

LET'S
GET IT
RIGHT.



The Tsunami of Education Reform and Its Impact on Maryland's #1 Schools

“ANYBODY COULD HAVE SEEN THIS COMING”

McDaniel College professor Francis “Skip” Fennell, who has helped to write the Common Core math curriculum, said he believes teachers are reaching a tipping point where they cannot focus on so many changes at once.

“Anybody could have seen this” coming, he said of the misalignment between testing and curriculum. He pointed out that teachers are being asked to change how and what they teach while also being mindful of the old tests.

“What drummer do you want march to?” Fennell said. “One would like to think that a policy would be a bit more flexible.”

—“*Education leaders call for moratorium on testing,*”
Baltimore Sun,
July 24, 2013

It's a big year for Maryland public schools, as students and educators are learning new curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Common Core, which the state adopted in 2010, is a set of learning standards for English/Language Arts/Literacy (ELA) and mathematics developed through an initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards have been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia.

Educators overwhelmingly support the CCSS because they present great opportunities for deeper, richer learning in reading and math that emphasizes critical thinking and real-world applications. However, the transition to CCSS requires a huge amount of work, resources, and extra hours for educators to align their lesson plans, materials, and pedagogy with the new standards.

While the shift to CCSS has kept teachers throughout Maryland working extremely hard, it's far from the only change they're facing. Local school systems are also in the process of transitioning to new local evaluation plans and shifting to a new statewide test called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, which is expected to be aligned to the CCSS. These changes were introduced as part of Maryland's federal Race to the Top (RTTT) grant and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver, yet require more time and money than have been made available.

The theory of moving multiple tracks of education reform at one time may have been well intentioned, but, in the wake of repeated red flags from local school systems, this increasingly reckless implementation process cannot be sustained by local school districts or common sense. There is a huge disparity in the mandates from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and what local school systems are actually able to accomplish with the provided funding and timelines. These reforms are not only challenging educators, but are greatly impacting Maryland students and confounding many parents.

MSEA President Betty Weller and others have been warning of this “tsunami of education reform” for several years. Now, this tsunami is hitting our schools head-on. If we don't take action soon, it will quickly threaten our successful education system—and its effects on lost confidence in the system and declining educator morale will be felt for years to come.

WHAT DOES THIS TSUNAMI OF REFORM MEAN FOR MARYLAND EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS?

The tsunami means that rather than being able to focus on getting each major reform right, our educators and students are being overwhelmed with numerous seismic changes all at once. While new standards and curriculum have been successfully implemented in Maryland before, the state has never tried to implement new standards, curriculum, student assessments, and high-stakes evaluations all in such a short timeframe. The time and resources to get these reforms right simply have not been provided to the educators who are responsible for making them happen.

Unfortunately, Maryland is losing its focus on what makes our schools, teachers, principals, and students the best in the nation. The state is no longer relying on our local education leaders to collaborate and deliver the results needed to improve student achievement and educator excellence. Instead, MSDE has pushed reforms from Washington, DC without regard to their impacts on educators and students in our local schools.

The result is that educators are overwhelmed, frustrated, and stressed. They strongly feel that the supports, resources, and professional development are not currently in place to make these reforms successful. Bottom line, they are swamped and fear that nobody is listening to them in their efforts to do what is best for students.



With new teacher evaluations and learning standards simultaneously implemented, 'it's a massive amount of work when most teachers and principals go to work every day and try to do their regular jobs. It's the tsunami of education reform.'"

*-Betty Weller,
Washington Post, May 7, 2013*

ARE EDUCATORS PREPARED FOR THE TRANSITION TO THE CCSS AND THE NEW CURRICULUM?

Educational standards such as CCSS are the start of a curriculum, and are meant to guide what students need to learn in each grade—but not how they are taught. Local school systems develop their own curriculum to reflect these standards. In many grades, there is a significant shift in what is being taught; for example, a skill that was once taught in fifth grade may now be taught in third grade.

Developing and fine-tuning curriculum is a labor-intensive and time-consuming process, and many locals are still in the process of developing their new curricula, which are being rolled out unit by unit in some places. However, starting the school year without a fully formed curriculum is incredibly frustrating to educators and detrimental to their ability to effectively teach the curriculum.

EDUCATORS WERE ASKED:

How far in advance of your covering the material have you typically received the curriculum in your subject area this year—and how far in advance would you like to receive it?

