

MSEA TEACHER CANDIDATES  
**THEY WON!**

500 WORDS ON  
**DR. KING**

TEACHER OF THE YEAR  
**JODY ZEPP**

# ACTIONLINE

The Magazine of the Maryland State Education Association Volume 15 Issue 2 December 2014



## **TOO MANY TESTS!**

Lost time, lost learning opportunities. Where will it end?

Visit [marylandeducators.org](http://marylandeducators.org) for MSEA's Board of Directors and local affiliates directory.

## SPECIAL FEATURE ►

# Too Many Tests!

The issue is snowballing. Educators, parents, and students across the country are railing against using the schoolhouse as a perpetual testing lab. We gained ground when MSDE backed down from 2015 high school PARCC assessment plans, but this year, Maryland kindergarten teachers delivered an hour long per student assessment on skills they hadn't taught to students they barely knew. Read what they had to say and what MSEA is doing about it.



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## 6 SHORT TAKES

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Get more content, videos,  
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[marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL](http://marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL).



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Anne Arundel County school counselor Reba Miller left a position with the Department of Defense for a career advocating for, and supporting, students and their families.

## THIS ISSUE'S COVER STORY

shows how important it is for you to share how education issues and policies affect your students, classroom, and professional life.



While we had heard anecdotally that there were problems with the new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), we needed a fuller picture of all the issues around the delivery of the test and whether those problems were isolated to certain counties. We sent an email calling on our kindergarten teacher members to share their experiences and challenges. Between many personal emails and responses to our survey, well over half of these members let us know, in great detail, how the quality, length, and delivery of the test affected them and their students.

Such a terrific response only adds momentum and credibility to our cause. Now we can tell state leaders, policymakers, and the press with confidence and authority how using educators and students as testing guinea pigs affects real-time professional practice. Don't miss the story beginning on page 12 to see survey results and member comments.

The KRA problem is a great example of how MSEA works best. Our priorities aren't developed in isolation in Annapolis—they come from you, our members, who share the challenges and opportunities that you experience every day. This is your association—and we are stronger and more influential because of your voice.

Never hesitate to reach out to me, MSEA, or your local association to share what's on your mind. Our job is to empower you by organizing around the issues that you—frontline educators and experts—identify. That's how we make real progress.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betty H. Weller".

MSEA PRESIDENT

Watch Betty's video at [marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL](http://marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL)  
Contact Betty at [bweller@mseane.org](mailto:bweller@mseane.org)

## 71% OF MSEA CANDIDATES WON IN NOVEMBER!

Record-breaking activity by MSEA members in the 2014 election will be hugely important to the future of public education in Maryland. Even though MSEA's endorsed candidate didn't win the governor's race, very few groups can claim a 71% success rate for endorsed candidates like we can. Because MSEA members were at the forefront of so many pro-public education campaigns—knocking on doors, making phone calls, and passing out Apple Ballots—we have friends we can count on at all levels of government. We'll be cultivating those relationships and building new ones in the coming months.

“The loss at the top of the ticket could mean challenging circumstances for advancing our pro-public education budget and policy agenda in the coming years,” said Sean Johnson, MSEA's director of political and legislative affairs. “But we've created a new awareness among members that public education and politics are inseparable and that to be heard, we must be organized.”

**Here's what can happen when organized members and a strong Fund for Children and Public Education come together:**

- Two **Carroll County** members, Dennis Frazier and Dick Weaver, were elected to what was a very anti-public education county commission. Educator-endorsed candidates won all three of the board of education seats.
- In **Charles County**, friends of education are now a majority on the county commission and include member Amanda Stewart. Educator-endorsed candidates won six of the seven board of education seats.
- **Frederick County** voters elected an education friendly county executive, and member Jessica Fitzwater gained a seat on the county council. Fitzwater's fellow teacher and council candidate Jerry Donald won by 25 votes.
- In **District 12** (Howard and Baltimore), all three of the recommended candidates for delegate won. Member Eric Ebersole was the top vote-getter among the three.
- **Brian Frosh**, Maryland's new attorney general, will be a strong supporter of MSEA and the autonomy of local school systems and associations to develop their own evaluation models.

### BY THE NUMBERS

WHILE EDUCATOR-ENDORSED CANDIDATES DIDN'T WIN EVERY RACE, WE WON FAR MORE THAN WE LOST AND HAD SOME GREAT VICTORIES BECAUSE MSEA MEMBERS STEPPED UP IN 2014.

