

actionLine

MARYLAND STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • NEA

VOLUME 9 ISSUE 5

Stopping the Dropouts



For students at risk of dropping out, the key is early intervention

Martin Luther King, Jr. MS staff and students embrace PBIS.



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8 For students at risk of dropping out, middle school intervention is key

Data, programs and dedicated educators make the difference for students at risk of dropping out. Learn how middle school programs such as PBIS and AVID and individual school-based endeavors are connecting students and parents to their schools and communities.



14 Members, Locals press lawmakers to support education issues

Whether trekking to Annapolis for face time with legislators, hitting the local airwaves with public appeals, or gathering at budget meetings, MSTA members and Locals are making their presence and their priorities known as county budgets feel the heat of the economic downturn.



Early-career teachers from Harford County visited Annapolis for the Local's annual Lobby Night.

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Dropout prevention is *everyone's* business



The dropout issue is just as relevant for educators and parents of children in mostly high-performing schools.

Maryland's public schools recently received another well-deserved honor—a second #1 ranking, this time in AP test scores and participation. So it might be easy for our state's educators, parents and policymakers to pat ourselves on the back and rest on our laurels.

Yet, beneath this stellar news lie some troubling facts. Maryland's low-income, African American and Hispanic students still suffer disproportionately from outdated facilities, inadequate resources, stubborn achievement gaps and other serious disadvantages.

This month we examine the dropout challenge, its impact, how it's measured, and most importantly, how it can be avoided. We cite many promising programs and strategies mentioned in a dropout prevention survey of MSTA members across the state conducted by our Human and Civil Rights Committee. Some of these—AVID, PBIS, mentoring, after-school tutoring, early and targeted interventions, alternative teaching strategies, and parent, family and community support—are being implemented in some middle schools to reach at-risk students in time.

Educators and policymakers alike can also benefit from NEA's 12-point plan (see page 11) for tackling this nationwide crisis. NEA's recommendations cover smaller learning communities and class sizes, increased educator training and resources, mandated school attendance up to age 21, expanded career and graduation options, and increased federal funding.

But we don't have to wait for our elected and school officials to act. We can involve families in creative new ways at school and at home so that everyone can support their child's education. We can use up-to-the-minute data on a variety of measures to track each student's progress, diagnose early warning signs, and address their specific needs.

Tackling the dropout crisis is *everyone's* business. It's a big issue for those striving to lift students who have been neglected by their school system, community and policymakers. But it's just as relevant for educators and parents of children in mostly high-performing schools as well as elected officials and the general public.

Think about it: Maryland has one of the largest and fastest-growing minority student populations. Many will fail to finish high school or become productive citizens or be prepared to enter the global workforce. The result is a continuation of low expectations, low-paying jobs and deepening estrangement from their communities.

We can fix this problem. We know who the at-risk students are, which schools are "dropout factories," and how to reach these children before it's too late. Yes, it's a matter of resources, but just as importantly, it's a matter of caring and will.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Write Clara:

MSTA, 140 Main Street,
Annapolis, MD 21401
cfloyd@mstanea.org



March is Read Across Maryland Month!

It wasn't just a boogeying Cat in a Hat entertaining Annapolis schoolchildren at MSTA's annual Green Eggs and Ham breakfast on March 2. Governor Martin O'Malley and President Clara Floyd joined the fun, too! The Governor read his personal Seuss favorites to the wowed special guests as he officially kicked off "Read Across Maryland Month," a new statewide literacy initiative.

All month long, the Governor, First Lady Katie O'Malley, Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown and cabinet members are hopping across the state with MSTA and Local leaders to read, deliver books, and share literacy resources with parents.

Visit *MSTA Online*, www.mstanea.org, for more information and events. For classroom resources and more, visit NEA's Read Across America, www.nea.org/readacross.

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

What makes you happy about your school?



NINA MULLENAX
Inclusion Helper
William S. James ES
Member for 4 years
Harford County

My school

The staff makes me happy. The teachers are so accepting and willing to help me any time. I work with special needs students and every day is a new challenge. I love working in my school!



PAUL MOCK
Special Education Teacher
New Market MS
Member for 3 years
Frederick County

Students

Those shiny faces that I see every day, and understanding that I am helping those students improve socially and academically. That's what makes it work for me.



ANGELE REID
Math Teacher
Benjamin Stoddert MS
Member for 7 years
Prince George's County

Support

We have very good support from the administration. If I need something, they are right there for me. Plus, they just keep things in check for me so I can focus on what I need to do in the classroom.



NINA MARTIN
Second grade teacher
Atholton ES
Member for 9 years
Howard County

My team

What makes me happy? Working with my team, my colleagues, our parents and, of course, our students.



IVELISSE YORDAN-TORRES
Teacher
Rock Creek Forest ES
Member for 14 years
Montgomery County

Diversity

We have students coming from around the world—Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean. I love the integration of so many cultures in one place. It's beautiful to see our students relate to one another. It really is.

StartingLine

NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW



TELL Maryland!

Certificated personnel: Have you completed the TELL Maryland survey? By now you should have received your confidential code and directions on how to complete the anonymous 30-minute online survey, co-sponsored by the Governor, MSTA and partnering education organizations.

TELL Maryland (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) is an unprecedented opportunity to share input on the teaching and learning conditions that influence student success and teacher retention.

Policymakers and education stakeholders will use the information to provide you, your school, your district, and the state with information to guide school improvement conversations and planning in areas such as facilities, resources, student behavior and achievement, community engagement, school leadership, professional development, and teacher support and mentoring.

REMEMBER! *Your anonymity is guaranteed! Deadline to participate is March 18. Don't have a code? Contact your building representative or school principal.*

Marian Wright Edelman speaks at MLK Awards

There was much to celebrate in January, including MSTA's 24th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast & Minority Recognition Awards, where more than 300 guests applauded member Stephanie Johnson, community activist McKinley Hayes and guest speaker Dr. Marian Wright Edelman.

“Happy is he who gets to know the reasons for things.”



VIRGIL,
GEORGICS, BOOK II (70 BC - 19 BC)

Quote

Education Award winner Johnson is a school psychologist in Queen Anne's County. She was honored for her ability to empower students in planning and communication, and as director of the county's Infants & Toddlers Program, where she has more than quadrupled the number of families using county services.



Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, spoke at MSTA's MLK, Jr. Breakfast & Minority Recognition Awards.

McKinley Hayes, honored for his contributions to community service, founded MSTA's Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration as chair of the Association's Minority Affairs Committee in 1985. His efforts as a 35-year veteran Prince George's County teacher and community activist have helped motivate students by providing career and college guidance and building strong school-community partnerships.

MSTA's special guest, Children's Defense Fund founder Dr. Marian Wright Edelman, has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowship, and the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Prize. "Although Dr. King has been gone 40 years, he is with me every day," Edelman said in her address to MSTA members. "We have made much, but far from enough, progress in overcoming the tenacious national demons of racism, poverty, materialism and militarism he repeatedly warned could destroy America and all of God's creation."



2009 awardees McKinley Hayes, Community Service, and Stephanie Johnson, Education.



ACCESS Savings: Just when you need it most

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Sporting Goods.com, 10% off books and movies at alibris.com, 10% off Einstein bagels, 20% off Bass shoes, 25% off posters and prints (plus free shipping) at Art Gazebo, and 15% off Sherwin Williams, plus discounted movie tickets, savings on automotive services, and hundreds more discounts especially for MSTA members.

ACCESS reports that many popular merchants are looking for ways to drive traffic to their businesses in a cost-effective way. They've found that ACCESS is a perfect venue to offer a discount and support their local community, so check the website often for new merchants and more deals!

Never logged on to ACCESS? It's easy! Visit *MSTA OnLine*, www.mstanea.org, look for the ACCESS logo on the homepage. Click and enter your MSTA membership number to log in. **Tip:** Your membership number is located on the mailing label of this issue of *ActionLine* and on your MSTA membership card.

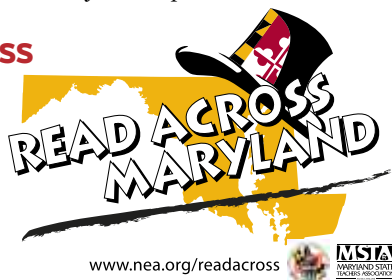
MONEY-SAVERS FROM NEA MEMBER BENEFITS

Your NEA membership offers lots of ways to save this spring! Visit NEA Member Benefits and take advantage of personal and professional cost savings on everything from faltering New Year's resolutions (think Jenny Craig), magazines (discounts up to 85%), personalized instructional tools (Rapid Resources®), ID theft protection (Identity Fraud, Inc.) and many other members-only offers.

Feeling the effects of the sluggish economy? See page 18 of this issue and learn how improving your financial literacy can help.

March is Read Across Maryland Month!

Visit www.nea.org for Read Across America resources, reading lists, downloads and more! See page 4 for details about Read Across Maryland.



by the numbers

Country rates top priorities for 2009
Percent rating each a "top priority"

Economy 85 • *Jobs 82*
TERRORISM 76 • **Social Security 63** • *Education 61*
ENERGY 60 • **Medicare 60**
HEALTHCARE 59 • *Deficit Reduction 53* • **Health Insurance 52** • **HELPING THE POOR 50** • *Crime 46* • **Moral decline 45** • **MILITARY 44** • *Tax cuts 43* • **Environment 41** • *Immigration 41* • **TRADE POLICY 31** • **Global warming 30**

