

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 532
Ways and Means

(Delegate Serafini, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Education - Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning - Responsibilities

This bill requires the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning, to study five specified issues regarding virtual learning in the State, including the resources needed to support a requirement that a student complete a virtual course or a blended virtual course to graduate from high school. By December 1, 2013, the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning must report its findings and recommendations.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can meet any additional staffing requirements for the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning relating to the study and report using existing resources

Local Effect: Local school system employees appointed to the council can participate without affecting local expenditures.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Specifically, the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning must study:

- the human, technological, financial, and regulatory resources needed to support a requirement that a student complete a virtual course or a course that blends digital content with traditional classroom instruction to graduate from high school;

- the feasibility of establishing virtual schools in the State;
- the feasibility of partnering with institutions of higher education in the State to develop resources to support virtual learning;
- the experiences of other states in establishing virtual and blended schools; and
- any issues relating to virtual learning quality standards and accessibility.

Current Law:

Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning

Chapters 290 and 291 of 2012 (SB 689/HB 745) established the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning within MSDE. MSDE must provide staff support for the council, and by December 1 of each year, the council must report its recommendations on 12 specified issues related to digital learning to the State Superintendent of Schools and the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee.

The mission of the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning is to encourage and support the education of students in accordance with national standards of online learning and State law. The council consists of 23 members: the State Superintendent of Schools or the State Superintendent's designee; the director of the Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunities Office; 2 members of the Senate appointed by the Senate President; 2 members of the House of Delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House; 11 members that meet specified qualifications to be appointed by the Governor, and 6 members appointed by MSDE that are employees of local school systems that have excelled in the ability to incorporate technology into the classroom.

Council members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget. A majority of the members then serving on the council constitutes a quorum. The council must meet at least four times during each academic year. The council may hold additional meetings in order to carry out its responsibilities.

Online Courses

According to Code of Maryland Regulations, consistent with local school system policy and procedure, credit may be given for correspondence courses and for MSDE-approved online courses. If credit is to be applied toward minimum graduation requirements, the

correspondence course or the MSDE-approved online course must be provided by the local school system.

MSDE must provide Maryland virtual learning opportunities that include (1) offering a distance-learning program to provide Maryland public school students with equal opportunities to develop a strong academic foundation; (2) offering expanded educational choices not otherwise available to students through online courses and services; and (3) expanding the professional development opportunities available to educational staff in Maryland public schools through online courses and services.

A local board of education may request that MSDE develop or review and approve online courses and services. MSDE may delegate this responsibility to a local board of education. If MSDE delegates this authority to a local board, the local board must request approval of the online course from MSDE once it has completed the development or the review and approval.

A local board may impose reasonable fees to be paid by the vendor to cover the cost of reviewing and approving online courses and services and must remit 15% of the fees collected to MSDE. The State Board of Education may set reasonable fees for developing or reviewing online courses and services and for processing approvals for online courses and services.

Background: In 2006, Michigan became the first state to require its students to take at least one online course to graduate. Since that time Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia have added requirements. In addition, individual school districts in at least 10 other states require an online course or experience to graduate.

Online courses offered on the market range from remedial credit recovery to Advanced Placement. Course delivery methods can be one-on-one tutoring with a certificated teacher, pre-recorded lectures, or even intelligent software that guides a student through individually paced instruction and problem modules. Blended or hybrid courses with some online components and some face-to-face components are also offered.

The Governor's proposed fiscal 2014 budget includes \$5 million for a new Digital Learning Innovation Fund. The new initiative will support competitive grants to local school systems to create digital learning environments, such as multimedia assets to students and teachers, differentiated instruction, differentiated assignments and materials for students advancing at different paces, training and support to educators and students, and offering more current information than traditional textbooks on an ongoing basis.

MSDE reports it is currently in the process of collecting data regarding online courses and has received responses from eight local school systems. In those eight local school systems, 273 students are taking an online course, of which three are special education students. MSDE further advises that during fall 2012, at least one student was taking 35 of the 49 course titles currently approved for students. Some of the course titles are available from more than one vendor or source; therefore, there are currently about 80 course options available.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 537 (Senator Shank, *et al.*) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, National Conference of State Legislatures, International Association of K-12 Online Learning, Onlinecolleges.net, WRAL.com, Department of Legislative Services

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