**83,114** Phone calls  
**20,244** Doors knocked on  
**1,292** Poll workers  
**71%** MSEA's recommended candidates who won their elections  
**6** MSEA members newly elected to state and local office

## How'd they do? THEY WON!

ActionLine checked in with the four teacher candidates featured in the October issue and asked about their next steps as elected officials.

### Eric Ebersole, Delegate, District 12



*As a public school teacher for over 34 years, I know education and teachers need a voice in Annapolis. We need to strike a productive balance between evaluation and innovation. The scope and prevalence of testing needs to be kept in check. We must keep the demands placed on teachers reasonable so that they have the freedom to teach to the student, not the test.*

### Jessica Fitzwater, County Council, Frederick County



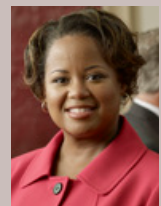
*I will advocate for the critical education funding that our county needs to meet the real needs of our school system. I will move to review the ordinance which currently allows developers to build even in areas where schools are over 100% capacity. And, I will move to reinstate the process that allows the non-profit organizations that provide critical citizen services to apply for funding and partner with county government.*

### Dennis Frazier, County Commissioner, Carroll County



*My first action will be to put an end to the educational opportunity fund, which currently gives \$400,000 a year to parents of private- and home-schooled children. I also want to make sure that teacher, police, and all county employee salaries are competitive with surrounding counties. And, I want to get high-speed fiber-optic cable to every business and industrial park in the county.*

### Amanda Stewart, County Commissioner, Charles County



*Ensuring competitive salaries for all of our teachers and police officers is high on my list. I want to work on a productive relationship with the Charles County Board of Education, focusing on improving the condition of our aging school buildings. And I'm interested in building relationships with our partners in economic development so we can attract higher paying jobs and better opportunities for telecommuting.*



## DELEGATES TAKE ON THE BUSINESS OF MSEA AT 2014 CONVENTION

It definitely wasn't business as usual at the 2014 MSEA Convention! Yes, there were great workshops, exhibits, inspiring speeches, and delegates debating issues that affect educators, students, and education policy. But a slow jam?

Yep! NEA Vice President Becky Pringle slow jammed the reasons educators need to be part of the political and policy-making mix from the State House to local boards of education and county councils. It was just one of the highlights of the annual event that celebrated a strong year of organizing successes.

### The business of MSEA

Delegates debated a wide variety of new business. Here are some of the items delegates moved forward (find the full details at [marylandeducators.org/Convention](http://marylandeducators.org/Convention)):

- Unanimous support of the removal of the PARCC tests as a graduation requirement until further research confirms their efficacy
- Support of legislation to enhance Maryland's human trafficking law
- Support of efforts to provide qualified substitutes for related service providers
- Supported the reduction by half of the planned MSEA dues increase for 2015-2016
- Supported a task force to study and create model contract language that differentiates special education planning from special education case management

Find out what delegates have tasked MSEA to do this year, watch convention videos, including speeches from MSEA leaders, Teacher of the Year Jody Zepp, and member performances from MSEA's Got Talent at [maryland-educators.org/Convention](http://maryland-educators.org/Convention)

### The Fund keeps growing

The success of the Fund at the convention showed just how political action awareness has grown in 2014. The result? A standout year for MSEA's Fund for Children and Public Education as educators made an investment in growing the Fund and amplifying their political voice.

### PAC IN 2014

46

Record number of Fund captains raised money at Convention 2014

2,336

New members recruited on payroll deduction for 2013-14

6

5% more Fund members in SIX local associations\*

100%

Every delegate from 23 local associations bought PAC Raffle tickets

\$22,360

Total raised in the 2014 MSEA PAC Raffle at Convention 2014

\*Carroll County Education Association, Calvert Education Association, Carroll Association of School Employees, Cecil County Classroom Teachers Association, Washington County Education Support Personnel, Prince George's County Educators' Association, Howard County Education Association

# TEACHER OF THE YEAR JODY ZEPP



Jody Zepp's passions as an educator are many. Yet the one that fuels the Howard County psychology and government teacher's soul—and takes her the furthest with students—is how she weaves together her pedagogy and her heart. For Zepp, neither teaching nor learning can begin until she establishes a relationship with her students that is founded in the humanity and dignity she sees in each one.

If you heard her speech at MSEA's convention in October, you know that Zepp digs deep to make those connections work in the classroom. Find out for yourself—learn about Zepp in her own words.