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press; January, 2009

on the web www.mstanea.org

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www.edweek.org

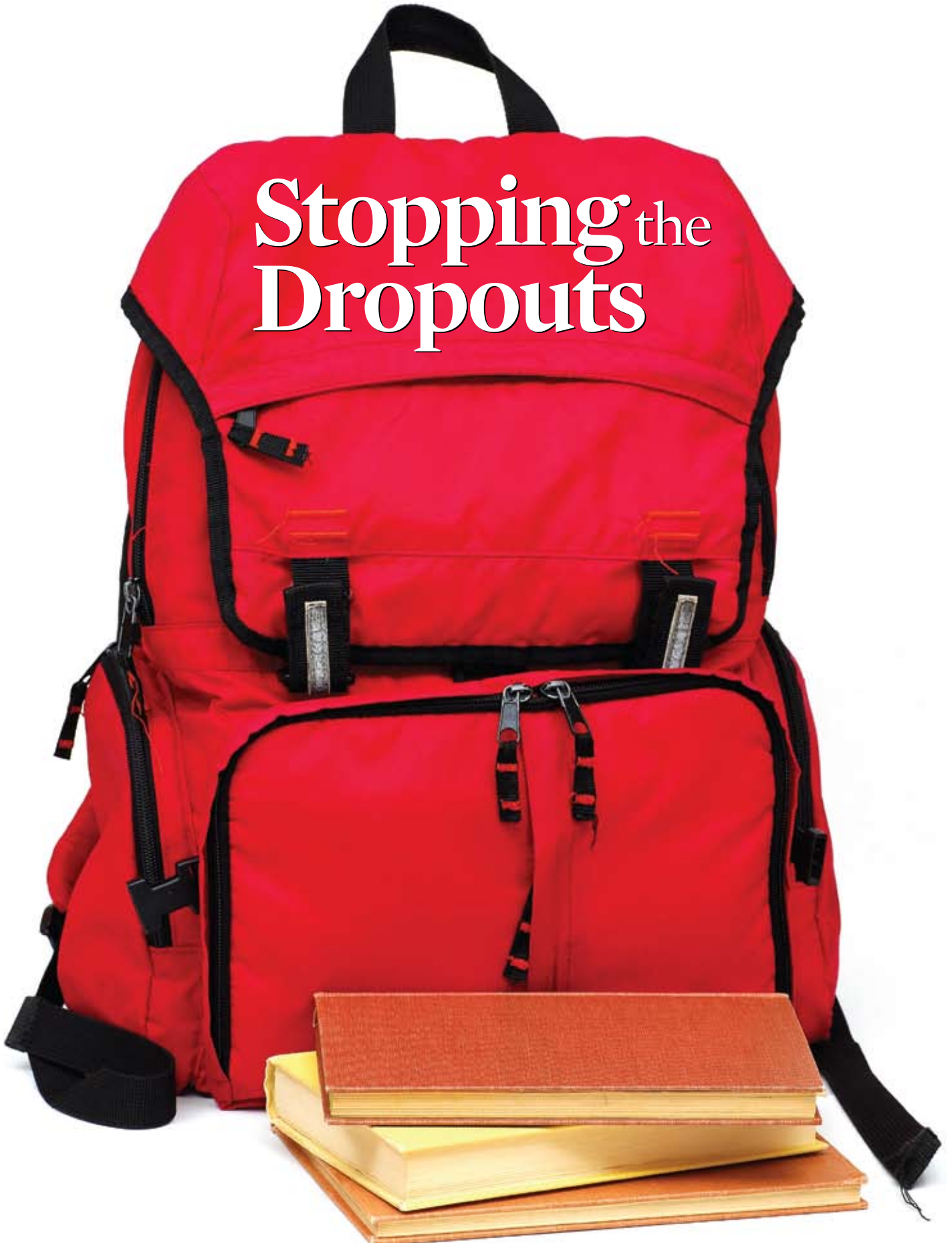
Edutopia

Filmmaker George Lucas's foundation publishes media to document and disseminate the most innovative practices in K-12 education. Media includes: *Edutopia.org*, the award-winning *Edutopia* magazine, and *Edutopia* video.
www.edutopia.org

Rethinking Schools

Since 1989, the non-profit Rethinking Schools has challenged educators and education advocates to not only improve education in their own classrooms and schools, but to help shape reform throughout the public school system in the United States. Founded by educators.
www.rethinkingschools.org

Stopping^{the} Dropouts





*For students at risk of dropping out,
middle school intervention is key*

It's a story told too many times in urban communities across the country: African American and Latino girls and boys, and students from low-income families dropping out of school at a rate far exceeding their white suburban peers. The implications are far-reaching, touching on every aspect of their futures.

Statistically, their fate is virtually sealed. They will earn less (dropouts can expect to earn \$1.6 million less than a high school graduate during their lifetimes), go to jail more frequently and vote less than students who graduate. They will also get sick more often, and are more likely to die prematurely from disease, cancer, injury and infection. And if the cost to the individual isn't depressing enough, there's the cost to society.

Pictured above: Staff and students at Martin Luther King, Jr. MS in Montgomery County, where PBIS, and an unshakable mission, have helped reduce suspensions and improve student achievement.



According to a 2007 Brookings Institution study, if the U.S. could cut in half the number of high school dropouts in a single group of 20-year olds (about 700,000 individuals), the country would gain, and accrue for each successive group, \$45 billion through extra tax revenue and reduced public health, crime and justice, and welfare costs. During difficult economic times, that's a bracing figure.

Nationally, NEA sounded the alarm in 2006 with a comprehensive 12-point plan (see page 11) including aggressive prevention strategies for policymakers, schools and communities. "Our economic future will only worsen if we do not take action now," said Linda Bacon, NEA's Manager for Human and Civil Rights. "Our 12 action steps can be used in any state and any local to address policies and programs that will provide the resources students and schools need for success."

Who drops out? Why?

High school dropouts in Maryland mirror those of the U.S. in general: Low-income and minority students in mostly urban school districts. These students are habitually truant, are mostly male, have experienced academic failure, and have little connection to their school community.

Some of the most frequently cited graduation rate data come from *Education Week* and the U.S. Department of Education studies. These data show that roughly 70-75% of all students graduate in four years, but the percentages for minority students hover around 60%.

Accurate and consistent information on student dropouts is notoriously difficult to cobble together because of different methods of calculation (the National Center for Education Statistics reports nine graduation rates that have been calculated by states, federal agencies and researchers). Recent requirements from the U.S. Department of Education will help. By 2011-2012, all states must use a simple calculation of the number of students who graduate with a regular four-year diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school as freshmen.

Above: Tara Seligman, 7th grade World Studies teacher, with students at Martin Luther King, Jr. MS in Montgomery County.

"We see that many students are at risk of dropping out, starting with truancy and academic failure in the early grades, leading to more truancy, more academic failure and discipline problems in middle school."

Mavis Ellis, chair, MSTA's Human and Civil Rights Committee

Maryland for one, is well on its way to standardizing its graduation rate data by using a new Individual Student Identifier, to be phased in over the next few years. The number is especially important for following students who move frequently, are homeless, or who leave and return to school. In addition, each school system in the state is required by law to develop a comprehensive master plan that must include goals, objectives, and strategies regarding the performance of students failing to meet and/or make progress toward meeting the state's performance standards.

According to MSDE, African American boys drop out 80% more frequently than their white peers; Latino boys are not far behind at 70%. Next in line are Latino and African American girls. Asian American boys and girls are the least likely to drop out.

This alarming disparity is the reason MSTA's Human and Civil Rights (HCR) Committee took up dropout prevention and a two-year initiative, *School Connectedness = Dropout Prevention*, to focus on increasing member awareness and involvement. Mavis Ellis, HCR chair and a pupil personnel worker in Montgomery County, said that by using a presentation to the delegates at the October 2008 MSTA Representative Assembly and a member survey as tools, "Our message





Staff spirit is on display every Friday at Montgomery County's MLK King, Jr. MS when staff wear their "Tradition of Excellence" tee shirts. Pictured left to right: Phillip Jackson, Jack Wooden, Debbie Good with Student Government Association members Puja Patel, Joanna Aguilar and Reggie Wilson.

Dropouts can be prevented through focused action

NEA and state affiliates have an important role to play in dropout prevention. NEA's comprehensive 12-Point Action Plan for Reducing the School Dropout Rate includes the most promising actions supported by experience and data.

In its dropout prevention and intervention plan, NEA advances strategies from preschool through age 21:

- 1 Intervene prior to kindergarten
- 2 Involve families in students' learning
- 3 Provide students with individual attention
- 4 Monitor students to track their academic progress
- 5 Involve the community in dropout prevention
- 6 Provide educators with the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out
- 7 Implement career and workforce readiness programs in schools
- 8 Provide graduation options for students
- 9 Raise the compulsory school attendance age
- 10 Open graduation centers for students who are 19-21 years of age
- 11 Gather and report accurate dropout rates
- 12 Increase federal funding to support dropout prevention

Visit www.nea.org, to learn more about NEA's advocacy and action plan. Click on the *Preventing Future High School Dropouts* link under Issues and Actions.

is making its way through the membership that dropout prevention is everybody's business."

