievement through cords, medals, or other insignia affixed to a student’s high school diploma. The bill also authorizes LEAs to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, civic organizations, and institutions of higher education to support program implementation. Beginning July 1, 2028, participating systems would submit annual reports to MSDE on program participation and outcomes.

The State Board and MSDE appreciate that the amended version of SB 204 clarifies that the State Board will establish the program through regulations in the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). This approach appropriately places the specific program requirements, procedures, and implementation details in regulation, allowing the State Board to develop a comprehensive framework informed by stakeholder input and best practices.

In developing these regulations, the State Board and MSDE will consider key principles that support the success of the program, including statewide consistency paired with local flexibility, clear definitions of civic engagement, and pathways for students to demonstrate proficiency. Ensuring equitable access for all students—including students in underresourced schools, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners—will also be central to the development of the program.

The State Board and MSDE believe that engaging a diverse group of stakeholders will be critical to developing a strong and sustainable framework in COMAR. The Department looks forward to working with educators and

other partners to ensure that the program reflects the diverse ways students can demonstrate civic learning and participation.

As this work progresses, MSDE will also examine implementation considerations, including professional learning needs, documentation and verification processes, and reporting requirements, to ensure that participation in the program is feasible for LEAs and accessible to students across Maryland's diverse communities.

MSDE respectfully offers this information for consideration as the committee deliberates SB 204. For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at Laurel.Cratsley@maryland.gov.