• *Our students bring a multitude of real and crushing problems through the door every single day and we need to confront that with humanity and dignity, not an iPad. We need to make sure that we are establishing that human experience.*

• *I learned very early that the idea of **equality of condition** is not the same thing as **equality of opportunity**. I learned very early that the idea of going to the mat on principle for that which is just may be lonely at times, but always worthy and honorable.*

• *As a student of social sciences, ... I am educated in the utility of statistics. But I also understand the manipulation of data. It is one thing for a school to have increased minority enrollment in AP classes with a goal to appear in the U.S. News and World Report scorecard, but it is quite another when those students are not passing the AP exams. I am troubled by that.*

• *Students cannot talk about a future until they can see one. And they can see a future when they are empowered in the classroom, when they feel a sense of self-actualization with academic progress, when their learned self-fulfilling prophecy of failure is no longer perpetuated, when the stereotype threat is lifted, and when the teacher has the unwavering commitment and belief in the ability of all her students.*

Don't miss Jody Zepp's Q&A with early-career teachers about best practices and more, and watch her convention speech, at [marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL](http://marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL).



## CALENDAR

### Cruise with MSEA—Retired

Mark your calendar for MSEA's 2015 cruise to New England and Canada, October 1–9. You can share MSEA's exclusive rate with family and friends! Rates start at \$800 per person. Act now to save! Learn more at [marylandeducators.org/2015Cruise](http://marylandeducators.org/2015Cruise).



### Honoring Dr. King

MSEA celebrates Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 17 at the 30th annual breakfast and awards presentation. This year, the theme is The Importance of Recruiting and Retaining Minority Educators. Learn more and register to attend at [marylandeducators.org/MLK2015](http://marylandeducators.org/MLK2015).



## MSEA EDUCATION POLICY FORUM

State education policy is what drives everything from educators' salaries to class size, evaluations, and planning time. It flows from the hallways, offices, and chambers of the House and Senate, through county councils and boards of education directly to you, your school, and your students. MSEA's job is to make sure that the voices of educators and experts are a part of these policy debates so that elected officials can make the very best decisions.

It's serious business, and that's why MSEA is taking a leading role in informing public education policy before the start of the new General Assembly in January. On December 15, we're hosting Building the Future of Public Education, a first-ever forum facilitated by the association and featuring nationally known and widely respected education experts, educators, and state leaders. Here are just a few:

**Linda Darling-Hammond**  
*Stanford University*

**Brit Kirwan** *Chancellor, University System of Maryland*  
**Sean McComb** *National Teacher of the Year*

**Morgan Polikoff** *Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California*

**Bernie Sadusky** *Executive Director, Maryland Association of Community Colleges*

**José Vilson** *Author, New York City Educator, Center for Teaching Quality*

**Jody Zepp** *Maryland Teacher of the Year*

We'll be convening panels throughout the day on key issues—funding, Common Core, the role of teachers, and more—facing Maryland educators, students, and families. The panels will be moderated by top reporters with the *Washington Post*, *Baltimore Sun*, and other leading media outlets.

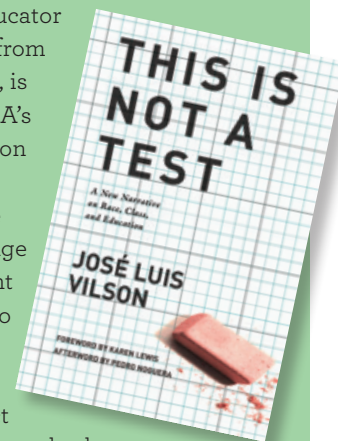
See a complete agenda and learn more about the event and the panelists at [marylandeducators.org/BuildingtheFuture](http://marylandeducators.org/BuildingtheFuture).

## Educator • Blogger • Author

José Vilson, the media's go-to educator for no holds-barred commentary from the frontlines of public education, is one of the guest panelists at MSEA's first-ever education policy forum on December 15.

"Right now is the perfect time for us as teachers to work as change agents, as the voice for the present and future generation of folks who want to lead as practitioners and experts in their field.

"It's not enough to just respect us and admire us from afar; we must also be willing to listen to the voices, understand the complexity, and assure that teachers serve as gurus not just for our children, but for education as a whole."



More content, videos, and resources at [marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL](http://marylandeducators.org/DigitalAL)

### ESP Professional Development

Get ready for MSEA's annual event for ESP members on February 21st. You'll find communications and assertiveness training, information and tips about educators' legal rights and responsibilities, and much more. Get the details and register at [marylandeducators.org/ESPPD2015](http://marylandeducators.org/ESPPD2015).



