

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 204 (Senators Kagan and Ready)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

This bill establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) as a voluntary program in which local school systems may recognize students and public schools that promote the civic readiness and civic engagement of students in public schools. By the 2027-2028 school year, MSDE, in consultation with experts and stakeholders, must develop guidelines to assist participating local school systems to determine student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. A participating local school system that determines a student has fulfilled the criteria under the program may (1) award the student a Seal of Civic Excellence and (2) recognize the award by awarding a cord or medal or by attaching other insignia on the student's high school diploma. Participating local school systems may collaborate with specified organizations or institutions to support the implementation of the program. By July 1, 2028, and each July 1, thereafter, each participating local school system must submit to MSDE a report based on the most recently completed school year. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can develop guidelines with existing resources to assist participating local school systems in determining student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: To the extent that a local school system chooses to participate, local expenditures may increase and operations may be affected. However, any expenditures or operational effects are discretionary. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Local school systems must use the guidelines established by MSDE to establish (1) a Maryland Civic Excellence Program; (2) application criteria to administer the program; and (3) criteria for awarding a student the Seal of Civic Excellence.

A participating local school system that determines a student has fulfilled the criteria under the program may (1) award the student a Seal of Civic Excellence and (2) recognize the award by awarding a cord or medal or by attaching other insignia on the student's high school diploma.

Current Law: Maryland high schools offer special awards to students. Some of these are statewide recognitions including the Seal of Biliteracy. Local school systems and specific schools also confer departmental awards in various disciplines. According to regulations, to graduate, a student must complete 75 service-learning hours or complete a locally designed program in student service that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools. Some local school systems award a certificate or other recognition for exceeding this requirement.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 8 and HB 72 of 2025; SB 762 of 2024 and SB 271 of 2023.

Designated Cross File: HB 57 (Delegate Vogel) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; Frederick County Public Schools; Wicomico County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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sj/mcr

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