43% of teachers said they received their curriculum two weeks or less ahead of time.

96% of teachers would like to receive curriculum more than two weeks ahead of time.



There are growing numbers of people in Maryland who think Lowery is simultaneously pushing three major reforms—a new teacher evaluation system linked in part to standardized test scores, the Core standards, and new assessment tests—and doing so too quickly to do them well.”

—“Common Core Resistance Is Growing in Maryland,”
Washington Post, November 25, 2013



**We are building
the plane as we fly it.”**

*—Dallas Dance, Baltimore County
Superintendent, Baltimore Sun,
September 23, 2013*

In November, the Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO) filed a grievance on behalf of the county’s 8,700 teachers because county teachers were not given the new curriculum and related materials in a “reasonable” amount of time before they were supposed to deliver them to students, as is stipulated in the TABCO contract. As reported by the *Baltimore Sun*, “County teachers have complained that they’ve been working long hours because the lesson plans have not been available until just weeks before they are to be taught and the website to access those lessons has been difficult to use ... The county union documented the extra work by asking teachers to fill out work logs over a two-week period. ... [T]he logs show that teachers are sometimes working 30 to 40 extra hours during that time” (“Baltimore County teachers file grievance over workload from Common Core,” November 20, 2013).

In many local districts the curriculum that is being provided to teachers has not been researched, aligned, piloted, or completed. Where aligned curriculum does exist, many educators do not have the resources, materials, texts, or professional development required to deliver it appropriately.

MSDE’s plan for providing professional development was for a team of 3–4 teachers from every school in the state to participate in the MSDE-led three-day Educator Effectiveness Academies (EEA) held in the summer and then share what they learned with their colleagues. Yet our research found that more than half of teachers surveyed had not received a presentation from someone in their building who attended an EEA. Given this lack of training, it should be no surprise that 86% of teachers in the MSEA survey believe that significant challenges remain to understanding and implementing CCSS in their school.

Clearly, this professional development model has not been sufficient and there has not been adequate time or funding at the local level to impart the necessary training to all educators in need. Right now, teachers and students are suffering the consequences of this poorly executed implementation process.

MSDE'S ACTIONS VIOLATE THE LEGISLATIVE INTENT OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2010

When the Maryland General Assembly passed the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 2010, it set in motion conversations across the state focused on strengthening local evaluation systems. While these conversations have yielded close collaboration at the local level, MSDE and USDE mandates and the rushed implementation timeline threaten to upend the intent of the ERA and all the good work done by locals.

When the General Assembly debated the ERA, it prioritized local collaboration in developing local evaluation systems. In fact, the law required that local evaluation systems, in following general guidelines from MSDE, be mutually agreed upon by the local school system and local education association; the state was given no oversight role or authority in order to protect local autonomy and the creation of systems that made sense for local school systems.

The law asked the state to develop a default evaluation model as a model of last resort if such local collaboration could not yield agreement. However, MSDE's actions have completely contravened the intent of the law and purpose of the default model. Instead of a model of last resort, MSDE has used the default model to bully local districts into conforming to a one-size fits all approach which requires 20% of the evaluation to be based on a high-stakes state test (i.e. MSA or PARCC), regardless of local agreements and the total absence of such a requirement in ERA.

Over the protests of local school systems, throughout 2012 MSDE repeatedly threatened to overturn any local evaluation system which did not include this 20% threshold. MSDE has been dictating to local districts the specific criteria to be included in teacher and principal evaluations—a power never provided to it in the ERA.

All told, such efforts flout the ERA and the good faith collaboration between local superintendents, school districts, and education associations in the development of evaluation systems that work for the local. By insisting on the default model as minimum requirements for all local models, MSDE threatens to dismantle local systems and autonomy and thumb their nose at the General Assembly by not comporting to the ERA.



We should just not give the current MSA. Just stop giving it tomorrow.”

—Joshua Starr, Montgomery County Superintendent, Baltimore Sun, July 24, 2013

PREPARING FOR PARCC AND REJECTING THE MSA

Currently, students in grades 3–8 take the Maryland State Assessment (MSA), which is aligned to the Voluntary State Curriculum, the predecessor to CCSS. With the current school year set as the first year of full CCSS

implementation, many local school systems began introducing elements of Common Core standards into their curriculum one to two years ago. The curriculum for many students has become increasingly focused on CCSS and misaligned with the MSA. So it's no surprise that MSA scores for 2013 decreased, and would be expected to decrease further in 2014.

