

actionLine

DECEMBER 2009

MARYLAND STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION • NEA

VOLUME 10 ISSUE 3



北京。我有一位中国朋友。他住在北京。J'ai un chien qui s'appelle Napoléon.

Yo sueño en español.

**Foreign language
immersion preps
students for the
global village**

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As our need for tolerance, communication and global interconnectedness grows, many policymakers and educators across the country are recognizing the increasing need for Americans with proficiency in more than one language.



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Earlier this year, 43,000 educators across Maryland took the opportunity to speak out about their school environments in the statewide survey, TELL Maryland. Now it's time to study the results.



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Learning new languages opens new doors



Verbal and written fluency in a second language and a deep understanding of other cultures are increasingly seen as fundamental skills in the global economy.

Nuestro sistema escolar es el mejor del país. Pero queremos crear excelentes escuelas públicas para todos los niños en el estado de Maryland.*

Unless you are a native Spanish speaker, teach Spanish or otherwise work with Spanish-speaking children, you probably had difficulty reading the paragraph above. But for a growing number of students in Maryland—including many native English speakers—reading and speaking in Spanish and other languages has become part of their daily routine.

This new trend is propelled by Maryland's changing population, particularly the rapid growth of the Hispanic and Asian immigrant populations. The U.S. Census predicts that by 2020 Maryland will become the first state on the East Coast, and the fifth overall, where minorities outnumber white residents.

That population shift is reshaping our public schools statewide. Already, Maryland's schools are majority-minority, and nearly one out of every four students in Montgomery County and one in five in Prince George's County are Hispanic. School systems from Frederick to Anne Arundel to Talbot County are also seeing an influx of Hispanic children.

These new arrivals are transforming public schools in other ways. Yes, many of them live in poverty and speak little English, which poses challenges for school systems. But these children are enriching classrooms and curricula with their language and customs. More and more parents of all ethnicities believe that exposure to a multilingual and multicultural academic environment is a vital part of their children's education. Verbal and written fluency in a second language—whether Spanish, French, Chinese or other—and a deep understanding of other cultures are increasingly seen as fundamental skills in the global economy.

The research shows that learning a foreign language not only has intrinsic value, but also helps students perform better in core areas such as math and science, and improve their critical-thinking skills. And especially in dual-language immersion programs, native speakers of both languages learn from each other, and the contributions of each group are equally valued.

Our challenge will be to ensure that these valuable programs continue to be funded—and even expanded—during a period of tight budgets. They are not luxuries—they are necessities.

**Translation: Our school system is the best in the nation. But we want great public schools for every child in Maryland.*

And the winners are...

Congratulations to the five lucky Association Representative who won \$250 Visa gift cards in the 2009 AR Membership Recruitment Drawing!

So far this year, member recruiters from across the state have added 200 new members to MSEA's roster (in addition to the thousands who joined at back-to-school events), bringing MSEA's total membership to nearly 71,000.

"In our work, relationships are our most important asset, and reps work with members and non-members, principals and supervisors to keep the Association's message alive," wrote President Clara Floyd in a letter to the drawing winners.

2009 Association Representative Membership Recruitment Drawing Winners

Valeria Arch
Allegany County
Teachers Association

Cheryl Ervin
Education Association
of Charles County

Lynn Fornwalt
Washington County
Teachers Association

Nancy Schorr
Harford County Educational
Services Council

Patricia Tucker
Worcester County
Teachers Association

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Write Clara: MSEA, 140 Main St, Annapolis, MD 21401 • cfloyd@mseanea.org

Look for **MemberVoices** in each issue of **ActionLine!** We'll be asking questions of MSEA members all over the state and sharing their answers with you!

If funding weren't an issue, what resource or equipment would be at the top of your wish list to improve student achievement or your school environment?



ROBERTA PALMER
Elementary arts specialist
Elk Neck ES
Member for 28 years
Cecil County

Art teachers five days a week

I would put art teachers in all elementary schools five days a week—regardless of the school population—so people could see the important connection between art and curricular areas such as math and language arts. We are currently a pilot school for arts integration. Classroom teachers are using the fine arts specialists as a resource to help integrate the arts into their lessons.

Resources to make schools cleaner and safer

More structure in the classrooms would definitely provide more opportunity for the children to learn. For support staff at my school, it would be more money for equipment and the different products we use to make our school cleaner and safer.



ANTHONY DESHIELDS
Custodian
Deal Island ES
Member for 5 years
Somerset County

Smaller class size

If you ask me what would benefit my classroom the most, it would be having a smaller class size. Technology is nice, and we should be paying attention to those innovations, but the thing that would help me the most would be smaller class sizes.

Promethean ActiVote

I would like to have a Promethean ActiVote*. I think it would be fun and interesting for the kids. I would be able to ask them a question, and they'd be able to vote immediately and respond with their own questions. I think it would be good for a variety of subjects.



STEPHANY WARNER
Student member
University of Maryland
College Park
Member for 1 year



SEAN HEYL
English teacher
McDonough HS
Member for 14 years
Charles County

Better technology, more equipment

I would love to have more equipment and better technology. We do have white boards, but not for every classroom. Our textbooks are six or seven years old, and there have been changes since then. Textbooks can cost up to \$100 each, so it's quite an investment.



ROBERT LEE
Social studies teacher
Seneca Valley HS
Member for 16 years
Montgomery County

**ActiVote is a learner response tool for teachers and students that provides instant feedback. Teachers can download results onto spreadsheets and lesson plans for clear achievement results.*

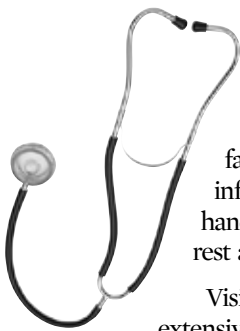
StartingLine

NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW

H1N1 resources for Maryland educators

More and more students and educators are missing school due to the seasonal flu and H1N1. Your school should pay special attention to the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Guidance for School Responses to Influenza (see CDC website below), and be aware of symptoms such

as a fever of 100 degrees or higher, sore throat, cough, body ache, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, and/or vomiting and diarrhea. Severe illnesses, including pneumonia and respiratory failure have been reported with H1N1 flu infection so be sure to take precautions—wash hands frequently, avoid sick people, get plenty of rest and eat well—to avoid the virus.



Visit the CDC and the U.S. government's extensive websites, www.cdc.gov and www.flu.gov, to learn more about H1N1. In Maryland, you can monitor the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene website, www.dhmm.maryland.gov/swineflu, for recent H1N1 news and vaccine information for your county.

