

VISITING THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY



A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

BOAST MARYLAND COALITION

2011

Maryland General Assembly

Lessons Plans

Lesson Plan 1 - General Assembly Basics

1.1 Maryland's Legislative Districts The State of Maryland is divided into 47 districts – similar to how America is divided into states. In each of Maryland's districts, voters elect 1 senator and 3 delegates to represent them in the Maryland General Assembly. That means there are a total of 47 senators and 141 delegates in the state.

1.2 Elections The members of the General Assembly and the state's governor are elected every four years to serve four-year terms. The next general election will be November 2014, which means lawmakers are serving the first year of the new term.

1.3 The General Assembly Session Every year for 90 days from January through April, all of the senators and delegates - the General Assembly - meet together in Annapolis, the state capital. This 90-day gathering is called "session". During session, the senators and delegates must approve the state's budget. The budget is what pays for public schools, police, health care and other services.

1.4 Legislation Senators and delegates also consider other issues during session. The issues come in the form of bills, or legislation. When the General Assembly approves the bills, they become law. That is why senators and delegates are called "lawmakers". The bills may give extra state money to special projects, or give approval or disapproval to new ideas.

1.5 Day in the Life of a Legislator During the General Assembly session, legislators are very busy. They often meet in the morning with their constituents (people who live in their district), or with each other to discuss the budget or bills. At 10 or 11 a.m. (depending on the day of the week), all of the Senators meet together in the Senate chambers and all of the Delegates meet together in the House of Delegate chambers to consider official business. After lunch, individual committees – each senator or delegate is a member of one - meet to hear testimony on bills (for more on the committees, see day 2 of the lesson plan). At night, legislators often have dinner or receptions with their constituents or lobbyists (people who work with legislators to get specific bills passed). The closer it gets to the end of the 90 day session, the busier senators and delegates become.

Summary:

- Maryland has 47 districts
- Each district has 1 senator and 3 delegates
- The General Assembly meets for 90 days every year (called “session”)
- The General Assembly must approve the budget and can consider other bills
- Legislators’ days are very busy

Suggested Homework Activity – Find Out Which Legislators Represent Your School

- Use the Internet to log onto www.mlis.state.md.us, which is the Maryland General Assembly's website.
- On the first line on the right side of the page, click the link "Find" on "Contact or Find a Legislator".
- Click the link that says "Find Your Federal and State Elected Officials."
- Type your school's address and city in the boxes labeled "address" and "city" (they are under the Maryland map).
- Click the button "Find Elected Officials".
- The names of your elected officials will appear on the left side of the screen
- Write down the legislative district your school is in, along with the names of your 3 delegates and 1 senator (you may have to scroll down to read the senator's name).
- Click the back button to return to the blue Maryland General Assembly home page.
- Under the heading "The Maryland General Assembly" halfway down the page, click on the link that says "Senators".
- Then click the link that says "Senators by Name".
- Find the senator who represents your school, and click the link on his or her name.
- Read the biography of your senator and write down his or her contact information, which committee they are a member of, and one fact about them.
- Return to the Maryland General Assembly's blue home page and click on the link that says "Delegate."
- Repeat the steps to locate your 3 delegates and read about them.

Suggested In-Class Activity - Write a letter and deliver it to your legislators

The Honorable **INSERT NAME**

INSERT ADDRESS

Dear Senator/Delegate **INSERT NAME**:

I am a **INSERT GRADE** grade student at **INSERT SCHOOL NAME AND CITY**. I am writing to ask you to support the BOAST Maryland Tax Credit (SB315/HB932). This bill is important because **INSERT ONE REASON**. The BOAST Maryland Tax Credit will help my school by **INSERT HOW BOAST WOULD HELP YOUR SCHOOL**.

Thank you for your representation and commitment to education. As you know, there are over 109,000 students in Maryland nonpublic schools which save our state almost **\$1.5 billion** annually. The BOAST Maryland Tax Credit will encourage businesses to invest in local scholarship organizations that support public and nonpublic school students. These donations will help sustain all local schools and continue to save money for the state of Maryland.

Sincerely,

INSERT STUDENT SIGNATURE

-Hand-Deliver to your legislator on March 16, 2011 at the BOAST Legislative Day-

Lesson Plan 2 - How a Bill Becomes Law

2.1 The House and the Senate As we mentioned before, Maryland has senators and delegates. The 47 senators are members of the Senate, while the 141 delegates are members of the House of Delegates. The House and the Senate are two separate but equal chambers of the General Assembly, or legislature (even though the Senate has fewer members). The budget and all other bills (legislation) must be approved by both the House and the Senate.