### Welcome 2015 General Assembly!

MSEA leaders and members welcome first-timers and returning legislators to Annapolis on January 14th at MSEA's annual Open House. With so many new faces, it's sure to be a valuable meet 'n' greet as we roll out our 2015 pro-public education agenda.



# WASHINGTON COUNTY ENGAGES & ORGANIZES

## WHAT THREE THINGS WOULD HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB BETTER?

In a new training program designed to increase membership and activism, five members of the Washington County Teachers Association are pivoting from answering that question themselves to asking that question to members in their building. They're using MSEA's Innovative Engagement and Organizing Grant to learn more about their colleagues—discovering how they feel about their association, and how the association can serve them better. It's a basic question, but one not often asked by administrators or until now, their association.

## NOT TRAINING AS USUAL

Using tools and techniques that blend traditional union organizing with data-driven approaches and technology, Washington County's newest organizers are becoming experts. They're learning why and how one-on-one conversations with both members and non-members are the most powerful organizing tool.

"This is definitely not training as usual," said Jessica Barthman, one of the five. "We're learning in an environment that is exciting, multimedia, and inspirational. We think this is the type of training every member should get.

"I understand now—better than ever before—the meaning and purpose of our union, the importance of building our membership," Barthman added, "and what we need to do to be influential and successful educators who are as committed to our profession as we are to our students."

## PREPPING FOR ON-SITE VISITS

Before their next meeting, where they'll plan an issue-focused campaign to organize members, the five will join reps in schools across the county to test their skills at one-on-one meet-ups. By the time they share the results of their program in May at a statewide meeting of MSEA leaders and staff, the local expects to have taken the pulse of its members, found new activists and leaders, and discovered how better to serve them all.

In the next *ActionLine*, read how members of the Prince George's County Educators' Association are organizing veteran and early-career teachers to better confront local challenges.



MSEA President Betty Weller and Vice President Cheryl Bost with Howard County members on ESP Day.

Members gathered on November 19 at MSEA's headquarters in Annapolis to celebrate Education Support Professionals Day and the many contributions of Maryland's ESP.

Respect Today and Every Day—this year's ESP theme—weaves its way from the November celebration to MSEA's annual professional development day on February 21. "We believe that professional development should be required throughout the career of education support professionals so they can gain and improve the skills vital to their positions and job performance," said MSEA President Betty Weller.

"MSEA's ESP Professional Development Day is designed to provide those skills to help ESP members build stronger locals and school and community partnerships, organize members, and move towards creating professional development activities at the local level," Weller added.

Attend MSEA's full-day conference for education support professionals, and be empowered on the job and in the association as you gain new leadership and advocacy skills. Learn more and register at [marylandeducators.org/ESPPD2015](http://marylandeducators.org/ESPPD2015).



## Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It was nearly 30 years ago that MSEA celebrated the first Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Breakfast and Minority Recognition Awards. Since then, thousands of educators have celebrated with MSEA the legacy of Dr. King's activism and commitment to nonviolent protest.

Dr. King was the great-grandson, grandson, and son of Baptist ministers. His father was pastor at the now-historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. Before completing his undergraduate studies at Morehouse College, the young King was already developing his ideas around Christianity and progressive social change. He earned his doctorate in systemic theology from Boston University in 1955 and emerged an intellectual force, having synthesized his deep understanding of theology and philosophy into a world view that he expressed with exceptional clarity and resonance.

Dr. King's nonviolent campaign against poverty and racial inequality was inspired by his faith and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian spiritual and political leader. Gandhi practiced Satyagraha—

resistance through mass non-violent civil disobedience—and in the turbulent atmosphere of race relations in the 1950s and '60s, Dr. King's peaceful organizing, acts of civil disobedience, protests, and marches became the unimpeachable backdrops to his powerful message.



Dr. King explained his understanding of nonviolent protest to a group of journalists in a Meet the Press interview on April 17, 1960. He had been arrested five times by then, and his home and church had been bombed. He had not yet written his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), nor had he won the Nobel Peace Prize (1964), been a driving

force in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) and Poor People's Campaign (1968), or galvanized the 25,000 defiant marchers in Selma, Alabama (1965) whose protest led directly to President Lyndon Johnson's introduction of the Civil

Rights Act (1965). He was only 31, his philosophy of nonviolent resistance deeply rooted, and his hopes for change poetic.