Frederick County teacher wins NEA Foundation grant

Thanks to reading intervention teacher Kelly Boutin, struggling K-2 readers at Thurmont Primary School will soon be building their literacy skills using an exciting new tool. Boutin recently received a \$5,000 Student Achievement Grant from the NEA Foundation, which she'll be using to purchase a computer-based supplemental literacy program to help her students with targeted reading skills.

"Our school data showed that our students needed more practice with phonological skills and phonics," said Boutin, a member of the Frederick County Teachers Association. "We started an after-school reading program and wanted a web-enabled computer program that would



provide students more practice with those specific skills," Boutin said. "Studies show that children provided with computer-assisted instruction that targets phonological awareness and phonics skills make significant advances in reading."

The NEA Foundation offers two grant categories to educators: Student Achievement Grants, which fund initiatives to improve academic achievement, and Learning & Leadership Grants, which support high-quality professional development activities. Since 1999, the Foundation has awarded more than \$6 million in grants.

The NEA Foundation awards grants to educators three times a year. The next deadlines for grant applications are February 1 and June 1. Learn more about the grants and how to apply at www.neafoundation.org.

Maryland 4th and 8th graders boost math scores



Maryland's fourth and eighth grade students both showed improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), registering some of the biggest increases in the nation.

Scores for fourth graders jumped by four points since 2007—the second largest gain of any state. Eighth graders' scores jumped two points in the same period. Since 1990, Maryland eighth grade math scores have increased 28 points, one of the biggest gains in the nation.

The results also show a move toward eliminating the achievement gaps of both African American and Hispanic students in the state. Fourth grade African American students' math scores increased five points since 2007; eighth grade Hispanic students scores have jumped a total of 13 points in the last four years.

For more information on this year's assessment, visit www.nationsreportcard.gov. NAEP is a congressionally authorized project of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.



"We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open."

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (1889-1964)
FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Why join Twitter? To follow MSEA, of course!

But there's another important reason—students spend a lot of time using online media to connect with friends, research a paper or buy a new pair of custom Chuck Taylors. Using Twitter may give you the Web 2.0 edge you need to engage your students back in your traditional classroom. Some educators have established their own private academic Twitter groups with their classes. Visit www.marylandeducators.org/twitter. We have everything you need to get you started on Twitter—from sign-up instructions to how to issue your first tweet.



For more ideas and support, check out

www.twitter4teachers.pbworks.com and find links to tweets for special education teachers, drama teachers, trades and technical teachers, principals, National Board Certified Teachers, school counselors, science teachers, plus specific grade levels and subjects, and many, many others (including tweets on issues like professional development and 21st century learning).

Last chance to help guide MSEA's 2010-2012 budget

MSEA's two-year budget will guide how your dues dollars are spent over the next two years. Don't forget to submit your comments for review by MSEA's Budget Committee and Board of Directors by January 4. After that, the budget goes before the Spring RA for final approval. Visit www.marylandeducators.org/budget.



Recognize your students' achievements and receive 250,000 points free!



Student Recognition and Rewards

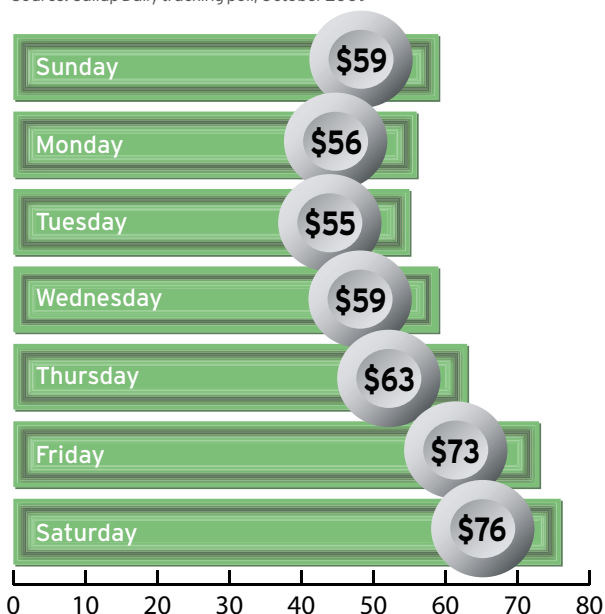
Reward your students' good behavior with uBoost, a points program redeemable for online prizes. Backed by behavioral research, this program engages and drives positive learning outcomes. MSEA members receive 250,000 FREE uBoost points (a \$265 value). Sign up online at NEA Member Benefits www.neamb.com/home/1209_2290.htm. Offer expires December 31.

by the numbers

When do you spend?

Flush on payday? Short on the weekend? You're not alone. According to a recent Gallup poll we Americans spend more of our money on the weekends—\$10 for a movie, an extra latte, perhaps—especially if we got paid that week.

Source: Gallup Daily tracking poll, October 2009



on the web

Get your holiday chill on ... relax, de-stress, simplify

Check out newdream.org, a website that's all about carbon-conscious consuming (think green). See *Simplify the Holidays 2009* for ways to reduce holiday stress, or share the Alternative Gift Registry for great handmade, secondhand, eco-friendly and non-material gift ideas!

Avoid department store crowds! Discover one-of-a-kind gifts at etsy.com, where you can find new, handmade, vintage and affordable fashion, jewelry, art, toys and housewares made by artists from across the globe.

Join paperbackswap.com and trade in your paperback library for brand new-to-you books from other members. You can do the same with CDs and DVDs.

Make a New Year's resolution to outsmart waste with terracycle.net. Collect drink pouches, energy bar wrappers, Lay's chip bags—to name a few—and send them in for credits for cash! Terracycle recycles the waste into more than 100 bargain-priced items like pencil cases, backpacks, bottles and flower pots.

Yo sueño en español. 我有一位中国笔友。他住在北京。 J'ai un chien qui s'appelle Napoléon.

Foreign language immersion preps students for the global village

I dream in Spanish. I have a pen pal in China! He lives Beijing. I have a dog named Napoléon.