"We see that many students are at risk of dropping out, starting with truancy and academic failure in the early grades, leading to more truancy, more academic failure and discipline problems in middle school," Ellis added. "They have low expectations for success, and they are dropping out. Everything leads up to that freshman year."

"Dropping out is a process, not an event! When a student drops out it is the end game," agreed Robert Murphy, a dropout prevention specialist at MSDE. "He or she shows many signs before dropping out such as truancy, substance abuse, suspensions, and more. All are signals that a student is struggling with connecting or staying connected to school."

Student surveys strongly point to the emotional connection a student makes with school staff members as anchors. "A teacher, cafeteria worker, coach, principal, or any caring adult—they just want to know someone is paying attention and is concerned about them," Murphy added.

In the HCR Committee member survey, member after member cited programs that fostered connectedness with the school community as a way to improve student retention through high school. Community coordinators/ambassador programs, Latino Parent Night, family reading events and pupil personnel workers are just some of the ways schools are trying to connect with families. For some low income and minority groups where expectations have been lowered and negative school experiences are the norm, creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere in the schoolhouse is the key.

The middle school connection

Creating relationships, and keeping students engaged and in school, is the focus of a number of successful middle school programs that also reach out to parents and community.

"The mission of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School community is a commitment to working together to eliminate the racial predictability of student achievement." That's the full-on, no-holds-barred mission statement of Principal Marc Cohen and MLK, Jr. MS in Montgomery County. Add to that a goal of eliminating the achievement gaps in one year; and you've got a school with a no-nonsense agenda of moving students successfully through high school graduation and beyond.

That kind of confidence is helped by the success of the schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program that has made a huge impact on both students and teachers. The school “walks the walk” of PBIS; the program’s shared core values of respect, responsibility, and integrity are integrated at every turn. At MLK, Jr., everyone—students, educators, parents—is on the same page. Expectations for behavior are clear and rewarded, students hear every day from Cohen and the entire staff that they can achieve at high academic levels, and home visits are making inroads in parent participation in school activities.

Michele Gately, PBIS coordinator, says the program has changed the way the school feels to both students and staff. “You can hear kids saying to each other things like, ‘Be respectful,’ ‘That shows integrity’ and ‘Good job!’ Because student behavior is better, everyone, staff and students, has a more positive attitude about school. The kids can see and feel that.”

PBIS has helped reduce referrals at MLK, Jr. by 41% and suspensions by 90%. That means more class time for students (861 saved instruction hours for students), which means improved learning, which means better test scores. “Once you have the framework down—that we are all functioning well in our environment and we’ve eliminated suspensions and referrals—then we can start talking about why the use of equitable classroom practice is so important.”

*Montgomery County MLK, Jr. MS 7th grade science teacher
Tori English explains the day’s lesson to her students.*



Statistics bear out the enthusiasm of Cohen and Gately about programs and progress at MLK Jr. Since 2005, reading scores for Latino children have improved nearly 22%, ESL student scores have risen 18%, and the number of African American students mastering algebra has nearly doubled.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

More than 3,500 middle and high schools around the country use the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to target low-income and minority students in the “academic middle.” They’re the ones who often slide through middle and high school without reaching their academic potential.

For one period a day (or comparable), the AVID student learns to be a *true* student, mastering note-taking, research, writing and study skills, using tutors when needed, learning about colleges and hearing success stories. As school engagement grows, and social and academic confidence builds, they become leaders and role models for other students.

In Anne Arundel County, the AVID program has evolved to provide a complete safety net around the students it supports, and in the adolescent social mayhem of middle school *that* is very important, especially for the student at risk of falling through the academic cracks. “While that was not the original intent, that is one of the best things to have happened to our students in some time,” said Tim Mennuti, president of the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County.

“I strongly believe that AVID helps students at all levels. Those who might not want to go on to college leave high school with a much better grasp of high school subject matter than those who don’t have AVID,” Mennuti added.

Kings and Queens

“I tell my students, especially my black males: It’s okay to be cool, but it’s okay to be smart, too. You have to think critically when you listen to or see artists and athletes,” said Prince George’s County music teacher Otis Harris. “Look behind the scenes and see where the *real* success lies.”

Harris dispenses such practical life lessons while he supports academic success and engages students in the school community, and the world at large, at weekly meetings of Kings and Queens. Harris has been leading the after-school program for African American students for almost 10 years at Martin Luther King, Jr. MS (same school name as the PBIS school in Montgomery County, but unrelated).



The Kings and Queens Club of Martin Luther King, Jr. MS in Prince George's County collected toys for needy children last year.

For Harris, making sure club members experience a broad vision of the world is part of his mission to prepare them for success in high school and beyond. Study skills, time and financial management, guest speakers (subjects such as college, careers, and teen health), luncheon events, and trips to ski slopes, New York City and the Smithsonian museums are just some of the ways Harris turns students on to a more integrated cultural experience. Former club members visit, too, sharing with students their strategies for high school success.

"I understand about testing skills, but in order for them to make it out in the world, these kids need to know what they're dealing with," Harris said. "There is success out there for them, but they have to work hard to get the confidence and the skills to make it."

There are testaments to the success of Kings and Queens—like the recent graduates of Georgetown and Columbia universities and the number of students and parents who keep in touch with Harris on Facebook and MySpace. "It's a great feeling when former club members come back to thank me for helping to prepare them for high school, college...and life."

Harris said there's another important sign of the program's success and perceived importance by students and parents. Because after-school activity buses have been cancelled, busy parents must pick up their students after the club meeting. Even so, almost all of the 65 Kings and Queens at MLK Jr. still attend club meetings each week.

"Our students deserve and need our focused attention directed to this very serious crisis, which has such a profound effect on their current and future lives as well as our society," said MSTA President Clara Floyd. "How we deal with the dropout crisis is a reflection of our commitment to our most vulnerable students, their schools and their families."



Statewide summit on dropout crisis

Maryland State Department of Education to host *Brighter Futures: Maryland's Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit* June 22

Every 26 seconds, a student drops out of high school in America. That adds up to more than 1.1 million students per year—nearly 10,000 in Maryland alone.

