

Department of Legislative Services  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
 Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1242

(Delegate Hill, *et al.*)

Ways and Means and Health and  
 Government Operations

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Public School Students – Vision Services – Reporting

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to jointly study and assess (1) the number of students identified in vision screenings who receive the recommended eye exam, eyeglasses, or corrective lenses; (2) programs that are available to provide children with no- or low-cost eye exams or eyeglasses and whether these programs are adequate to meet students’ needs; and (3) whether and how parents are made aware of these programs. MSDE and MDH must jointly report to the Governor and the General Assembly on their findings by December 1, 2019. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019, and terminates June 30, 2020.**

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by \$50,000 in FY 2020 only for contractual costs to conduct the required study. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	50,000	0	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$50,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

*Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** The bill does not directly affect local finances or operations.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

### Current Law:

#### *Required Hearing and Vision Screenings*

Each local board of education or local health department (LHD) must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in local public schools, and each LHD must provide and fund the screenings for private and nonpublic schools in the jurisdiction. Unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested within the past year, the screenings must take place in the years that a child enters a school system, enters the first grade, and enters the eighth or ninth grade. Further screenings must be done in accordance with the bylaws adopted by the State Board of Education or policies adopted by a local board of education or LHD. A student whose parent or guardian objects in writing to a hearing or vision screening on religious grounds may not be required to take the screening.

Results of screenings go in each child's permanent record and are reported to the local board of education or LHD. Additionally, the parents or guardians of each student must be provided with the results of the hearing and vision screenings, regardless of whether the student passes or fails the screenings, as well as educational materials that include (1) a disclaimer that a vision screening is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination; (2) an overview of visual impairments and an explanation of the potential educational impact of untreated visual impairments; and (3) a list of at-risk groups that are encouraged to have a comprehensive eye examination.

Additional information must be provided to the parents or guardians of a student who fails the vision screening that includes (1) notice that the results of the screening indicate that the student may have a vision disorder; (2) a recommendation that the student be tested by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist; (3) a description of the warning signs, symptoms, risk factors, and behavioral problems associated with vision disorders or eye conditions; (4) a description of the difference between eye examinations and vision screenings; (5) information on how to enroll in Medicaid; and (6) information on locally available free or low-cost programs that provide eye examinations and eyeglasses for children, if any.

The parent or guardian of a student who does not pass a screening must report on the recommended services received by the student, and the report must be submitted on a form provided by the local board of education or LHD. The local board of education or LHD must report the results of screenings and the number of students receiving recommended services to MDH. MDH is required to (1) review hearing and vision screening reports from local boards of education and LHDs and (2) in counties where fewer than 50% of students who have failed the screenings are receiving recommended services, coordinate with the

local board of education or LHD to implement measures to improve the number of students receiving the recommended services.

**Background:** Vision screenings are provided by either the local board of education or LHD, depending on the jurisdiction. LHDs conduct screenings in all but four jurisdictions. In one jurisdiction, the local school system contracts with a local hospital to perform the screenings. Vision screenings test for myopia, color vision, and depth perception. These routine screenings do not test all visual skills or for symptoms of visual disorders.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) [advises](#) that good vision is key to a child's physical development, success in school, and overall well-being. The vision system is not fully formed in babies and young children, and equal input from both eyes is necessary for the brain's vision centers to develop normally. If a young child's eyes cannot send clear images to the brain, his or her vision may become limited in ways that cannot be corrected later in life. However, if problems are detected early, it is usually possible to treat them effectively. AAO [notes](#) that some symptoms of vision problems are not obvious. For example, a vision problem could result in a child having a short attention span, losing his or her place when reading, avoiding reading and other close activities, and turning his or her head to the side.

Vision for Baltimore is a partnership between the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD), Johns Hopkins University, Vision to Learn (VTL), and Warby Parker. For students who do not pass the vision screenings provided by BCHD, the program provides, with the consent of a parent or guardian, an eye examination in VTL's mobile vision clinic, which goes to the school. Students who need eyeglasses pick the style and color of their frames in the mobile clinic. The eyeglasses are manufactured by eyewear provider Warby Parker and delivered to students in their schools. All services are available regardless of ability to pay, and parents are not charged.

**State Expenditures:** Many of the requirements related to failed vision screenings and follow-up services, information provided to parents and guardians, and MDH duties are new pursuant to Chapters 311 and 312 and Chapter 401 of 2018. Therefore, much of the information needed for the study is not yet readily available. Additionally, current law does not require the *statewide* gap analysis necessitated by this bill.

Accordingly, general fund expenditures increase by \$50,000 in fiscal 2020 only for MDH to hire a contractor with expertise in student health services to complete the gap analysis. MDH can otherwise support the contractor and provide the information reported to the department on vision services in public schools with existing budgeted staff and resources. MSDE can collaborate with MDH and the contractor to complete the joint report with existing budgeted staff and resources.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** SB 915 (Senators Lam and Young) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Association of County Health Officers; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Community College; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; Maryland Department of Health; Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; American Academy of Ophthalmology; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Department of Legislative Services

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