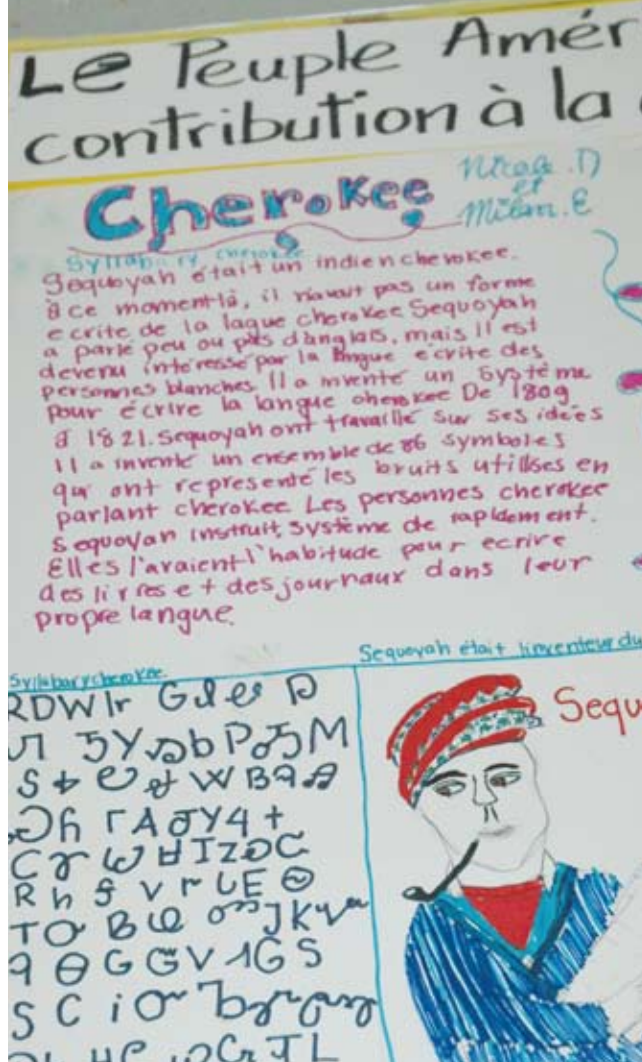


They say it takes a village to raise a child, but in the 21st century, it may very well take a global village to educate one. That's the sentiment of many educators and parents who support the concepts of public school language immersion and dual language programs. As the world becomes smaller and our need for tolerance, communication and global interconnectedness grows, many policymakers and educators across the country are recognizing the increasing need for Americans with proficiency in more than one language.

Understanding the need to keep pace with other nations, and a truly global economy, parents, too, see the benefit of giving their children early exposure to a second language. But it's not just the language acquisition that draws praise for the early foreign language instruction programs. Exposure to other cultures—and their history, literature and art—is equally important as students absorb a new language.

Barbara Contreras, a parent of two students in the Spanish immersion program at Rock Creek Forest ES in Montgomery County, is thrilled that her children are learning Spanish because her husband's family is Mexican-American. "We believe it is a great gift in today's economy and society to speak two languages," Contreras said. "My fourth grader has been in the program since kindergarten. The exposure has made him very curious about the all parts of the globe. He came to me in tears in first grade because he hadn't yet traveled outside the United States—we were terrible parents!"

Compelling and ongoing research shows that learning a second language very early has significant and long-lasting benefits. As far back as 1962, researchers reported that, "Monolingual and bilingual French-English children, aged 10, were administered verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests and measures of attitudes toward the English and French communities. Bilinguals performed significantly better on both verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests."



According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, learning a second language at an early age:

- Has a positive effect on intellectual growth;
- Enriches and enhances a child's mental development;
- Leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language and a better ear for listening;
- Improves a child's understanding of his/her native language;
- Gives children the ability to communicate with people they would otherwise not have the chance to know;
- Opens the door to other cultures and helps a child understand and appreciate people from other countries;
- Gives a student a head start in language requirements for college; and
- Increases job opportunities in many careers where knowing another language is a real asset.



“My students are very excited about learning in Spanish. Even at this level, they are proud of their accomplishments in meeting the challenge of learning another language,” said Dolly Xeron, a veteran Montgomery County Spanish language immersion teacher.

There are language immersion and dual language programs in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties—homes to Maryland’s most diverse populations, thanks to their proximity to Washington, D.C. The schools are universal and democratic in their lottery-based admissions processes, which are held every year for entry at the kindergarten level (there are occasional first grade openings). Students from all over the counties are eligible to participate in the lotteries; county buses provide transportation.

“Our program attracts all kinds of families,” said Carla Malozowski, staff development coordinator at Rock Creek Forest ES. “We are varied socioeconomically and racially and getting more so every year. We’re a bit of a well-kept secret. I think it’s a sign of a savvy and involved parent who finds the program, is attracted to it for their child and seeks us out. I don’t think it’s socioeconomics. I think it’s motivation.”

Rock Creek Forest supports a traditional neighborhood English-speaking school and the full immersion Spanish program. Students in the Spanish program receive nearly 100 percent of their elementary education in Spanish beginning in kindergarten, with the exception of art, music and physical education. Fourth and fifth graders receive extra English instruction in language arts focusing on writing and composition.

“My students are very excited about learning in Spanish. Even at this level, they are proud of their accomplishments in meeting the challenge of learning

another language,” said Dolly Xeron, a 13-year veteran immersion kindergarten teacher at Rock Creek Forest. “Our students are fluent by the time they leave our school.” Because there is no middle school Spanish immersion program in Montgomery County, students tend to lose a bit of the language, but most continue with as much Spanish as they can, and many former Rock Creek Forest students major or minor in the language in college.

Xeron is a native Spanish speaker as are most all of the classroom teachers in the Montgomery and Prince George’s programs. At Robert Goddard French Immersion School, a kindergarten through eighth grade program in Prince George’s County, native French-speaking classroom teachers come from Europe and Africa. A visitor to the school not only hears French in the classroom, but in the main office, in the hallways and in the cafeteria.

The principal, Kona-Facia Népay, says the teachers and students in her school are motivated by the fact that the minute they walk into the classroom, there is change. “They just stepped into another country, so the style of teaching and learning changes dramatically and, by its nature, must be very expressive and creative. Because we teach through French—our students are acquiring a new language in the same way they acquired their native one, by hearing and speaking it.”

Like their counterparts at Rock Creek Forest, Robert Goddard students are chosen through a lottery, and the makeup of the school is diverse racially, culturally and economically. That, too, adds to the enriching experience students get at Robert Goddard. “It’s open to everyone,” said Martha Kristy, the program coordinator. “We have Latino and Asian students, so we don’t teach those languages. Because French is not a foreign language to them, our students instead take Russian, a non-Romance language that requires a completely different handwriting style.”