America's Promise Alliance, a national alliance of more than 100 partner organizations representing the business community, nonprofits, communities and policymakers, wants to help reverse the trend by hosting Dropout Prevention Summits in every state and in many cities.

"This is a huge challenge in Maryland and requires acknowledgement from all of us," said Clara Floyd, MSTA president. "One concerned group is simply not enough. Our students need our help, and that means a firm commitment and adequate resources. Getting our students successfully through school to their graduation truly benefits everyone."

In Maryland, the *Brighter Futures: Maryland's Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit*, organized by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), will bring together key stakeholders from across the state in a day-long discussion. The goal? To begin the process of developing a statewide dropout prevention plan with potential legislative agenda and policy implications.

"A high school diploma represents the bare minimum in today's career marketplace, and the Brighter Futures Summit will offer educators the opportunity to share ideas and strategies on how to reduce the number of students who leave school before completing their work," said Dr. Nancy Grasmick, state superintendent of schools.

"We have a responsibility to reduce the dropout rate as well as to make certain that the education students receive in high school is meaningful. The two goals go hand-in-hand," Grasmick added.

Members, Locals press lawmakers to support education issues

Annapolis Lobby Night: Harford County

Members make most of face time with lawmakers

It was already well past 6 p.m. as Harford County members and their legislators—both weary after a long day in school and grueling state budget meetings—gathered in a cavernous meeting room in the House Office Building in Annapolis to discuss the top issues facing educators in this year's General Assembly.

Despite the frosty chill in the air, the two-and-a-half hour bus ride and the 18-hour workday it entailed, the bus was packed with nearly 40 concerned and curious educators. For new and veteran members of the Harford County Education Association (HCEA) and the Harford County Educational Services Council (HCESC), the annual Lobby Night proved to be a perfect time to meet legislators face-to-face, ask specific questions about local issues and hear their views on statewide hot topics.

Veteran members like teacher Greg Lynch find that a trip to Annapolis keeps lawmakers focused on the issues of one of their largest constituencies. "I enjoy meeting my legislators and letting them know that everyday educators like me are interested in their views. I want them to see a face before they make a decision," Lynch said.

Early career teachers James Blackwell, Kristy Lynch and Kristen Nance in the State House before dropping in on a hearing.



Members Ollie May Danage and Greg Lynch discussed pension funding with Senator Barry Glassman.

"I'm also interested in teacher pensions, and the seemingly annual concern that funding them may be pushed off to the county. I want to make sure that doesn't happen," he added.

Paraeducator Mary Lou Gross is the HCESC building representative in her school. She took the bus ride to get a better understanding of how things work in the capital. "I've always been interested in the system," she said, "but never truly understood the process. This is a good time to see it in action. Pressing issues for me this year are funding and our pensions. I have a part-time job to make it on my salary and there's a long way to go until I can get my pension."

Some of HCEA's newest members also signed up to learn more about how legislators think and how they can make a difference in the legislation that affects them in the classroom. "I came because I want to be more involved," said Colleen Dunphy, a trainer for HCEA's SPARKS program for new members. "I think that the more we show our faces, the greater impact we have."

MSTA and Locals sponsor Annapolis Lobby Nights every Monday during the General Assembly. MSTA lobbyists brief

"Our elected officials are really interested in what we have to say. They explain issues from their perspective and make us feel very welcome."

—Greg Lynch, HCEA



Building rep Mary Lou Gross goes through security at the House of Delegates office building before meeting legislators.



After a long day at school, Harford County members traveled over two hours by bus to Annapolis to lobby their legislators.

members on top issues and introduce legislators who answer questions about legislation and provide useful insight into ways members can make a difference.

Local campaigns take funding concerns to the public

Locals in Worcester, St. Mary's, and Allegany are going straight to the public using radio, newspaper and direct mail to alert them about the consequences of cuts to education funding.

In Worcester County

After county commissioners requested budgets trimmed to 3% less than those approved last year, Worcester County teacher and ESP Locals decided to speak up. The Locals

planned three mailers over three months targeted to county households with school-age children as the pared-down budget makes its way to county commissioners.

The messages? Worcester County student test scores are among best in the state; schools and students need adequate county funding and resources to maintain success; and parents must act by speaking out in opposition to the cuts at the county level. The mailers are just one part of a year-long multi-media public relations campaign supported by the Local Associations and MSTA.

In Allegany and Garrett Counties

In Allegany and Garrett counties, the airwaves were buzzing last month with messages from civic leaders and educators about the importance of school funding. "We partnered with local employers and professionals to emphasize that an investment in education is the first step towards sustaining the quality of our future workforce," said Debbie Pappas, president of the Allegany County Teachers Association.

In one message, Garrett County Chamber of Commerce President Charlie Ross said, "Business is serious about education. We can't recruit and retain excellent educators on the cheap. Now, more than ever, economic development starts and grows with quality education."

In St. Mary's County

In St. Mary's County, education has gotten a smaller piece of the county pie for the last several years and now fears are growing of funding cuts. That compelled the Education Association of St. Mary's County (EASMC) and the Collective Employees Association of St. Mary's County (CEASMC) to alert the public to the consequences of the bare bones budget proposed by the county's commissioners. With a new public relations grant and staff support from MSTA, the Locals plan editorials, letters to the editor, press briefings, a website, and cable and radio ads.

"Families are already suffering in this economy and now our students are at risk. The county is sitting on a substantial fund balance," said EASMC President Wanda Twigg. "They call it a 'rainy day' fund for a reason—and it's pouring right now. We simply cannot afford to turn back the clock on the progress we've made."

LocalLine

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MSTA LOCALS

Talbot County Local scores new contract

It's not every day that a contract is settled in one day, especially one that hasn't been opened in six years! But that's the way it works in Talbot County, where the Talbot County Education Association (TCEA) bargaining team and the county school board settled recently in a traditional "down and dirty one-day session," according to TCEA President Tamara Keeler. "Coming off of an unprecedented five-year contract, with a one-year extension, we negotiated a new four-year contract without giving anything up or moving backward," she added.