"The non-violent way doesn't bring about miracles in a few hours, in a few days, or in a few years for that matter," Dr. King explained. "I think at first, the first reaction of the oppressor when the oppressed

people rise up against the system of injustice is an attitude of bitterness.

"But I do believe that if the non-violent resisters continue to follow the way of non-violence, they eventually get over to the hearts and souls of the former oppressors. And I think it eventually brings about that redemption that we dream of.

"Of course, I can't estimate how many people we've touched so far. This is impossible because it's an inner process. But I'm sure something is stirring in the minds and the souls of people. And I'm sure that many people are thinking anew on this basic problem of human relations."

On January 17, MSEA pivots from Dr. King's legacy of equity and inclusion to study the importance of recruiting and retaining minority educators. Members and special guests will also honor minority achievement by a Marylander in community involvement.

You can find past winners of MSEA's MLK, Jr. awards at [marylandeducators.org/MLKAwards](http://marylandeducators.org/MLKAwards).

Would you like to attend this year's event? Learn more and register to attend at [marylandeducators.org/MLK2015](http://marylandeducators.org/MLK2015).

## Keith Roberts

Choir Director  
Crisfield High School & Academy  
Somerset County

### 1 GPS RUNNING WATCH

I started running as a hobby about six months ago and that led to biking and swimming. I use my GPS watch to track my runs and bike rides. Exercise is a great way to release tension from the school day and just be with myself for a while. I just ran my first half-marathon.

### 2 BILLY JOEL BOOK

When I really want to unwind, I will break out this book, or others like it, and sing through some tunes. It gives me a chance to relax and enjoy myself.

### 3 CHORAL FOLDER

This is the folder I use when I go to rehearse with a community chorus in my area. My philosophy is that since I am usually up in front of the choir, it can be very easy to forget what it's like to be in the choir. Plus, I get the great opportunity to actually perform without feeling like the pressure of the world is on my shoulders!

### 4 KEYBOARD

As a choir director, I use this every day in the classroom. I want my

students to sing the very best that they can. We work hard learning how the music on the page transfers to the pitches and rhythms that they produce.

### 5 APRIL/FAMILY/FRIENDS

No one goes it alone. I don't know what I would do without the support I get from my girlfriend April (an elementary teacher in Charles County), my family, or my friends. It could be simply listening as I share my day, or something as great as driving for 3+ hours to see me.

### 6 STACK OF CHORUS MATERIALS

I am constantly learning and trying to become a better teacher than I was the day before. I try to learn as much as I can from books about choral conducting, good habits for choral rehearsals, choral warm-ups, and sight-singing.



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PHOTO: BRION MCCARTHER PHOTOGRAPHY © 2014

## INSIDE MSEA WITH DAVID HELFMAN



When I came here in 2005, we had 62,600 members. Today, we're 10,000 members larger. Our average instructional salary was \$54,300; today it's \$15,000 higher.

But strength is not only about adding members or negotiating increases. It's about deepening relationships, being responsive to member needs, and understanding the importance of collaboration.

Many of our locals excel at this work. The Montgomery County Education Association has been a national leader in Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), the rigorous, educator-led evaluation and support system. Over the last several years, locals in Prince George's, Howard, and Baltimore counties have been building their own PAR programs, because they know that when educators can work collaboratively as empowered leaders of their profession, student success will follow.

Why focus on these initiatives? Because not one of the market-based reform strategies has successfully improved student performance—not vouchers, unregulated charters, merit pay, eliminating tenure, value-added testing, or making employment decisions based on high-stakes student tests.

What has worked? According to a recent study by Rutgers University's Saul Rubinstein and John McCarthy, the quality of union-management partnerships focused on issues such as the use of student performance data, curriculum development, cross-subject and cross-grade integration, professional development, and mentoring is directly related to and a significant predictor of improvement in student performance. And that's after taking poverty and school type into account.

Great, collaborative labor-management partnerships are underway in many locals in Maryland, partnerships only possible if the union is both strong and engaged. These initiatives support traditional union work to improve bread-and-butter conditions. Are there opportunities in your local to step up and join these efforts?

## A WORD FROM MSEA'S LEGAL TEAM

### What Can I Do? Intervening in Fights



All public school employees have a legal obligation to create and maintain a safe learning environment. To protect students, educators, and the learning environment, the Annotated Code of Maryland gives all public school employees the authority to intervene in fights or physical struggles between students or others on school property. If you encounter a fight, you should not walk away even if another staff member is present.