Students at Robert Goddard and other immersion and dual language schools make a very strong showing on MSAs. “Our graduates compete to get into Roosevelt,

“I think learning French gives you a better understanding of other people and their customs. I want to be an international lawyer, so speaking French will help me all over the world!”

—Marie Penda Toure
Robert Goddard French Immersion School

“Le fait que je parle bien français sera bien sur les applications. Si je fais un interview avec un francophone, je pourrai lui parler en français. C’ est simplement une très bonne ressource.”

—Malik Bivins
 Robert Goddard French Immersion School
 “In the future, it will look good on my application that I speak French. Also, when I go for a job interview I can speak French with the person interviewing. It is just a very useful resource.”

Flowers and other highly regarded public and private high schools,” said Népay. “Imagine: Our students are taught in French, yet they do very well on our standardized tests. What happens is that they learn to listen, be creative and decipher information.”

Heidi Schmidt is an English teacher at Robert Goddard, one of only a handful of non-French speaking instructors at the school. She says her challenge is teaching the curriculum in the limited time she has with her students. “I may not be able to teach the entire curriculum, but I still have to teach the skills. Where another teacher might focus on setting in a story, I might have to focus on setting, plot, conflict and point of view in that same story. And because they don’t get as much reading in English at school, I have them do a lot of reading for homework.” Research shows that full immersion students often lag behind their peers slightly in certain English skills, such as reading, word knowledge and spelling, but quickly catch up when they reach their English language arts classes.

There’s a similar curve at the Kemp Mill ES dual language program in Montgomery County. There, one third of the students are Spanish-speaking; the rest are English-speaking. Students spend part of their day learning in English and part of their day learning in Spanish. Like immersion students, test scores sometimes show a lag, but most students catch up by third grade—due in large part to preparation for the MSAs.

Perhaps the biggest stretch for young students studying a foreign language is at Montgomery County’s Potomac ES, where students in the immersion program learn math and



Fourth grade students study the elements in Zhian Zhang’s Chinese immersion science class at Potomac ES in Montgomery County.

science in Mandarin Chinese. Dr. Zhian Zhang, a 12-year veteran of the program, says the benefits to students are many. “The students learn very good listening and comprehension skills, and math scores are generally higher. Those are all a plus for parents.”

While the benefits to students are well-documented and the creative opportunities for teachers are many, there are challenges. Materials are not always available in the immersion language, and most teachers must translate their lessons from English textbooks. Sometimes they must seek out other materials to supplement their instruction, and larger class sizes add additional pressure. “I think we as teachers have many challenges. No matter what language you’re using, we are always expected to improve test scores,” Zhang said. “If a student learning in English isn’t doing well, how can we expect him to do well in another language? Both students and teachers have to work very hard to do well. The joy is the students themselves and understanding and supportive parents.”

Robert Goddard’s Népay says it’s not just the parents, teachers and staff who find satisfaction in the programs—students are enthusiastic and committed. “We have little truancy or attrition here. Students really want to be here. The focus is on bilingualism, but because we are so multicultural—many actually become trilingual.”

And trilingualism, especially in the United States, is a skill that is not only something a student should be very proud of, but a truly valuable and marketable career asset in the global village.



At Prince George’s County Robert Goddard French Immersion School, eighth graders like Marie Penda Toure and Nijah Richardson deliver the school announcements every morning in French.



Educators across Maryland speak out about their school environments

Statewide survey reveals many positives and some key areas of concern

Maryland is a wonderful state to teach in. Our largest task is educating our students in the use of technology. Training our teachers to teach a technology-smart student population is the major task of our teacher generation.

—Brian Stottlemeyer, Worcester County

The major issue is TIME. Time to plan, do paperwork, file and run copies, research, grade papers, return phone calls ... time to do our jobs.

—Kelly Karwacki, Baltimore County

I strongly believe the key to retaining new teachers is to provide them with a supportive atmosphere.

—Anonymous, Talbot County

My only concern is the huge emphasis on central office management of individual teacher actions. It makes it hard to diversify my instruction for students.

—Karen Brackett, Harford County

I believe that those in authority have an obligation to review the counselor/student ratio in schools. The student population is 862, yet I am the only counselor assigned.

—Anonymous, Montgomery County

Supportive school leaders. Time for planning and collaboration. Adequate classroom resources and support services. Mentoring for new teachers. Staff input in decision-making that affects instruction.

These are some of the conditions of teaching and learning that educators know—and research clearly shows—are critical to retaining high-quality teachers and staff and raising the student achievement in public schools.

How do Maryland's public schools stack up?

This past March, for the first time, teachers, principals and other certificated staff statewide were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the environment in their schools in an online survey, TELL Maryland (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning).

The TELL Maryland survey was conducted by the New Teacher Center* in conjunction with MSEA, Governor Martin O'Malley's office, the Maryland State Department of Education and other education stakeholder groups. Data were gathered from frontline educators on a variety of issues related to student achievement and teacher retention. The purpose is to identify needs at the school, district and state levels as part of efforts to close achievement gaps and provide all students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

More than 43,000 educators statewide (62 percent of those eligible) responded, and the initial results are in. On the whole, they portray an education workforce reasonably satisfied with conditions in their schools in terms of school safety, collaboration and trust, and support from school administration. Those sentiments help explain why Maryland's public schools have recently received plenty of national accolades.

"The data confirm that teaching and learning conditions do make a difference in teachers' desire to continue teaching and in students' ability to meet expectations," noted Governor O'Malley in a letter to educators upon release of the results. "The vast majority of you remain committed to teaching in Maryland and to doing so for the same reason you originally became a teacher."

Nevertheless, levels of satisfaction with the school environment varied widely from district to district and school to school. And the survey identified some common areas of concern among educators that will be important areas for discussion and action in the months and years ahead.

*The New Teacher Center is an independent research organization that has designed and implemented similar surveys in nine other states.



The best professional development is when we mull over one or two new ideas and how we can work them into our classroom. It beats *50 Incredible Teaching Ideas* presented in a powerpoint program.

—Matthew Klapper, Calvert County

First, some good news

Nine out of every ten respondents report that the faculty in their school is committed to helping every student learn. Almost three out of four educators agree their school is a good place to work and learn, and close to two thirds say that leadership in their school has created an atmosphere of trust and respect.

That's critical because school leadership was identified as the top reason educators opt to stay at their current workplace. And the fact that four out of five respondents plan to remain where they are, at least in the short term, is cause for optimism.