This misalignment means that there is no longer a need or a role for the MSA in the 2013-14 school year. Educators, superintendents, education advocates, and editorial boards across the state have all said that it makes no sense to give the MSA this year, since misalignment and lagging data will not reflect student learning or help teachers improve their practice. The time and money spent administering the MSA could be better spent on additional instruction time for students and financial resources for districts to prepare for the new assessments. Yet despite this strong public opposition and clear common sense, MSDE has not budged from its plans to force students to take the MSA this year, even though it is no longer aligned to content and is thus meaningless.

During the next school year (2014–15), the MSA is scheduled to be replaced with the new PARCC assessments. PARCC assessments are a web-based computer test that are expected to be given annually in March and May to students in grades 3–12 in ELA and mathematics. Not only have the tests not been fully developed or validated to be aligned with the CCSS, but districts are far from ready to give the PARCC test. Unfortunately, many school districts currently do not have the bandwidth and technology in place to allow all 3–12 grade students to take a web-based computer test.



**Why force children to
take a useless test?”**

—Gazette editorial, November 20, 2013

EDUCATORS WERE ASKED:

Do you feel that your school has the technological and physical capacity to administer the PARCC exam, the entirely computer-based test that will replace the MSA to all students next school year?

Additionally, many students do not have the keyboarding and computer skills necessary to take the timed, computer-based PARCC test, especially in the early grades. And no reasonable plan is in place to address English Language Learners and those students with special education needs as they attempt to take this test. The shift to PARCC is another example of an unrealistic timeline without concern for local budget realities. The outcry and confusion from parents will be heard loud and clear if these issues remain unaddressed before PARCC is given to all students next year.

READY FOR PARCC?

MSEA's survey shows that fewer than 1 in 10 educators feel that their school has the capacity to administer PARCC next year.



THERE IS NO RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THE USE OF STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES IN TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATIONS

Any change or reform should be guided and supported by strong research proving its efficacy and reliability. Unfortunately, MSDE apparently disagrees. The Department's desire to force standardized test scores as part of teacher and principal evaluations is not supported by research. In fact, research and experts suggest quite the opposite. Evaluation development expert Charlotte Danielson—whose



The state Department of Education should have done a better job of getting the curriculum together and ensuring that teachers had all the tools they needed well in advance of trying to roll out the program.”

—Carroll County Times editorial,
November 15, 2013



work most districts are using as the foundation of their evaluation systems—has long said that there is no way to attribute an individual teacher’s impact on a student test score. Moreover, test data will not be provided to teachers in a timely manner that would inform their instruction of their students.

Research shows that the best way to support the professional growth of teachers and principals is through an evaluation system that relies heavily on reflection to inform instruction and that provides the opportunity to improve one’s professional practice through professional development. Such a system has been in place for decades in Montgomery County, where it is integrated with their Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) system, which has become a national model praised by USDE, NEA, and education experts from across the country. This system has been effective in providing teachers with the resources and training to improve their practice as well as providing a clear path for teachers to exit the profession when their performance does not improve.

Moving forward with teacher and principal evaluations that use any aspect of test scores on a state test that is not created, is unproven, and has not been completely validated is foolish and unfair. Testing can and should move forward as results can be informative for a teacher’s professional practice. But using it to inform high-stakes decisions on personnel is not fair to the professionals working so hard to implement such an incomplete system. The result would be a waste of time and money and a likely further drop in educator morale.

Not only is the use of standardized tests as part of evaluations unproven, we already have a better way of measuring student growth: student learning objectives (SLOs). SLOs are a far simpler, smarter, and effective way to measure and include student growth in a teacher’s evaluation. They are teacher-developed, data-driven, curriculum-aligned, measurable teaching tools that are created in partnership with a school administrator. Nearly half of U.S. states require, recommend, or identify SLOs as an example of student growth. “SLOs emphasize multiple best practices for teachers,” says Sean McComb, 2014 Maryland Teacher of the Year and an English teacher at Baltimore’s Patapsco High School & Center for the Arts. “Their implementation encourages teachers to employ pre-assessments, analyze data to identify student deficits, and tailor instruction to student needs and monitor progress.”