Negotiating a contract that quickly didn't happen without some serious preparation. An all-member survey last spring set the stage for what members expected in the new contract, and the bargaining committee met several times before an initial two-hour meeting with the board's team to exchange proposals.

When it was time to settle the contract, TCEA's bargaining team members were ready for the day-long marathon. They even successfully pushed for the board to give education support professionals the same raises and salary protections!

Highlights of the four-year contract include: a 3.5% across-the-board raise per year; new volunteer disability insurance, and an increase in the board's share of health care costs from 85% to a maximum of 98% if the County Council doesn't fully fund the salary increases.

"It's never been easy to get our board to change contract language



NEA President Dennis Van Roekel spoke to Howard County Education Association building representatives last month. He encouraged political activism as a tool for improving public education and shared his own experiences as a classroom teacher activist.

and this time around, they were open to our new ideas," Keeler said. "Our team did a great job, especially in this economy. In addition to fair raises, there is a lot of protection for us if the raises can't be funded."

It's official: State Board confirms status of OT/PTs, audiologists and speech-language pathologists

The Maryland State Board of Education voted last month to confirm the repeal of a proposed rule change that would have affected OTs and PTs, as well as audiologists and speech-language pathologists. Deeply concerned, MSTA and members responded swiftly and decisively.

Thanks to that strong member activism, officials received more than 2,000 emails, letters and petition signatures protesting the proposal and responded by withdrawing the changes and incorporating MSTA's recommendations. Now, the change is complete. *All* employees will retain their professional certification and bargaining rights.

"Congratulations member activists!" said President Clara Floyd. "Your efforts let officials know in no uncertain terms that the proposal was wrong."

Members, Locals awarded NEA grants

Congratulations to Harford County members Tiffany Loner-Diemer and Susan Recher! The Magnolia MS science teachers received a \$5,000 grant for an interdisciplinary learning experience using science fiction literature and the internet to collaborate with students around the world.

Kudos also to Montgomery County members and science teachers Autumn Moore and Heather Vorhauer, Ridgeview MS, whose \$5,000 grant will support a partnership with the Maryland Science Center to expose students to science experiences that bring physics, biology, and chemistry to life.

Montgomery and Howard County Locals were each awarded \$5,000 grants from NEA's National Council of Urban Education Associations (NCUEA), a group that represents the Association's urban Locals across the nation.

MCEA has initiated a partnership project to create a K-8 community "innovation" public school within the Montgomery County Public Schools, serving a minority student population highly affected by poverty. The grant will assist with an intensive, year-long planning and development process.

The Howard County Education Association (HCEA) will fund the second year of a new teacher mentoring program, which has already been shown to contribute to members' professional development and to improved student achievement.

Visit the NEA Foundation, www.neafoundation.org, for more information about Student Achievement and Learning & Leadership grants, including tips on grant writing and online applications. The next deadline for applications is June 1.

Election Notice: Retired Delegate to MSTA Convention 2009

If you are a retired member from a Local Affiliate that does not permit retired members to serve as delegates to the MSTA Convention and you wish to serve as an MSTA '09 Convention delegate, you may run for a seat by completing and submitting the form below.

DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT: 5 p.m., March 25, 2009

You may include a statement of no more than 25 words with your form.

Nominating Form: Retired Delegate to the 2009 MSTA Representative Assembly

Name

Address

City

Zip

Home Phone

Work Phone

Email

Local Association affiliation at time of retirement

Letter of Intent

I hereby state my willingness to run as a candidate for Retired Delegate to the 2009 MSTA Representative Assembly. I agree to abide by the MSTA/NEA policies and bylaws and to adhere to the Code of Ethics, as adopted by the Association.

Date

Signature of Nominee

Mail, fax, email or deliver to be received by March 25, 2009, to:

MSTA Nominations and Credentials Committee
c/o Susan W. Russell
140 Main Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

Fax 410/263-5730; email srussell@mstanea.org.

MARCH 2009

- 9 MSTA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 10 MSTA East Coordinated Bargaining Council (CBC)
- 11-15 NEA ESP National Conference Orlando, FL
- 12 MSTA Urban CBC
- 12-13 Group Processing Skills Training St. Michaels
- 16 MSTA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 20 National Board Certified Teachers Reception Annapolis First day of spring
- 23 MSTA Lobby Night Annapolis
- 27-28 MSTA Board of Directors Meeting
- 28 MSTA Membership Workshop Rockville
- 30 MSTA Lobby Night Annapolis

APRIL 2009

- 1 April Fool's Day
- 6 MSTA Lobby Night Annapolis MSTA Retired Advisory Council
- 7 Local Officers' Network Series II Annapolis
- 7-9 NEA-Retired East Regional Conference Savannah, GA
- 8 MSTA Urban CBC Passover begins at sunset
- 10 Good Friday Office closed
- 13 Sine Die General Assembly adjourns Office closed
- 14 MSTA East CBC
- 15 Passover ends at sunset
- 17-18 Emerging Leaders Academy Part II St. Michaels
- 21 MSTA Southern CBC
- 24 MSTA Joint Governance/Staff Meeting Bowie Presidents' Advisory Council Bowie
- 24-25 MSTA Board of Directors Meeting



Financial literacy: It's making a comeback

Financial literacy is making a comeback. The nation's economic woes are making it necessary for everyone to take a deep breath and scale back the big spending of the recent past. The Task Force to Study How to Improve Financial Literacy in the State presented its preliminary report in January, focusing on school curricula to prepare students to enter the world fully aware of money matters.

But what about educators themselves? The financial crisis means economizing even more than usual at home and in the classroom, maximizing dollars in every area—from meals and leisure activities to stickers for classroom papers and extra Kleenex for runny noses. Financial stress is a burden no one wants or needs, but in these difficult times, it's important to recognize the warning signs and know the steps you can take to ease your worries.

HOW TO IDENTIFY FINANCIAL STRESS

According to NEA Member Benefits, answering yes to any one of these questions could indicate financial stress.

- Do you routinely spend more than you earn?
- Are you forced to make day-to-day purchases on credit?
- Are you able to make only the minimum payments on monthly credit card bills?
- Are you having difficulty stretching your paycheck to meet monthly bills?
- Are bill collectors constantly calling?
- Would you have difficulty paying next month's bills if you lost your job?