School safety incidents may continue to make headlines around the state, but more than eight of ten educators feel they teach in a safe school environment. And at least seven out of ten educators are positive about their facilities and resources. These include clean and well-maintained facilities, a classroom conducive to teaching and learning, and adequate instructional materials, instructional technology and communications technology.

Needs improvement

However, only 56 percent say their class sizes are reasonable, and while more than eight of ten believe teachers and schools are doing a good job of promoting parent/guardian involvement, considerably fewer believe parents are responding and offering their support.

Feelings about the issue of planning time are also mixed. Although more than half of teachers say they have time to collaborate with their colleagues, when the data are explored in more detail, a majority of teachers say that they receive three or fewer hours per week for individual planning, and nine out of ten report three or fewer hours for structured collaborative planning. More educators (four in ten) argue having more time to plan and work with colleagues is the most important condition in promoting student learning.

Similarly, almost seven out of ten educators are positive about the way Maryland Professional Development Standards have been incorporated into their learning opportunities in areas such as deepening content knowledge and skills, applying research to teaching, and working with colleagues to refine teaching practices. But

more than half believe teachers have little or no role in determining the content of professional development programs, which, according to the survey, translates into less support and training in other areas they need to be more effective at their jobs.

In the area of mentoring, more than one third of new teachers say they were never assigned a mentor. Of those who were, more than six out of ten never observed their mentor's teaching, and sizable minorities note that their mentors never analyzed their students' work or reviewed their students' assessments.

Staff empowerment a big issue

Roughly six out of ten educators agree that they are integrally involved in decision-making at their school. Seven out of ten report that leadership opportunities exist and that teachers trust each other and are recognized as educational experts. Yet, almost eight of ten say teachers play little or no role in selecting teachers new to the school, and seven of ten say the same for deciding how the school budget will be spent. A clear gap in perceptions between teachers and principals also emerges in this area of empowerment; although eight of ten principals say teachers have an appropriate level of influence over decisions, only four of ten teachers agree.

Finally, while two-thirds of respondents agree that assessment results are available in time to be useful in instruction—and almost nine out of ten said they use formative assessments to adjust classroom instruction—less than six out of ten believe assessments are useful for improving student learning.

“These results echo what we have seen from the data on academic outcomes,” said MSEA President Clara Floyd. “Maryland’s public schools are generally on the right track, but if we hope to raise achievement levels for all students in all parts of the state, we need to work with our partners to address the issues frontline educators know are critical to our success.”

Want to see your school's results?

Visit www.tellmaryland.org and enter your school's unique passcode (obtained from your Association rep or principal). If your school did not have a participation rate of 50 percent or more, you can still use the passcode to view district and statewide results.



Our school is old and the teacher to student ratio is way off. We share the multipurpose room. Music and phys-ed teachers share a room. One music teacher must tote a cart to already overcrowded classrooms.

—Anonymous, Prince George's County

I value feeling empowered to make decisions about what happens in my classroom. But we are so bound by time constraints of having to "teach the test content" that there is very little time to stop and "teach the moment."

—Beth Strakonsky, Frederick County

Teacher empowerment—the opportunity to make changes that can affect the learning environment of my students—is very important to me.

—John McKim, Queen Anne's County

TELL Maryland At-a-Glance

Who took the survey...

Number of MD teachers, administrators and certificated specialists who took the survey:
43,448 (62% of total eligible)

Number of Maryland schools with 50% or greater response rate 1,023

Highest response rate by district
Somerset County (98%)

The good news about schools...

Our faculty is committed to helping every student learn 90%

I teach in a safe school 82%

I plan to stay at my current school in the short term 80%

My school is a good place to work and learn 73%

School leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents 73%

School leadership creates supportive environment with mutual trust and respect 64%

The not-so-good news...

New teachers never assigned a mentor 35%

Educators have little or no role in determining:

The content of in-service professional development programs 52%

How school budget will be spent 71%

Selection of new teachers to the school 79%

And differences of opinion...

Believe teachers have an appropriate level of decision-making in their school:

Principals 85%

Teachers 40%

LocalLine

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MSEA LOCALS

Locals push back—one furlough day returned to school employees

Thanks to rigorous organizing by the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County (TAAAC) and the Secretaries and Assistants Association of Anne Arundel County (SAAAAC), nearly 10,000 Anne Arundel County school employees recently gained back a furlough day imposed last summer. The furloughs—along with a pay freeze—were deemed necessary to help trim the \$40 million the county needed to balance the 2010 budget.

Last summer, the Local Associations reluctantly agreed to the furlough days over concern about the health care fund balance, which the district claimed was insufficient to cover 2010 claims. However, when the 2009 budget closeout figures were announced, a huge surplus in the same account totaled nearly \$12 million more than anticipated in the health care fund alone. More shocking, perhaps, was that additional surpluses totaled \$15.2 million—\$5 million in the instructional salaries category!

“We worked carefully with the district throughout the entire budget process, and at no time did they tell us about surplus funds,” said TAAAC president Tim Mennuti. “Fortunately, we monitor district expenses and revenues carefully on a daily basis, which is how we discovered the funds.”

The Locals worked hard to get the one-day furlough reinstated. Leaders, however, are still uncertain if any of the remaining furlough days are really necessary. “We thought it was interesting that the board of education took the money for the returned furlough day not from the identified surplus, but by making further cuts to the operating budget,” Mennuti added.



Left to right: WCTA PAC chair Sharon Chirgott, Senator Don Munson and WCTA board member Marilyn Young at the recent legislative breakfast hosted by WCTA and WCESP.

“If there was still enough money in the budget to fund a furlough day, it would appear that no furlough days were actually necessary. We continue to believe that in a down economy we should focus on retaining our outstanding workforce even if that means transferring funding from pet projects to payroll and benefits.”

Locals kick off annual pre-General Assembly legislative events

Locals on the Eastern Shore and in Western Maryland were the first to kick off the 2010 General Assembly session at legislative breakfast events last month. The events, scheduled by every Local Association before the state legislature convenes on January

13, are an opportunity for Association leaders and members to meet with their elected officials and share both local and statewide Association goals.

“At the top of our agenda were education funding needs, preserving maintenance of effort, protecting our pensions from possible cost shifting to the counties, and the Association’s fair labor negotiations bill,” said Washington County Teachers Association (WCTA) President Denise Fry. “MSEA President Clara Floyd and MSEA lobbyist Bob Rankin joined us for a morning of good food and casual conversations.”

