

**From:** [Sean Johnson, Assistant Executive Director of Political and Legislative Affairs](#)  
**To:** [@Remote \[MD\]](#)  
**Subject:** Up the Street - March 18, 2016  
**Date:** Friday, March 18, 2016 12:54:12 PM

Up the Street: MSEA Legislative Updates

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*March 18, 2016; Issue 111*

## THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS

### • Testing Reduction Bills Move Forward

Following MSEA's successful Week of Action—which resulted in thousands of emails, phone calls, and social media posts from educators throughout Maryland—and our legislative committee's lobby night on Monday, legislators started moving parts of our legislative package to reduce standardized testing forward:

- *Limit Mandated Testing at 2% of Annual Instruction Time (HB 141/SB 407)*: The top priority of our testing package is on the floor of the House of Delegates this morning. We hope by the end of the weekend, it will have passed and will head to the Senate.
- *Changing the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to a Sample Test (HB 657/SB 794)*: The bill—which would effectively eliminate the KRA for the vast majority of kindergarteners and prohibit standardized testing in public pre-K—is up for third reader in both chambers this morning. There are slight differences in amendments between the bills that would need to be worked out before the end of session.
- *Annual Public Disclosure (HB 412/ SB 533)*: This legislation would require school districts to publicly disclose all mandated tests and how much time they take away from instruction each year. It passed the Senate 34-10 on Wednesday and is up for third reader in the House this morning. The Senate bill now moves to the House and the House bill would move to the Senate following passage on third reader. Once both chambers approve the same version of either or both bills, the legislation will head to the governor's desk.
- *Parental Notification (HB 1233)*: The bill, as initially drafted, would require school districts to email parents every quarter with a list of information about their kids' upcoming mandated standardized tests. After passing unanimously out of committee, it was watered down on the House floor to allow districts to choose the notification method. We are disappointed in the amendment, but encouraged to keep the issue alive as the bill moves.

There are two other bills in our testing reduction package that have not moved forward: one that would remove the state's ability to mandate that districts include PARCC scores in teacher evaluations (**HB 633**) and another that would apply for federal permission to create a pilot program for performance-based assessments (**HB 1427/ SB 787**). We are working with legislators to see if we can move them before Monday's crossover deadline.

- **Senate Narrowly Passes Tax Credit Voucher Program**

After rejecting seven amendments on Tuesday, **the Senate passed the Maryland Education Credit (formerly known as BOAST) by a 25-19 margin**—with just 11 Democrats in favor and 19 against. The bill had the full backing of **Gov. Larry Hogan** and **Senate President Mike Miller** (D-Calvert, Charles, and Prince George's-District 27), but more than 1,200 calls from educators helped build a strong majority of opposition amongst Democratic senators. This makes it much less likely for this version of the bill to move in the House, where it has been rejected for the last decade.

- **Senate Unanimously Approves Full Funding for Public Schools**

**After educators held Gov. Hogan accountable for his \$68 million cut to public schools** in last year's budget, he opted to submit a budget this year with full K-12 education funding. That budget made its way through the Senate with relatively minor changes, and was **approved unanimously by the full chamber yesterday**. The budget now goes to the House Appropriations Committee, where they are expected to make additional changes before moving the budget to the House floor next week.

There were a couple of other items of interest in the budget. Unfortunately, budget language to fund the first year of the Maryland Education Credit is still in the budget bill and will need to be removed by the House. However, **the Senate did add in \$19 million to help counties cover increased pension costs this year**. While that helps meet this year's gap, it is far from a permanent solution to protect pension dollars from crowding out classroom dollars.

## News and Notes

- *MSEA Continues to Lobby Delegates to Reject BOOST and MEC*

While the House leadership has been a reliable ally against the creation of the tax credit voucher program, they have floated the idea of passing a new version of the same bad idea—the BOOST bill (**HB 1213**) sponsored by **Del. Keith Haynes** (D-Baltimore City-District 44A). While it includes some marginal improvements over the Maryland Education Credit (MEC), **it would end in the same result of diverting public dollars to private schools**. MSEA President Betty Weller sent a letter to legislators who promised to oppose tax credit vouchers as candidates in 2014 to encourage their continued opposition. **Send an email to your delegates today to urge them to vote against BOOST and MEC.**

- *Community Schools to be Included in After-School Bill*

While **Del. Mary Washington's** (D-Baltimore City-District 43) legislation to expand community schools (**HB 1139**) is now likely to be reduced to a study bill, we also learned this week that House leadership is working to make community schools eligible for grant funding through a bill sponsored by Del. Maggie McIntosh (D-Baltimore City-District 43) to expand after-school and summer programs for districts with a majority of low-income students (**HB 1402**). The Maryland Extended Day and Summer Enhancement Programs Act would distribute \$10 million annually for such programs. **You can read MSEA's background paper on community schools here.**

- *Thornton II Commission Legislation Passes General Assembly*

Legislation to create a Thornton II Commission (**HB 999/SB 905**) to **update the state's**

**public school funding formula** is up for third reader in the House with minor amendments this morning after receiving unanimous approval in the Senate last week. Once the two chambers agree on a common version of the commission, the bill will go to Gov. Hogan for his consideration.

- *Senate Budget Committee Advances Tax Cuts for Top Earners*

Despite a drop in revenue projections, Senate leadership advanced a tax cut plan that primarily benefits the state's top earners, who would pay \$2,000 less on average on their income taxes. The plan, which was originally supposed to only benefit working families through an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, **would now cost \$670 million over the next five years**, making it more difficult for the General Assembly to fully fund public services like education. MSEA is working in coalition to press the full Senate to remove the tax breaks for top earners from the bill. **Here is a copy of a letter shared with all senators this morning.**

## CAMPAIGN 2016

- **Hillary Sweeps Tuesday's Contests, Turns Attention to Trump**

Hillary Clinton quieted talk of a Bernie Sanders comeback on Tuesday when she swept five big contests and opened up a 300-plus delegate lead—**more than double the largest margin by Barack Obama in 2008**. While there is still a nomination to win, the Clinton campaign is shifting some focus to Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, who has lacked even a semblance of coherent policy views on education in his run for president. With so much at stake in this election, Hillary needs all the help she can get from Maryland educators. Sign up to become an Educator for Hillary at [www.strongpublicschools.org](http://www.strongpublicschools.org).

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### Sean Johnson

*Assistant Executive Director of Political and Legislative Affairs*  
Center for Public Affairs

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**Our mailing address is:**  
140 Main Street  
Annapolis MD 21401



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