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Up the Street: MSEA Legislative Updates

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

### **THIS MONTH IN ANNAPOLIS (AND BALTIMORE)**

#### **Testing Commission Finishes Work, Issues Final Report**

In the coming days, the Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments in Public Schools is expected to officially release their long-awaited final report on how to reduce standardized testing in Maryland schools. The recommendations now must be adopted or rejected by local school boards by September 1, 2016, and the State Board of Education by October 1, 2016. As you might remember, the Commission was created by MSEA-driven legislation in the 2015 General Assembly session.

The report, [which you can read here](#), unfortunately **lacks concrete recommendations for reducing testing**, instead focusing for the most part on trying to improve assessment administration. However—thanks to the advocacy work of MSEA—it does contain a recommendation that each local school district form a District Committee on Assessments (DCA) to complete a comprehensive review on all local mandated assessments and propose testing reductions to their school board for approval. The vast majority of over-testing lies at the district level—in the form of unit, benchmark, and quarterly exams—so this provides educators a real opportunity to advocate for significant reductions in testing time. To hold these committees accountable, the recommendation includes language that urges districts to include union-appointed educators in decision-making and requires reporting to the Maryland General Assembly. MSEA will focus support on these committees' efforts to reduce standardized testing, and educators at the local level are eager to fully engage with this opportunity.

The Commission made several other recommendations that will help educators and their students:

- **Elimination of State Middle School Social Studies Test:** Right now, the only state-mandated standardized test in social studies is the Government HSA in high school. However, state law also requires a similar middle school test in the coming years. The Commission made a recommendation to the General Assembly to eliminate that middle school test and replace it with a more general requirement that districts demonstrate that students are meeting the standards in any way they choose (portfolios, projects, or other assessments).
- **Student Learning Objective (SLO) Reform:** One crucial finding by the Commission—

based heavily on educator feedback—was that SLOs are often implemented using district-mandated tests *without* real input by teachers. As a result, SLOs have led to an increase in locally mandated testing. To help counteract this consequence, the Commission made two key recommendations: 1) The primary purpose of a standardized assessment may not be to attain an SLO, and 2) School districts should require no more than two teacher directed SLOs for the purposes of meeting the student growth requirements within the district's teacher and principal evaluation system.

- o **Creation of PARCC Advisory Stakeholder Group:** The PARCC assessment is one of the biggest drivers of educator frustration with standardized testing. It disrupts schools buildings for weeks (if not months) at a time, even though the validity and instructional usefulness of the test has yet to be proven. Unfortunately, Maryland has to give *some* statewide test under federal law. To help make the best of PARCC, the Commission recommended that the Maryland State Department of Education form an educator-driven advisory group to give direct feedback to PARCC on administration changes. Including and listening to educators' voices can only help to improve the current situation and should result in some real improvement.

### **The State Board of Education Approves KRA Sampling Regulations**

After MSEA successfully worked with the General Assembly to change the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) to a sampling test, MSDE was tasked with writing regulations to implement the law—with final approval authority given to the State Board. Those regulations were approved during the Board's June 28 meeting and show just how many kindergarteners now will not have to take the KRA this fall.

Just eight of the 24 districts have chosen to give the test to every student, most of which are smaller districts: Allegany, Baltimore City, Caroline, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Somerset, and Wicomico. The other 16 districts will give the test to a range of 10-30% of students, depending on their size (larger districts can give it to fewer students than smaller districts). MSEA will continue to work with local affiliates to advocate for less kindergarten testing. As of now, we have cut the number of kindergarteners taking the KRA by more than half *without* jeopardizing the validity of data that can make the case for universal pre-K.

### **NEWS AND NOTES**

#### **Gov. Hogan Criticizes School Facilities Inspection Changes**

While Gov. Hogan continues to mostly ignore public education policy, he did publicly criticize a new plan by outgoing **Interagency Committee on School Construction Executive Director David Lever** to significantly reduce the frequency of school facility inspections. Lever argued that the proposal to reduce the inspections from 220 a year to 100 is necessary because there is not enough staff to conduct the current level of inspections. **Gov. Hogan blasted the move**, saying, "It's hard to understand how anyone, especially someone supposedly in charge of Maryland school construction, could think it's a good idea to do less school maintenance inspections...it's about the safety of our students."

#### **Gov. Hogan Names New Chief Lobbyist**

After appointing his chief lobbyist (**Joe Getty**)—**with no previous judicial experience**—to Maryland's highest court, Gov. Hogan tapped former Senator **Chris Shank** as **his new legislative lead**. The staff shuffle should have little influence on Gov. Hogan's narrow education agenda, which has been limited to charter schools, private schools, and corporation-based programs. However, it does give the governor a sure vote in any controversial case before the Maryland Court of Appeals. So much for taking on Annapolis insider politics.

### **MSDE Holds ESSA Stakeholder Meeting**

As they are required to do under federal law, MSDE held its second stakeholder workgroup meeting to help implement the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). MSEA President Betty Weller and Vice President Cheryl Bost are two of more than 40 stakeholders MSDE has invited to participate in the process, giving the association a direct voice in how the landmark federal law influences state and district policymaking. To help define how MSEA advocates for policy under ESSA, the association has formed an internal ESSA Implementation Team, including both members and staff.

### **CAMPAIGN 2016 (and 2018)**

#### **Hillary Builds Early Polling Lead Over Trump**

Following a disastrous month by Donald Trump's presidential campaign—including the firing of his campaign manager, bragging that he predicted the Orlando shooting, and saying the judge in his Trump University lawsuit was biased because of his Mexican heritage—Hillary Clinton (who will address the NEA Representative Assembly next week) now holds a **five-point advantage** in national poll averages going into July. Help make sure we have a proven education champion in the White House rather a candidate whose chief education experience is driving people into debt through Trump University. **Sign up to become an Educator for Hillary today.**

#### **Gov. Hogan Finally Says He Won't Vote for Trump**

After months of dodging questions on Donald Trump more awkwardly than Michael Scott manages his employees in *The Office*, Gov. Hogan finally gave in to the media pressure and announced he would not be voting for his party's nominee for president. That means the governor will either not vote or vote for Hillary Clinton, a third-party candidate, or perhaps write-in someone (maybe Chris Christie?). One thing is for sure: **Gov. Hogan's conservative base was not too pleased with his decision.**

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