In Maryland, educators throughout the state are developing SLOs in collaboration with their principals to measure their students’ growth and help improve their professional practice. SLOs can measure student growth in a way that is much more precise, fair, and helpful to a teacher than a state standardized test ever could.

Educators want to be fairly evaluated. Educators embrace tools that will strengthen instruction, improve the profession, and create a better learning environment. We know it is entirely possible to create an evaluation system that is credible, valid, and fair. That is the system the state should demand and support—not the top-down fads of the day that fail to be flexible or responsive to teachers, students, and local needs.

Maybe it’s time to think more seriously about the morale and development of the teacher corps. We could call it Common Courtesy or Common Sense.”

— *“No Surprise with Maryland Test Score Decline,” WYPR, July 25, 2013*

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

Across the state, educators, principals, superintendents, and parents are expressing concern about the state's rushed reforms, unfunded mandates, and the loss of local control in education policy. We cannot allow this tsunami of education reform to wipe away all the progress that our schools and students have made. It's time to make sure that educators have the resources, time, and support that they need to get these changes right.

Additionally, it is time to hold MSDE accountable to the laws governing these education reforms and insist that they listen to local superintendents, educators, and parents as school districts tirelessly work to institute reforms, improve professional practice, and boost student achievement.

The first step for positive action is for MSDE to request a new ESEA waiver from USDE. An updated waiver request is due in the next few months. That waiver must seek the time and support that educators desperately need to get these reforms right, rather than doubling down on an implementation process that is quickly losing credibility and sustainability.

The waiver is an extension of Maryland's current ESEA waiver, which is intended to relieve the state from unrealistic No Child Left Behind school accountability measures like Adequate Yearly Progress. MSDE should use this opportunity of the waiver to extend the period during which student test scores cannot count towards teacher evaluations. With experts saying that it takes at least six years before new assessments reflect a student's mastery of CCSS—and in the absence of convincing research to show that state test scores are even a reliable indicator of a teacher's practice—this is just common sense.




We find it hard to believe that the Department of Education would severely punish Maryland for exercising some obvious common sense. ... If federal officials don't like it, tough luck.”

— Baltimore Sun *editorial*,
September 16, 2013

Maryland's upcoming ESEA waiver must include amendments to remove high-stakes tests from the teacher and principal evaluations and respect the ERA and honor local autonomy. If the MSDE waiver fails to include such provisions, the General Assembly must act to provide this relief and clarity of the law.

In addition to the future ESEA waiver, MSDE should seek an immediate waiver from USDE to not administer the MSA test in the spring of 2014. This would require immediate action from MSDE so that we can save the time, expense, and anxiety of administering *a test that provides no valuable and valid data for a single district, school, principal, teacher, or student*. This time and money can be repurposed to better prepare students on the new curriculum and districts for the new assessments to come online next year.

Finally, MSDE and the General Assembly must make appropriate budget investments to ensure that the transition to CCSS is successful. Local school systems must have the resources necessary to develop rigorous and useful curriculum aligned to CCSS. Appropriate, responsive, and embedded professional development for all staff charged with implementation of the curricula aligned to CCSS needs to be designed and implemented. Local school systems must acquire the much-needed resources, materials, and technology required to effectively implement newly designed curricula aligned to CCSS. There needs to be an honest assessment of budget needs and the appropriate timeframe needed to transition into the use of the new online PARCC assessments.



State education officials should reconsider their position on testing during the curriculum transition. ... A better use can almost certainly be found for the time, effort and money needed to administer the MSA tests.”

—Baltimore Sun *editorial*,
September 19, 2013

LET'S GET EDUCATION REFORM RIGHT FOR EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

1. The General Assembly must provide oversight of MSDE's ESEA waiver request to ensure amendments are added to provide local autonomy in the development of teacher and principal evaluations and to remove high-stakes testing from any evaluation calculation until such a test is aligned with curriculum and validated to actually measure student growth.
2. MSDE must seek a waiver from administering the MSA test this spring. If they fail to act, the General Assembly will need to pass emergency legislation directing them to seek such a waiver from USDE.
3. There must be support in state and local budgets to make the transition to CCSS and PARCC assessments successfully. This includes additional infrastructure and technology needs across all districts, and resources for appropriate professional development.



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MSEA is the 71,000-member Maryland affiliate of the National Education Association, which represents 3 million education employees across the country. MSEA is the state's largest professional association and supports 39 local affiliates throughout Maryland.

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