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Up the Street: MSEA Legislative Updates

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March 4, 2016; Issue 109

THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS

- **Senate Holds Hearings on Testing Reduction Legislative Package**

On Wednesday, **MSEA's legislative agenda to reduce standardized testing** received hearings in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, with President Betty Weller, the senate bill sponsors, educators, and national testing experts leading the advocacy effort. **Sen. Roger Manno** (D-Montgomery-District 19) was joined by educators—Sarah Neubold (Montgomery), Rachel McCusker (Carroll), and Jake Zebley (Cecil)—to advocate for a statewide limit on mandated testing at 2% of annual instruction time, or a little more than 20 hours a year (**SB 407**). Later in the afternoon, **Senate Minority Leader J.B. Jennings** (R-Baltimore and Harford-District 7) was joined by kindergarten teachers—P.J. Friend (Montgomery), Diane Bachek (Howard), Kathryn Henn (Carroll), and Christine Bennett (Calvert)—to present the case for changing the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment into a sampling test (**SB 794**).

President Weller also teamed up with **Monty Neill, executive director of FairTest**, to testify in support of **Sen. Rich Madaleno's** (D-Montgomery-District 18) bill to require the Maryland State Department of Education to apply to become one of seven assessment innovation states that will have the opportunity to pilot performance-based assessments as a possible replacement to state standardized tests (**SB 787**).

- **NEXT WEEK is MSEA's Week of Action**

Now that our testing bills have had hearings in both the House and the Senate, this is the critical period of the legislative session when legislators really need to hear from you—on the phone, over email, in person, or on social media. That's why, starting on Monday, MSEA is holding a Week of Action to make it easy to communicate with your delegates and senator in Annapolis. Mark your calendars for when you'll be taking action to make sure our students have less testing and more learning next school year and thereafter.

Here's the schedule for **MSEA's Week of Action**:

- **Monday, March 7:** Join the Facebook rally for less testing by posting MSEA shareables to your page. Visit facebook.com/marylandeducators for ideas.
- **Tuesday, March 8:** Wear red and post your photo to social media with the #lesstesting, and then call your legislators to ask for their support by using the

MSEA Legislative Hotline, 888-520-MSEA (6732).

- **Wednesday, March 9:** Send an email to your legislators at bit.ly/weekofaction16 and share your perspective.
- **Thursday, March 10:** Dial in to the Less Testing Tele-Town Hall at 7:30 p.m. for an update on our progress.
- **Friday, March 11:** Join our Twitter Storm by tweeting about the importance of reducing testing at lesstestingmorelearning.com/tweet.

- **A New Era of Public Education Funding in Maryland?**

While testing dominated our advocacy this week, there were bill hearings in the House and Senate on legislation that would create a Thornton II Commission to update and reform Maryland's Thornton funding formula (**HB999/SB905**). Since the mid-2000s, when Thornton was first fully implemented, the percentage of K-12 students living in poverty and the number of English language-learners have doubled. As some districts face school closures as a result of declining enrollments while others suffer overcrowding as enrollment grows each year, the initial Thornton plan—as historic as its passage was—has outlived its full effectiveness. As written in the bill, the commission will include a representative from MSEA (as appointed by MSEA, not the governor). This presents a very important chance to improve educator salaries and retirement security and increase recruitment and retention, lower class sizes, and close opportunity gaps.

- **News and Notes**

- *House Expected to Pass Community College Collective Bargaining Bill* The House of Delegates is set to vote today to **permit collective bargaining for all community college employees**. The legislation—**HB 27**— would be a major victory for workers' rights at colleges where faculty members and adjuncts currently have no voice for better pay and working conditions. MSEA has played a large role in the coalition that has worked for the past few years to secure what is expected to be veto-proof support in the House. If passed today, the bill will then move to the Senate.
- *More Public Awareness for "Less Testing, More Learning" Campaign* Our push to reduce standardized testing continues to pick up steam in the media, as MSEA made the rounds on Baltimore television and radio outlets to spread the word. You can listen and watch here: **WMAR (ABC Baltimore)**, **WBAL Radio**, **the Steiner Show on WEAA**, and **Maryland Morning News on WBAL**. You can also check out **more than 40 online, print, radio, and television stories that have been produced by news outlets since we launched our campaign last year**.
- *MSEA Continues to Protect Local School Calendar Decisions* After failing to pass last year, legislation (**HB 1349/ SB 767**) and a House resolution (**HJ 5**) to mandate that school years start after Labor Day is back before the General Assembly. MSEA representatives testified against the House resolution on Monday and then against the legislation in a Senate hearing on Wednesday. With much less press coverage and continued opposition by General Assembly members and committee leaders, the bills are not expected to gain traction this year. **You can read more about the legislation here**.

MSEA Works with Coalition to Guarantee Earned Sick Leave

MSEA—in conjunction with the Working Matters coalition—**stepped up advocacy efforts this week to pass earned sick leave for private and public sector employees (HB 580/ SB 472)**. Mary Stein, an MSEA member and Howard County school nurse, expressed support on behalf of Maryland’s educators in front of the House Economic Matters Committee on Tuesday and the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday.

CAMPAIGN 2016

- **Hillary Dominates Super Tuesday, Has Clear Path to Democratic Nomination**

Thanks in large part to the efforts of educators around the country, Hillary Clinton now holds a commanding lead in delegates following wins in 8 of the 12 Super Tuesday contests. Last week, we asked educators to help Hillary win the state of Virginia—and with our help, she won the Commonwealth’s primary by a 64-35 landslide and secured 61 of 93 delegates. Of course, there’s still a long way to go before Hillary officially clinches the nomination and she still needs your help, especially in Maryland’s primary next month. Sign up to become an Educator for Hillary at www.strongpublicschools.org.

- **Edwards and Van Hollen Continue Their Battle for the U.S. Senate**

After reinvigorating **Rep. Donna Edwards’** Senate campaign with a million-dollar ad buy in Baltimore back in December and January, **Emily’s List announced a new six-figure TV ad buy this week in the Baltimore and DC markets on behalf of the congresswoman**. The ad—titled “**Taking**”—paints Edwards as an independent fighter willing to take on Wall Street. The boost is badly needed for Edwards as she trails campaign rival **Rep. Chris Van Hollen** in fundraising by steep margins. Meanwhile, Van Hollen showcased support from the Democratic Party’s youngest activists by winning the **Young Democrats of Maryland straw poll** 76-34 over Edwards.

For a pdf version of this edition of *Up the Street*, [click here](#).

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