If you are financially stressed, you either have to earn more money or cut expenses. Since earning more money is not always an option, it is easier to reduce your current expenses. Consider these steps:

CUT SPENDING Try to eliminate any unnecessary spending such as eating out and expensive entertainment. Regularly maintain your car to prevent large, expensive repairs. Clip coupons, shop sales, purchase generic products at the supermarket, and avoid impulse purchases. Consider substituting a debit card for your credit card. *Above all, stop incurring new debt.*

CONSOLIDATE DEBT To get your finances in order, you may need to consolidate your debt. Many consumers use home equity loans, mortgage refinancing, and personal installment loans to consolidate their debt (credit cards, personal loans, and automobile loans) into one loan. The advantage is that you have one monthly payment (which is usually lower) and the finance charges are specific (with the exception of home equity lines of credit) and will not adjust (unlike revolving finance charges normally associated with credit cards). In addition, the interest rate will most likely be substantially lower than your credit card interest rates.

If you're a homeowner, you may also consolidate your short-term debts if you refinance your mortgage. Given the lower mortgage interest rates, you may lower your monthly payments by hundreds of dollars. Consolidating all of the loans may not change your current mortgage payment, but will take care of short-term debts by spreading the payment of the short-term debt over a longer period of time.

The main problem with consolidating debt into one loan is that many people will go out and incur more debt, especially on credit cards. This defeats the purpose of getting a handle on credit with one loan. You need a clear understanding of the implications of consolidating debt, especially when using a home as collateral.

SEEK INFORMATION Obtain additional financial resources from government and private sources. While most active Association members will not qualify for public assistance, unemployment compensation, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps or low-income energy assistance may be available in certain situations. Other sources may be churches or community groups.

Visit NEA Member Benefits, www.neamb.com, for more guidance, tips and money-saving services that can help you and your family get through these difficult economic times.

Schools, parents, communities: It's time to address childhood obesity

Childhood obesity is truly an epidemic. In the past 30 years, the percentage of obese children has more than doubled for preschool and adolescent children, and tripled for those ages 6-11. Healthcare costs associated with childhood obesity have skyrocketed from \$35 million in 1979-1981 to \$127 million in 1997-1999. It's a serious and troubling issue for educators, schools and parents. The physical costs (diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, orthopedic problems and more) combined with the social and emotional results (low self-esteem, depression, teasing and bullying) work together to make obesity a childhood problem with deeply felt and long-lasting consequences.

“Kids are bigger—and yes, some are obese—than when I started teaching 20 years ago. They can't walk a mile. They're tired. They're eating all the wrong things.” —Yvonne Baicich

How can we protect students from becoming obese? Veteran physical education teachers, and members of MSTA's Board of Directors, Yvonne Baicich and Terry Borneman took action on the issue when they successfully presented a New Business Item (NBI), Childhood Obesity Prevention, to delegates at MSTA's 2008 Representative Assembly in October. “We wanted to be sure that the significance of childhood obesity is understood by our Locals and their boards of education so that action can be taken.”

Baicich based her NBI on the recommendations of the 2004 Institute of Medicine study, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*. The report addresses the responsibilities of the healthcare industry, the marketplace, media, home, community, and schools, taking them to task as partners in the problem and making strong recommendations to each for positive change.

“Kids are bigger—and yes, some are obese—than when I started teaching 20 years ago. They can't walk a mile. They're tired. They're eating all the wrong things,” Baicich said. “Most students spend more than half their day in school. It is our responsibility to use that time to nurture them in mind and body so they can safely, and in good health, enjoy their childhood. Anything less is under serving our students.”



The Institute of Medicine report *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*, states that, “Schools should provide a consistent environment that is conducive to healthful eating behaviors and regular physical activity,” and recommends that state and local education authorities and schools should:

- Ensure that all children and youth participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during the school day.
- Expand opportunities for physical activity through physical education classes; intramural and interscholastic sports programs and other physical activity clubs, programs, and lessons; after-school use of school facilities; use of schools as community centers; and walking- and biking-to-school programs.
- Enhance health curricula to devote adequate attention to nutrition, physical activity, reducing sedentary behaviors, and energy balance, and to include a behavioral skills focus.
- Develop, implement, and enforce school policies to create schools that are advertising-free to the greatest possible extent.
- Involve school health services in obesity prevention efforts.
- Conduct annual assessments of each student's weight, height, and gender- and age-specific BMI percentile and make this information available to parents.
- Perform periodic assessments of each school's policies and practices related to nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention.

At press time, there are a number of bills in front of the General Assembly that address student obesity and physical education requirements. MSTA firmly believes that significant steps must be taken to address this critical problem, but that any plan, program or initiative must come from education experts.

Let's finally level the playing field



A shrinking private sector unionization rate has hurt all employees and their families—including the children in our public schools.

I was a sophomore in college when I participated in my first union organizing drive. I was waiting tables in a Madison, Wisconsin hotel. Like many others, I relied on the job to cover room, board, and tuition. The working conditions were so lousy, we decided to organize a union and negotiate improvements.

The reaction of the hotel owner was swift. He hired a labor-busting law firm. A co-worker was fired; I was assigned to the slowest shifts and the worst tables. Then the owner's attorneys filed to have the bargaining unit defined to include not only restaurant employees, but also maintenance and housekeeping staff, who were highly dependent on their jobs and deathly afraid of management. We filed unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and won. It took a year and cost the hotel owner a couple thousand dollars. But he had crippled our drive.

That was 35 years ago. In the years since, the NLRB has become more and more hostile to unions and organizers. Today, only 7.6 percent of private sector workers are organized.

A shrinking private sector unionization rate has hurt all employees and their families—including the children in our public schools. Unions raised millions of Americans into the middle class by leading the fight for Social Security and the minimum wage. They helped pass laws creating the eight-hour workday, ending child labor, and protecting workers' health and safety. When more taxpayers, voters, and parents personally benefit from their—or their family members'—union membership and collective bargaining, our effectiveness advocating for MSTANEA members improves.

That's why we believe the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) should pass Congress and be signed by President Obama.