2.2. A Bill is Introduced A bill must be introduced by either a senator or delegate (or both) for it to be considered by the General Assembly. The legislator who introduces the bill is known as the “sponsor.” When the bill is introduced to the House or Senate, it is called the “first reading” (see Legislative Process flow chart).

2.3. The Bill is Assigned to Committee After the bill has been introduced and given the first reading, it is assigned to a committee (the “second reading”). Committees were created because there are so many bills to consider and the state’s budget is so large that the work of reviewing them has to be split up among the lawmakers. Each senator or delegate is a member of a committee in his or her chamber and each committee focuses on a specific type of legislation.

Committee members then have a hearing on the bill. During the hearing, legislators hear testimony from both sides – people who support and people who oppose (or do not support) the bill. After the testimony, the committee votes to approve or not approve the legislation. The committee must approve the bill if it is to move on to become law. If the committee does not pass the bill, that bill will not become law.

2.4 The House or Senate Votes on the Bill After the bill has been approved by the committee, it returns to the chamber it was introduced in (the “third reading”). The full House or Senate may debate (discuss) the bill. Once the debate is over, all of the members of that chamber (House or Senate) vote on the bill. The full House or Senate must approve the bill for it to become law. If lawmakers approve it, it is “passed”. If they do not approve it, it is “defeated”.

2.5 The Bill Moves to the Other Chamber After the bill has been passed by one chamber, it still must be approved by the other chamber. The second chamber repeats the steps of the first chamber (points 2.2 through 2.4) – it is introduced on the floor, assigned to committee, voted on by the committee, returns to the full chamber (if passed by the committee), debated, and voted on by the whole chamber.

2.6 Amendments to Bills Sometimes legislators want to support a bill but do not like everything the bill says. If that’s the case, the lawmaker can offer an amendment either in committee or on the chamber floor to change the bill by either adding or deleting something. Just because an amendment may be defeated doesn’t mean the entire bill will fail.

2.7 Conference Committee If both the House and Senate have approved a bill, but they have slightly different versions of it (maybe, for example, one chamber approved an amendment but the other did not), a Conference Committee made up of both senators and delegates meets to work out the differences. There can only be one final version of the bill.

2.8 The Bill is Presented to the Governor If the House and Senate approved a bill and have worked out any differences, it then goes to the governor for his signature. The governor must sign a bill for it to become law. If the governor does not want the bill to become law, he vetoes (does not approve) it.

Summary

- The House of Delegates and the Senate are two separate but equal chambers of the General Assembly
- A bill must pass both chambers to become law
- Only a senator or delegate can introduce a bill
- Once introduced, a bill is assigned to a committee
- If the committee approves the bill, it returns to the full chamber for a vote
- If the full chamber approves the bill, it then moves to the other chamber
- Both chambers (House and Senate) must approve the same version of a bill and the governor must sign it for it to become law

**Suggested Homework Activity – Gathering Further Information on SB315/HB932
(BOAST Maryland Tax Credit)**

- Use the Internet to log onto www.mlis.state.md.us, which is the Maryland General Assembly's website.
- On the second line on the left side of the page, click the link "Bill Information and Status."
- In the open box labeled "Bill Number," type in the number of the bill you want to look up, which is SB315 or HB932, the BOAST Maryland Tax Credit.
- Click "Submit Query".
- When the bill information screen appears, scroll down a bit on the page until you reach "History by Legislative and Calendar Date."
- Find out where it says "first reading" and write down the date.
- Note which committee the bill has been assigned to. The committee name will appear next to the first reading. Committee names include Appropriations, Ways and Means, Budget and Tax, Education, Health and Environment, etc.
- If there is a hearing scheduled for the bill, note the date and time.
- Note the latest (most recent) action on a bill and write down what it is.

Lesson Plan 3 - Legislative Issues in Education

3.1 BOAST Maryland Tax Credit This bill gives a tax credit to businesses that donate to programs for students. A tax credit means the business does not owe the state as much money. The businesses who want to get the BOAST (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers) Tax Credit can donate to one of two types of organizations. The first type of organization gives scholarships to students who attend nonpublic schools like yours so they and their families can afford to attend. The second type of organization helps fund extracurricular programs that benefit public school students. This bill will encourage businesses to donate to both public and nonpublic school students, which means it benefits children all over the state! A similar program has already been working successfully in the neighboring state of Pennsylvania for several years.

Exhibit 3.2
The Legislative Process

