

Division of Academics – Department of Special Education – Budget Summary

Overview of the Division

The Department of Special Education (DSE) is in the Division of Academics. The role of this Department is to ensure students with disabilities, birth to age 21, receive high-quality services within their homes, community, and/or school settings to improve outcomes for learners who receive early intervention and special education services.

The services of this Department are delivered through the budgets of the following programs:

- Countywide Services
- Speech, Language, and Hearing Services
- Special Education School-Based Services
- Early Childhood Special Education: Birth–Five
- Cedar Lane
- Special Education Summer Services
- Special Education Compliance and Nonpublic Services
- Special Education–Central Office

The Department of Special Education (DSE) promotes Equity in Action by ensuring that students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education that meets individual learner needs in the least restrictive environment. The DSE is committed to providing high-quality early intervention and special education services to improve outcomes for learners, birth to age 21. DSE leaders value and promote open, transparent, and accessible communication so that all stakeholders become partners in the work.

Over the past few years, the Department has reduced spending on materials, and worked toward maximizing staffing allocations, increasing professional learning opportunities, and decreasing case management workload through a variety of approaches. While striving to address all legal service hour requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the DSE continues to experience constraints in creating comprehensive programs and supports that could meet more complex student needs and reduce the potential for rising nonpublic placement costs due to lack of options within the existing continuum of services.

Summary of Major Budget Changes for FY 2026

The budget for the Department of Special Education is increasing by a total of \$85.1 million or 48.34 percent compared to the current budget. This total change in budget is for budget additions and budget realignments. The amount of change for each is:

- Budget additions equal \$29.9 million, a 17.01 percent increase and 143.50 FTE positions.
- Budget realignments equal \$55.1 million and the realignment of (0.8) net FTE positions.

More specific information on these budget changes is explained below which are followed by schedules summarizing the Division budget and changes by program.

Budget changes are grouped as Mandates, Commitments, Priorities, and Realignments.

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- Mandates are budget changes necessary to meet a specific legal requirement. The mandated cost changes in this year's budget support the continued implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.
- Commitments are changes made in the budget to support the costs for existing obligations such as contracts and prior negotiated pay and benefits.
- Priorities represent those budget items to support existing policy, Superintendent or Board defined goals and objectives, and specific issues.
- Realignments represent transfer of funds between programs, state categories and/or spend categories to support existing requirements. Realignments are budget neutral, although there can be significant changes between programs and accounts. The FY 2026 budget includes a significant movement of budget authority for budgetary realignments that have been done for three purposes:
 - Realignments to meet Blueprint Minimum School Fund reporting requirements. For FY 2026, employee benefits (Social Security, Medicare, pension, and health insurance) have been realigned from the Fixed Charges budget (Program 8001) into each program budget. As a result, all program budgets with positions will show a significant increase in budget reflecting the cost of the employee benefits in the program.
 - Realignments for the Superintendent's reorganization of divisions and programs done in July 2025.
 - Realignments of existing budget authority to meet budgetary needs and properly classify expenditures by state category, division, program, and/or account.

Budget additions for Mandates, Commitments, Priorities, and Realignments are sub-grouped for clearer understanding of the reason(s) for the budget changes in the division and programs. Each division summary section provides a narrative explanation of budget changes and schedules that present the changes in budget dollars and full-time equivalent (FTE) positions from the current budget. The Factors Influencing and Summary of the Budget in the Executive Summary section of the budget book provides the combined summary of budget changes for all divisions and by state category.

A summary of budget changes for this division is provided below.

Mandates

- \$466,838 – Blueprint requirements for National Board Certification pay for teachers.

Commitments

- \$3,712,519 – Benefit costs for new positions, wages, and stipends included National Board Certification pay for teachers.
- (\$175,000) – Decreasing transportation budget. The costs for special education student transportation is included in the Transportation Department's budget in the Operations Division.
- \$2,742,697 – Health Insurance cost increases based on preliminary actuarial estimates.
- \$238,235 – For financial obligations related to position reclassifications.
- \$327,658 – Estimated change in retirement costs for positions included in this division.