“Both the Washington County Educational Support Personnel (WCESP) and WCTA hope this is the first of many opportunities for us to



KCTA President Terri Mullikin, left, and Cecil County member Ted Gorzkowski, right, flank Delegate Michael Smigiel (R-36). Delegates Smigiel and Richard Sossi, (R-36) joined U.S. Representative Frank Kratovil (D-1st) at a legislative breakfast event for members from Kent, Queen Anne’s and Cecil counties.

share our views and better understand the positions of our elected officials," said WCESP President Janice Tucker.

On the Upper Eastern Shore, topics were the much the same as members met with Delegates Michael Smigiel (R-36) and Richard Sossi (R-36), and U.S. Representative Frank Kratovil (D-1st). "These events are critical because we can voice our concerns directly to our elected officials," said Kent County Teachers Association (KCTA) President Terry Mullikin. "Both Delegates Smigiel and Sossi said it was important to hear real-life examples of inequities in the current labor negotiations law, but they both declined to take a position at the time."

See your Local Association members in LocalLine!

- Big breakthrough with your board of education?
- Exciting success story?
- Rough negotiations?

LocalLine is the two-page feature in *ActionLine* dedicated to Local Association news and events. If you have an interesting story that features your Association or your colleagues, contact your Local Association office, your school representative or Casey Newton, 443/433-3631; cnewton@mseanea.org.

datebook

DECEMBER 2009

- 14 MSEA West Coordinated Bargaining Council (CBC)
- 19 Hanukkah Ends
- 24 Christmas Eve
- 24-1 MSEA offices closed for holidays
- 25 Christmas Day
- 26 Kwanzaa Begins
- 31 New Year's Eve

JANUARY 2010

- 1 New Year's Day
Kwanzaa Ends
Office closed
- 4 MSEA office reopens
- 12 MSEA East CBC
- 12-13 MSEA Board of Directors Meeting
- 13 MSEA General Assembly Open House
- 14 MSEA Urban CBC
- 16 MSEA's MLK, Jr. Breakfast and Minority Achievement Awards
Martin's Crosswinds, Greenbelt
- 18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Office closed
- 25 MSEA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 28 MSEA Joint Governance Staff Meeting
- 29-30 Organizational Leadership Skills (OAS) Cambridge

FEBRUARY 2010

- 1 MSEA Retired Advisory Council Meeting
MSEA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 6 I Can Do It! Training
MSEA Headquarters, Annapolis
- 8 MSEA West CBC
MSEA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 9 MSEA East CBC
- 11 MSEA Urban CBC
- 12-13 NEA Board of Directors Meeting
- 15 Presidents' Day

Turn your life into ActionLine's "MyLife"

Here's what we need!

- Your name
- Your school or worksite
- Your grade/subject, work assignment or job title
- A brief bio of approximately 150-200 words
- Headshot
- How long have you been an Association member?
- How long an education employee teacher?
- 6-8 photos with captions!

Educators have such full and varied lives, but too often are seen as one-dimensional because of the visibility and enormous responsibility of their jobs.

We know that each life is filled with more of the things that make it exciting, fun and rewarding. *ActionLine's* "MyLife" features photos and captions provided by a member to share the richness and diversity of our member's lives. We'd like brief written comments about your life

and 6-8 photos with captions. *ActionLine* editors can edit the captions and crop photos if you wish. At least one photo should include activities in your school or worksite with students or colleagues. *Tip: Be sure your school has a photo release form on file for each student in any photo.*

For more information . . .

Contact Casey Newton, 443/433-3631, cnewton@mseanea.org, or send your story and photos to cnewton@mseanea.org, and you could be featured in an upcoming issue of *ActionLine*!



NEA's HIN provides roadmap for quality indoor air quality



Poor ventilation. Chemicals. Mold. Pesticides. Radon. Lead. Asbestos. The list is long and a little scary. In the U.S. one third of school buildings are in need of extensive repair or replacement. Research reports suggest that students attending schools in poor condition score 11 percent lower on standardized tests than students who attend schools in good condition. In Maryland, Governor O'Malley and the General Assembly have made historic investments in school construction and renovation, but problems persist.

The problems

Age of buildings Older buildings are more apt to have outdated ventilation systems and older roofs.

Lack of money for renovation and maintenance Failure to regularly maintain buildings invariably causes problems.

Overcrowding A typical school has four times as many occupants per square foot as an office building, with ventilation systems designed for a smaller population.

Organizing for healthier schools

According to a 1995 study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), nearly half the nation's schools have poor indoor air quality (IAQ). Since then, the EPA has created the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program, a comprehensive resource to help identify, correct, and prevent indoor air quality problems. Jennie Young, a senior program coordinator for NEA's Health Information Network (HIN), considers it the model for Local Associations organizing around IAQ issues.



"One way Local Associations can make schools healthier and safer is to create indoor air quality or school safety committees to organize members at the local level to address IAQ concerns school-by-school," Young said. "Without school-level activism, poor IAQ won't get the visibility it needs to be fixed."

Next month, HIN debuts a new online IAQ course* through the NEA Academy to help Local Associations organize. "What's Your IEQ? A Roadmap to School Indoor Environmental Quality" is a 4.5-hour interactive course for school staff about how to identify, prevent and resolve IAQ issues. It covers the basics of IAQ, including the factors that affect IAQ and the effect of poor IAQ on performance and health; common pollutant sources; and how Local Associations can organize around IAQ and advocate for an effective management plan in their school or district.



"We've gathered expert presenters on green schools, performance, asthma and IAQ," Young said. "Plus members and UniServ staff share how they've successfully created safety and IAQ committees and included IAQ language in local contracts. Organizing members, who are as affected by poor IAQ as much as students, is a very effective way to get local districts moving on this issue."

Organizing for IAQ

Steven Brooks, president of the Calvert Association of Educational Support Staff (CAESS) and a member of the NEA and MSEA boards of directors, recruited a five-member team of CAESS building supervisors. They partnered with a team from the county's school district to attend one of the EPA's annual conferences* focused exclusively on IAQ issues in schools.

With a CAESS safety committee in place and a solid relationship with his school board, Brooks said that getting the response they need when IAQ issues come up is no problem. "If a student or teacher reacts to an IAQ problem in a classroom or school building, the superintendent wants the air tested as much as we do. Asthma is a serious problem and we're all here to help stop it," Brooks said. "None of us hesitate when it comes to children or teachers and their health."

