
**Informational Testimony regarding Senate Bill 986
Public Schools—Agricultural Education and Grant Programs**

**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on Senate Bill 986, legislation that would require each county board of education to implement an agriculture science curriculum and an agriculture education program. It also requires the Maryland State Department of Education to implement and administer a Maryland Agricultural Education Grant Program, which would be funded through an annual budget appropriation.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA supports efforts to expand learning opportunities for our students, particularly ones that allow young people to extend their learning outside of the classroom in fun and engaging ways. Agricultural education programs and activities such as Future Farmers of America and 4-H allow for such learning. We also support career and technical education (CTE), believing that it provides students with important skills and career opportunities so they can better compete in the Maryland economy. We support the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and its effort to expand access to CTE programs so that more students can take advantage of these types of opportunities. Maryland's rich agricultural history and our robust agricultural landscape create numerous pathways by which students who participate in agricultural education and CTE programs can pursue a postsecondary career in an agricultural-related. Understanding the important role agriculture plays in many of Maryland's Eastern Shore counties, we appreciate the sponsor's desire to expand access to this program of study.

However, MSEA has a longstanding position in opposition to legislatively mandating curriculum and programs of study. We believe that it is the purview of the MSDE and the State Board of Education to develop and implement curriculum standards in order to meet the academic needs of the students served in Maryland's public schools. It is then the responsibility of local districts to determine how best to implement a program of study that best serves the needs of their students. Current statute allows local boards of education to implement agricultural science curriculum if they wish, and those who have desired to do so have taken advantage of said opportunity. Those seeking to do so in the future are empowered to follow suit. As such, we neither believe it to be wise nor necessary to mandate that such steps be taken at the state level.