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- (\$2,041,085) – Year-over-Year Personnel Cost Change. This adjustment will appear in all program budgets that have budgeted personnel. A complete explanation for these changes is included in the Factors Influencing in the Executive Summary section of the budget book.

Priorities

- \$9,209,774 – Placeholder for employee compensation increases subject to collective bargaining.
- \$1,062,695– To meet projected contract cost increases for various contracts including private duty nurses, translation services, temporary employees, and software systems.
- \$7,122,447 – Adjustments to Special Education enrollment service levels:
 - \$832,782 – Adjusting delivery model by decreasing use of temporary wages by \$(823,980) – and adding \$1,656,762 for 35.0 positions – To meet the increase in the number of students with IEPs and IEP service hours due to the complexity of student needs. This includes the additional expansion of regional classrooms for students accessing the Maryland Alternate Education Framework.
 - \$6,289,665 – 105.00 FTE positions, including 73.0 FTE for Special Education Teachers (17 for the Regional Program and 56 for case management) and 32.0 FTE for Student Assistants.
- \$6,952,053 – A net increase for Nonpublic Services and Compliance increasing the budget for non-public transfer tuition.
- \$15,000 – For supplies for Extended School Year.
- \$296,120 – 3.5 FTE positions (Occupational Therapist, 0.5, Speech Pathologist, 1.0, Nurse, 1.0, and Special Education Teacher, 1.0) transferring from federal grants to General Fund to maintain services levels.

Realignments

- \$55,241,403 – Realignment of Employee Health Insurance, Social Security, Medicare, and Retirement from Fixed Charges to the programs in the Special Education department.
- (\$99,292) – Realignment of existing budget authority to meet budgetary needs and a realignment of (0.80) net FTE positions.

Summary schedules of these changes are presented in the following pages.

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SUMMARY OF FY 2026 REQUESTED BUDGET										
Program	Program Number	Approved Budget FY 2025	Total Additions	Total Realignments	Net Budget Changes	Net Budget Changes FTE	Superintendent Proposed FY 2026	Board Requested FY 2026	\$ Change From FY 2025	% Change from FY 2025
Countywide Services	3320	\$ 11,864,326	\$ 1,270,796	\$ 3,374,613	\$ 4,645,409	2.20	\$ 16,321,630	16,509,735	\$ 4,645,409	39.15%
Special Education - School-Based Services	3321	84,242,467	17,883,694	32,738,107	50,621,801	137.00	124,888,453	134,864,268	50,621,801	60.09%
Cedar Lane	3322	6,134,435	36,491	2,245,911	2,282,402	(2.00)	8,372,803	8,416,837	2,282,402	37.21%
Early Childhood Special Education: Birth-Five	3324	31,052,793	3,525,110	11,279,776	14,804,886	3.50	45,136,980	45,857,679	14,804,886	47.68%
Speech, Language, and Hearing Services	3325	14,512,263	1,116,795	4,212,090	5,328,885	3.00	19,580,487	19,841,148	5,328,885	36.72%
Special Education Summer Services	3326	2,272,816	176,566	195,700	372,266	-	2,643,866	2,645,082	372,266	16.38%
Special Education Compliance and Nonpublic Services	3328	22,872,855	5,704,491	296,918	6,001,409	-	26,366,239	28,874,264	6,001,409	26.24%
Special Education - Central Office	3330	3,025,106	216,008	798,996	1,015,004	(1.00)	4,013,208	4,040,110	1,015,004	33.55%
Academics-Special Education Total		\$ 175,977,061	\$ 29,929,951	\$ 55,142,111	\$ 85,072,062	142.70	\$ 247,323,666	\$ 261,049,123	\$ 85,072,062	48.34%