**What's Your IEQ?" and "Managing Asthma," a short course on helping students control asthma in school, are both offered for credit. Members should check with their local school boards to determine eligibility.*



There's still time to register for *Learn How to Create Healthy, High Performance Schools*, the EPA's IAQ Tools for Schools 2010 symposium on January 14-16. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/symposium.html, or contact Jennie Young, jyoung@nea.org.

One teacher finds the connection between teaching and acting

For Guy Wellman, teaching, like acting, is all about transformation. Wellman, a special education math teacher at North East MS in Cecil County, moonlights as an actor, and the transformation he looks for when taking on a role is one he sees mirrored every day in the classroom.

“As a math teacher, I’m focused on my students memorizing certain facts and drills. Making it fun and interesting is the challenge. The joy is seeing what they’ve learned come to life and watching them expand upon it,” Wellman said. “When I’m acting, it’s not until I’ve learned my lines and studied the character that I can expand on what I’ve learned and bring that character to life for the audience.”

In both cases, Wellman says, the transformation is always life changing and affirmative. “For my students and me in the classroom, every ‘aha’ moment changes us. And in acting, stretching to find the character within me always changes my perspective.”

Wellman’s most recent acting gig has taken him to the far reaches of the universe in the movie *Browncoats: Redemption*, a sequel to the sci-fi TV show *Firefly*, which, though short-lived, has a strong and loyal fan base. Those fans clamored for, and got, a feature-length film to shore up loose ends after the series was cancelled. That film, *Serenity*, directed by *Firefly* creator Joss Whedon (who also created the TV shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*) stoked the *Firefly* fans even more. The “fan film” *Browncoats: Redemption*, picks up where *Serenity* left off.

A fan film is a movie created entirely through the actions of fans, in this case, fans of *Firefly* and *Serenity* who simply wanted the show



Guy Wellman, second from right, with fellow actors on-site at Frontier Town in Ocean City for the filming of *Browncoats: Redemption*.

to go on. For *Browncoats*, the creative and production teams consist of volunteer artists, actors and fans who found the locations, materials and equipment needed to produce the feature-length, not-for-profit film, now scheduled for international distribution on Blu-Ray Disc next year. All proceeds will go to charity.

With blessings from Whedon, dedicated fans started production in April 2009. Wellman, who heard about the casting call from his *Firefly*-fan wife, was cast as Dr. Cameron Alan, a medic on the spaceship *Redemption*. The plot is pure sci-fi with action taking place entirely in Maryland, including a suburban Glen Burnie warehouse, an Ellicott City coffee shop and Frontier Town in Ocean City.

Wellman drew on his personal relationships and life experiences to help transform himself into his character. “The director knew I was a teacher and helped me find ways to use my experiences at school to build on what we knew about Dr. Alan through the script and story,” Wellman said.

“In one scene he suggested I draw on times I’ve been really frustrated that students aren’t getting what I’m trying so hard to teach them. Instead of getting upset, we teachers step back, reflect and find a new direction,” Wellman added. “That concept works for me in the classroom and it worked

for me on set as I tried to make Dr. Alan real for the audience.”

There was a lot of trial and error during shooting for everyone involved, but Wellman found a way to use what he’s learned in the classroom on the film set. “One of the things with teaching math is finding what motivates students to want to learn the material. As an actor, finding the character’s motivation is essential. I used my classroom experience in discovering what motivates my students to look within myself to find what I could use to make Dr. Alan believable.”



A trailer for the film debuted last month at *Dragon*Con*, a fantasy/sci-fi convention. Look for the Blu-ray Disc of *Browncoats: Redemption Labor Day 2010*. All proceeds go to charities, including Equality Now, Kids Need to Read, the Dyslexia Foundation and the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation.

The Race to the Top, viewed from the top



A strong union provides security to its members, imposes rigor on management's decision-making process and increases the fairness in personnel practices. These benefits contribute to a high-performing school system.

The accolades keep coming. It started with number one rankings from *Education Week* for our public education system and the College Board for AP test performance. Last month we learned that Maryland leads the nation in improvement on the 4th and 8th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math tests.

When evaluating students, employees, or schools, we believe in multiple measures. These key measures lead to the same conclusion: Maryland sits at the top.

Now the U.S. Department of Education is offering billions of dollars to states "that have raised student performance in the past and have the capacity to accelerate achievement gains with innovative reforms" (see sidebar). Given our status, Maryland should be a frontrunner in this "Race to the Top." But we must be careful not to radically change our education system for the sole purpose of chasing additional federal dollars.

In a recent report, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other groups questioned whether Maryland truly is on top. They gave Maryland an "F" for removing ineffective teachers and placed much of the blame on unions. North Dakota and Mississippi lead the nation on this scale. Does anyone envy the schools in these states?

Proposals have since emerged that would weaken tenure protections, approve non-union charter schools, expand alternate routes to teaching and even allow management to unilaterally nullify existing contract provisions.

The next time you hear that unions are to blame for underperforming schools, ask them why states with strong unions outperform those states without strong unions. In non-union states, management has authority to do anything they want. But overall, the schools in these states continue to perform poorly.

In fact, a strong union provides security to its members, imposes rigor on management's decision-making process and increases the fairness in personnel practices. These benefits contribute to a high-performing school system.

Although Maryland is indeed at the top, too many of our schools and students continue to struggle. MSEA, our local affiliates and our members have a moral and ethical obligation to seek improvements in public schools serving disproportionately large populations of disadvantaged learners. Yet if a school system believes that making changes in contract protections, staffing processes, or wages, hours or working conditions will drive improvement in student performance, let them collaboratively engage our local leaders to enact acceptable changes. I trust our local leaders to make the right decisions.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S RACE TO THE TOP A \$4 billion carrot for education reform

The U.S. Department of Education has more than \$4 billion in federal money to reward states that have raised student performance and have the capacity to accelerate gains with "innovative reforms."

How Race to the Top works
Proposals are ranked on a 500-point scale based on a state demonstrating student progress, common standards and high-quality assessments, teacher and principal effectiveness, union collaboration, a comprehensive plan for turning around the lowest-performing schools, and other criteria. The final determination will be made by Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

How much could Maryland gain?
Based on the guidelines, if selected, Maryland's public schools could be awarded \$140-250 million.

How does the Association feel about this program?
The Department of Education adopted some of NEA's recommendations in crafting the final rules. Yet thorny issues remain, such as tying individual teacher evaluation and pay to student performance on tests.