The EFCA—had it been the law in 1974—would have made a difference for my first organizing drive. Our union would have been certified as soon as we filed signature cards, shortening the organizing drive and depriving the owner of time to intimidate employees. We could have guaranteed a contract, because binding arbitration would kick in if our first contract was not settled within 90 days. And the hotel owner would have hesitated to fire my coworker or harass organizers due to more severe penalties for employers violating labor.

The EFCA is a critical step towards establishing a level playing field for union organizing efforts that give more hard-working Americans the opportunity to receive the salaries, benefits and job protections they deserve.

Visit www.freechoiceact.org to sign the petition and learn more about the EFCA.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Write David:

MSTA, 140 Main Street,
Annapolis, MD 21401
dhelfman@mstanea.org

IT'S A NEW DAY FOR ORGANIZED LABOR

“We need to level the playing field for workers and the unions that represent their interests, because we know that you cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement.”

“When workers are prospering, they buy products that make businesses prosper. We can be competitive and lean and mean and still create a situation where workers are thriving in this country.”

—President Barack Obama

MSTA continues fight for funding, pension and labor fairness

The mixed news for Maryland's public schools continues. On the plus side, Maryland's school system earned its second #1 national ranking in as many months, this time by coming out on top in the percentage of high school seniors who took the challenging Advanced Placement (AP) exams and who scored the "3" or better usually needed for college credit.

Maryland's schools also scored a victory when MSTA successfully lobbied Governor O'Malley to postpone consideration of \$38 million in planned mid-year education cuts while the Obama administration and Congress finished negotiations over the economic recovery package. And then came the really good news: the federal government threw a lifeline to the states with \$790 billion in stimulus that included \$3.3 billion for education and other priorities in Maryland over the next two years.

Yet, with counties facing declining revenues themselves, some local school systems were already planning cutbacks for next school year. The massive aid coming from the federal government will save some educator jobs and allow some school modernization projects to move forward, but with local school boards already sending their budgets to the counties, it may be too late to save some salary increases and some important positions and programs. For example:

- In Calvert County, all 18 computer lab positions were eliminated this year and employees transferred. The superintendent has estimated that for next year, 22 teaching positions will be cut.
- Some resource teacher positions are being eliminated in Cecil County, school lunch prices have been increased, and renovations to aging schools and a technical high school have been delayed.
- Harford County eliminated 56 positions this year, and next year's budget cuts an additional five positions.



Governor Martin O'Malley joined MSTA President Clara Floyd to celebrate Maryland's #1 national ranking at MSTA's annual General Assembly Open House.

- The Montgomery County school board approved a budget for next year that eliminates 275 jobs, increases K-3 class sizes, and reduces funding for materials and supplies. The job cuts would have been worse if school employees had not sacrificed their already negotiated 5.3% salary increases.

And educators were still fretting that the state's revenue situation might worsen, forcing additional cuts and possibly the shifting of some pension costs to the counties, as some legislators and newspaper editorials were advocating. In a letter to the *Washington Post*, MSTA President Clara Floyd and the Maryland Association of Counties criticized the proposed cost shift and emphasized the need to continue the level of investment in public education that has propelled Maryland to the top: "If forced to support teacher pensions, counties would have to make up for those added costs with steep reductions in funding for classroom instruction—exactly where Maryland has made its proudest gains."

At press time, MSTA leaders, lobbyists and members were ratcheting up the pressure on the General Assembly to adequately fund schools and support the Association's other big priority this legislative session—the Fairness in Negotiations Act (S.B. 673/H.B. 1243). The bill would create a process *and* timeline for resolving labor negotiations disputes between local school boards and Local Associations, and put educators on a more equal footing with employers at the bargaining table.

Visit *MSTA OnLine*, www.mstanea.org, for more examples of recent cuts to Maryland schools.

With just one month left in this session, it's critical that every MSTA member tell his or her representatives how much students, educators and public schools need their support. Come to Annapolis on Monday night, or visit *MSTA OnLine*, www.mstanea.org, and email your legislators.

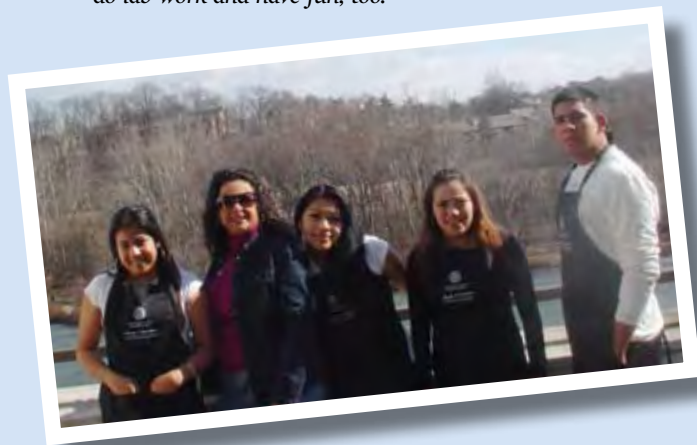
Meet *Gisela Cooke*



Near Front Royal, Virginia, my husband Ken and I stopped on our way home from a two-day motorcycle trip to Skyline Drive.



I love working with students in the classroom. I get to do lab work and have fun, too.



I am a sponsor of Mi Gente Latina Club. Here we are on a community service project last month.

Gisela Cooke
Paraeducator, ESOL/ELL
Reservoir HS Howard County

Leaving Panama to come to America was one of the hardest things I've done. It was not easy for my mother and me—there were no programs like ESOL/ELL at that time. Learning the language and culture and meeting new friends were my biggest hurdles. I made a commitment that I would work with ESOL/ELL students and the Latino community. That commitment became my passion.

I make it a point that my students get good grades, but I also help them with community service hours. I also work hard to bring parents together so they better understand what's happening in their student's school life and in the community.

At school, I'm on the Attendance and Suspension and Project CommUNITY committees, a member of the S.I.T. Team and a sponsor for the Mi Gente Latina Club.

My husband Ken and I have two daughters, two grandchildren and a granddog. I enjoy the outdoors, bowling, cooking, scrapbooking, road trips, and, especially, motorcycling.



Here I am in La Pollera—the traditional dress of my native Panama.



My husband Ken and I dancing at my sister's wedding.

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

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FRONTLINE

Maryland State Teachers Association - NEA

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