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SUMMARY OF FY 2026 BUDGET CHANGES BY PROGRAM AND SUMMARY GROUPINGS									
		3320	3321	3322	3324	3325			
PROGRAMS		Countywide Services	Special Education - School-Based Services	Cedar Lane	Early Childhood Special Education: Birth-Five	Speech, Language, and Hearing Services	FTE	FTE	FTE
MANDATES		FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE	FTE			
	Blueprint-National Board Certification	\$ 1,650	\$ 268,438	\$ 4,675	\$ 192,075	\$ -	-	-	-
		1,650	268,438	4,675	192,075	-	-	-	-
Subtotal Mandates									
COMMITMENTS									
	Benefit Cost-New Positions/Salaries/Wages	28,185	3,551,402	576	141,081	48,726	-	-	-
	Bus Contracts-Obligated Increase	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Health Insurance	150,256	1,722,037	115,142	534,167	192,247	-	-	-
	Reclassifications	127,886	10,410	-	58,574	22,127	-	-	-
	Retirement	18,080	150,365	35,432	68,422	35,643	-	-	-
	Year over Year Personnel Cost Change	300,731	(1,622,729)	(457,598)	(82,099)	(202,356)	-	-	-
		625,138	3,811,485	(306,448)	720,145	96,387	-	-	-
Subtotal Commitments									
PRIORITIES									
	Employee Compensation	605,504	5,260,320	338,264	1,904,916	890,408	-	-	-
	Special Education- Contracts	-	931,124	-	300,000	-	-	-	-
	Special Education-Enrollment Service Levels	-	7,533,785	136.00	228,900	130,000	2.00	-	-
	Special Education Compliance and Nonpublic Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Special Education-Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Other Grants-Transition	38,504	78,542	1.00	179,074	-	2.00	-	-
		644,008	13,803,771	338,264	2,612,890	1,020,408	4.00	2.00	2.00
Subtotal Priorities									
SUBTOTAL BUDGET ADDITIONS									
		1,270,796	17,883,694	36,491	3,525,110	1,116,795	4.00	2.00	2.00
	Budget Realignments	3,374,613	32,738,107	2,245,911	11,279,776	4,212,090	(0.50)	1.00	1.00
		4,645,409	50,621,801	2,282,402	14,804,886	5,328,885	3.50	3.00	3.00
DIVISION TOTAL									
		\$ 4,645,409	\$ 50,621,801	\$ 2,282,402	\$ 14,804,886	\$ 5,328,885	3.50	3.00	3.00

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SUMMARY OF FY 2026 BUDGET CHANGES BY PROGRAM AND SUMMARY GROUPINGS									
		3326		3328		3330			
		Special Education Summer Services		Special Education Compliance and Nonpublic Services		Special Education - Central Office			
PROGRAMS		FTE		FTE		FTE		Total	Total FTE
MANDATES									
Blueprint-National Board Certification	\$	-	-	-	\$	-	-	\$	466,838
Subtotal Mandates								466,838	-
COMMITMENTS									
Benefit Cost-New Positions/Salaries/Wages		4,111	-	(61,562)	-	-	-	3,712,519	-
Bus Contracts-Obligated Increase		-	-	(175,000)	-	-	-	(175,000)	-
Health Insurance		1,272	-	8,906	-	18,670	-	2,742,697	-
Reclassifications		-	-	-	-	19,238	-	238,235	-
Retirement		278	-	3,468	-	15,970	-	327,658	-
Year over Year Personnel Cost Change		(70)	-	20,591	-	2,445	-	(2,041,085)	-
Subtotal Commitments		5,591	-	(203,597)	-	56,323	-	4,805,024	-
PRIORITIES									
Employee Compensation		9,409	-	41,268	-	159,685	-	9,209,774	-
Special Education- Contracts		92,824	-	(261,253)	-	-	-	1,062,695	-
Special Education-Enrollment Service Levels		53,742	-	(823,980)	-	-	-	7,122,447	140.00
Special Education Compliance and Nonpublic Services		-	-	6,952,053	-	-	-	6,952,053	-
Special Education-Other		15,000	-	-	-	-	-	15,000	-
Other Grants-Transition		-	-	-	-	-	-	296,120	3.50
Subtotal Priorities		170,975	-	5,908,088	-	159,685	-	24,658,089	143.50
SUBTOTAL BUDGET ADDITIONS		176,566	-	5,704,491	-	216,008	-	29,929,951	143.50
Budget Realignments		195,700	-	296,918	-	798,996	(1.00)	55,142,111	(0.80)
DIVISION TOTAL	\$	372,266	-	\$ 6,001,409	-	\$ 1,015,004	(1.00)	\$ 85,072,062	142.70