

Keep the Promise: 2011 Legislative Guide

From protecting our pensions, to fighting budget cuts, to defending our profession from imposed, one-size-fits-all evaluation systems, it is clear that 2011 will be a year of challenges.

However, it also will be a year of opportunity. It is an opportunity to draw the direct lines that we know exist between pensions, school funding, and evaluation systems and our ability to provide great public schools for every child.

It also will provide us with an opportunity to speak from the heart about our members' promises to create the best public schools in the country while holding elected officials accountable for keeping their promises to our members, students, parents, and schools.

The Keep the Promise Campaign is a grassroots advocacy effort focusing on school funding, our pensions, and educator evaluations. To be successful, this effort must emphasize that we've kept our promise; now elected officials must keep theirs. The continued success of our schools, our children, and our association is at stake.

School Funding

Since state lawmakers passed the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act (also known as the Thornton Plan) in 2002, Maryland has provided historic levels of aid to its public schools—allowing all 24 of its school systems to raise achievement levels for all groups of students and vaulting the state's education system to the #1 spot nationwide for three years in a row. **We've kept our promise to effectively use the additional resources provided by Thornton to make our schools #1 and help our students achieve.**

Despite this great progress, the state's ongoing economic and budget difficulties have made lawmakers more reluctant to provide the same level of support for public schools. So far, MSEA and its 71,000 member-educators continue to win the day with our vocal argument that reducing state and local spending on education will impede our efforts to create great public schools for every child in Maryland. **We must continue to urge legislators to keep their promise of providing our children and schools with the resources they need to thrive.**

MSEA believes that adequate levels of school funding are imperative for providing a great public school for every child.

The Promise Campaign		
<i>Educators have kept our promise to...</i>		<i>Leaders in Annapolis must keep their promise to...</i>
Effectively use available resources to make Maryland schools #1.	Funding	Provide our children and schools with the resources they need to thrive.
More than double our pension contributions to strengthen the retirement system.	Pensions	Maintain a sustainable pension system that provides educators with a secure retirement.
Continue to support high standards and strong, transparent evaluation systems.	Evaluations	Ensure that local communities and educators can determine how to support and achieve high standards in their schools.
By Keeping the Promise, We Can Keep Maryland Schools #1!		

Pensions

In 2006, MSEA members worked hard to improve their pension benefits, which at the time were the worst in the nation. MSEA successfully lobbied for an enhancement, bringing Maryland's pension system to just below the national average. Educators more than doubled their contribution rate to help fund this enhancement. **We've kept our promise to strengthen the retirement system.**

But now, your hard-earned pensions are at risk. Not only did the 2008-09 market crash hammer pension investments, but the state hasn't been making its full contribution since 2001, even though employees have continued and increased theirs. The state hasn't been keeping its promise; and now, some officials are attempting to cut benefits, increase your contribution, or make it harder for you to receive your benefit. Legislators also are considering a shift of pension costs to local school boards, which would have a devastating impact on county budgets and school funding. **We urge elected officials to keep their promise of a secure retirement for educators.**

MSEA is committed to securing the benefits you've earned for retirement, blocking a shift of costs from the state to local boards of education, and encouraging a long-term funding strategy that fully funds your benefit.

Educator Evaluations

In May, the Education Reform Act of 2010 (ERA) became law. In addition to providing early mentoring for teachers who may be at risk of failing to achieve tenure, the law mandated that student growth would be a "significant component" and "one of multiple measures" in a teacher's evaluation. The law also mandated that local evaluation systems must be mutually determined and agreed upon at the local level. Since the ERA became law, locals have been hard at work revising and fine-tuning their evaluation systems to reflect its provisions. **We've kept our promise to support high standards, best practices, and strong, transparent evaluation systems incorporating student growth.**

On August 24, Maryland, along with nine other states and the District of Columbia, was announced as a winner of round two of Race to the Top (RTTT). Even though the law preserves local authority over determining specific evaluation criteria, the State Board of Education has made attempts to dictate to all counties specific evaluation criteria. **We urge policymakers to keep their promise, enshrined in the ERA, to ensure that local communities and educators can determine how to support and achieve high standards in their schools.**

MSEA believes that educator evaluation systems must be educator-informed, research-based, and collaboratively developed on the local level. Evaluation systems should be fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, reliable, and designed to improve instruction by focusing on teaching and learning.



For more information and continuing updates on the Keep the Promise campaign, visit www.marylandeducators.org/promise.