Where can I get more information?
Visit www.ed.gov/programs/racetotheTOP/index.html for complete program rules, and www.nea.org/home/36882.htm for NEA's position.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Write David: MSEA, 140 Main St, Annapolis, MD 21401 • dhelfman@mseanea.org

General Assembly 2010: Funding is the 800 lb. gorilla in the room

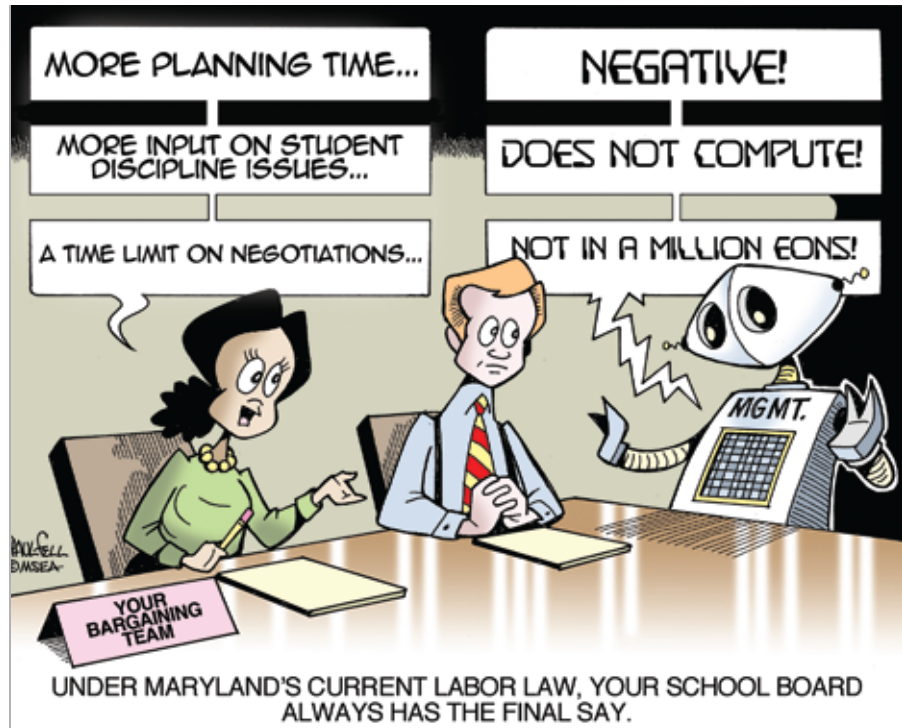
State budgets have been battered across the nation, and Maryland's is no exception. State employees have lost five paydays to furloughs in fiscal year 2009, with more of the same already scheduled for 2010 and 2011. Every county has initiated hiring freezes, and have, or are considering, furlough days for their employees.

Thanks in part to MSEA advocacy, the commitment of Governor O'Malley and legislative leaders, and a much-needed lifeline from the federal stimulus package, the state's education budget has largely been protected up to now. But with so many shouldering the budget burden, it too may be threatened. Last month, the Board of Public Works announced expected mid-year cuts totaling \$360 million, once again sparing education. But they won't be much more than a drop in the bucket of the widening deficit of \$2.5 billion anticipated for fiscal year 2011.

"Our state economy is still in distress, and our representatives in the 2010 General Assembly will once again be focused on balancing the budget," said Diana Saquella, MSEA chief lobbyist. "Governor O'Malley has protected education funding, and our students' achievement is testimony to his commitment, but this year our challenge will be to push back even harder to those who say it's our turn."

The economic downturn has also had a significant impact on the value of the state pension fund assets. It comes as no surprise that as the return on investments has plummeted, the state's annual required contribution to the pension fund has increased.

For fiscal year 2010, the state is expected to contribute approximately \$833 million for the teachers' systems



We're taking action to fix Maryland's unfair labor law for education employees! MSEA leaders and Local Association presidents have already met with Senate President Mike Miller and House Speaker Mike Busch to brief them on failures of the current law.

Learn more about the labor negotiations bill and why it's so important to education employees:

www.marylandeducators.org/laborbill

alone. The governor could maintain the state's education funding levels and use the federal stimulus money to pay for the pension costs, but the state would face the same significant problem in 2012 when the stimulus money runs out. The looming threat is that in the near future, pension funding could be shifted to the counties, a scenario MSEA has long advocated against and will continue to fight, while working with legislators on constructive, long-term solutions.

With such dire funding concerns at the top of everyone's minds, MSEA

will again be vigorously opposing the B.O.A.S.T. bill—the perennial tuition tax credit legislation that has so far failed to pass the General Assembly. The proposed program is based on a highly criticized Arizona model that primarily benefited affluent students already attending private schools, and well-paid program executives. In Pennsylvania, a B.O.A.S.T.-like program eats up \$80 million of the state's budget.

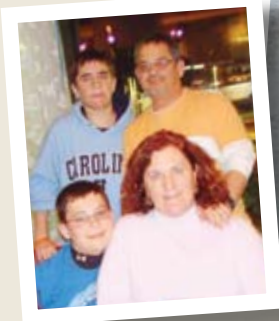
Opening day of the 2010 General Assembly begins January 13.

Visit www.marylandeducators.org often for news and updates.

Meet *Leon Brand*



My wife and I at home.



We're having dinner at a restaurant in Boston.



Our school winners of 2009 James Ryder Randall ES STEM Fair.



My sons in blue and white getting ready to snowboard.

Leon Brand
Fifth grade teacher
James Ryder Randall Elementary School
Prince George's County

I was born in Groote Schuur Hospital in beautiful Cape Town, South Africa, at the foot of Table Mountain. After teaching for close to 20 years in South Africa, my beautiful wife Vanessa and I came to America as cultural exchange teachers in 2004. Since we've arrived, Vanessa, our two sons and I have traveled from Key West to Boston. We've walked across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, bathed in the cold Pacific in Los Angeles, and snowboarded in the Poconos and Appalachians.

We are very active in our church. My wife and I are currently coordinating an Extreme Home Makeover project our church is conducting in our community.

I love working with students and watching them grow and develop. It is an awesome feeling to know that one has had a positive influence on students' lives.

Overall it has been an interesting journey for us, but there is always that nagging longing for family at home.



Our family visited South Africa this summer. These are my sons Anleo and Petri on Bloubergstrand Beach with Table Mountain in the background.



In California, we took a boat trip under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

When you need help or have a suggestion, contact your Association Representative at school or:

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