Here are three things you can do to keep students, fellow educators, and visitors out of harm's way when confronting a fight at school:

- 1 Issue a verbal command to stop.
- 2 Send someone for help.
- 3 Control the crowd.

Taking these steps—one or all of them—will cover your employee obligation to maintain a safe learning environment. Under no circumstances, however, are you obligated to put yourself in danger.

The decision to physically intervene depends on the situation, the size of students, and your own physical health. No matter what, remember that you must do something, even if it is to call or send someone for help.

# TOO MANY TESTS!



**“OUR SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO MERE TEST PREP FACTORIES... ”**

An illustration on the left side of the page shows three children walking away from the viewer. The child in the foreground has a large green backpack and is wearing a blue shirt and orange shoes. The child in the middle has a pink backpack and is wearing a pink shirt and blue shoes. The child in the background has a dark brown head and is wearing a dark blue shirt. The background is a textured teal color with stylized clouds in shades of blue and grey, and a yellow sun partially obscured by a cloud.

## **KINDERGARTENERS ARE THE LATEST VICTIMS OF OUT-OF-CONTROL TESTING IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

“The testing fixation has reached the point of insanity,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia, in response to the lack of common-sense flexibility on high stakes testing in the U.S. Department of Education’s latest guidance on NCLB waivers.

“Whatever valuable information testing mandates provided,” Eskelsen Garcia added, “has been completely overshadowed by the enormous collateral damage inflicted on too many students. Our schools have been reduced to mere test prep factories and we are too often ignoring student learning and opportunity in America.”

The insistence of the federal government on using test scores not only to evaluate teachers, but to drive America’s education policy, flies in the face of a national wave of testing fatigue that has educators, parents, and students incredulous and baffled.



## **BUT THAT'S NOT THE ONLY PROBLEM,**

according to Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford University professor and director of the university's Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. The most successful school systems in the world test rarely or, in the case of Finland, never.

Darling-Hammond places the problem squarely in the hands of policymakers unwilling to acknowledge what educators already know—access and equity for students, and professional development support for teachers, will make a far greater impact on student achievement than manic levels of testing. Darling-Hammond will be visiting Annapolis this month as a guest panelist at MSEA's first-ever Education Policy Forum.

"Many politicians talk of international test score comparisons, [but] they rarely talk about what high-performing countries like Finland, Singapore, and Canada actually do," said Darling-Hammond in a speech at the 2011 Save Our Schools March. "They ensure that all children have housing, health care, and food security. They fund their schools equitably. They invest in the highest-quality preparation, mentoring, and professional development for teachers and school leaders, completely at government expense. They organize their curriculum around problem-solving and critical thinking skills."

A recent *Baltimore Sun* cover story on testing found that Maryland students are far from immune to the problem of over-testing. The *Sun* analysis found that Maryland 8th graders spend an average of 28 hours—2.6% of the year—taking mandated tests. In Anne Arundel County, 8th graders spend an incredible 46 hours testing.

Unfortunately, this testing obsession has now reached arguably the most excited learners in the building. This year, eager,

excited five-year-olds barely had time to find their cubbies before they were asked to perform a series of skills, usually one-on-one with a teacher with whom they had not yet had a chance to bond.

At MSEA's annual convention in October, delegates voted overwhelmingly to urge the suspension of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). Soon after, President Betty Weller emailed kindergarten teachers in every local association. "We wanted to hear directly from classroom educators about the test," Weller said, "What was it like for teacher and student? How did it affect instructional time? What kind of support did you have? How was the technology? How long did it take?"

"We knew it was an issue, but the survey responses and the comments that accompanied them clearly tell the whole story."

Some say the kindergarten testing boom is fueled by the dangled carrot of funding from Race to the Top and ESEA grants like the \$5 million Grant for Enhanced Assessment Instrument that MSDE received in 2013.

"Building on a highly successful existing effort already underway between Maryland and Ohio," Maryland's project description says, "the proposed enhanced system greatly expands the use of technology for more authentic and compelling items and tasks; efficiency of administration, scoring, and reporting; and increased student motivation.

"The end result will be a more reliable and valid system that provides timely, actionable data to identify individual student and program strengths and weaknesses, drive instruction, support curricular reform, and inform all stakeholders in the system about the effectiveness of preschool and kindergarten programs."

That's not exactly what MSEA heard from educators giving the test. "There are always glitches," Weller said. "We all know that. But

# ABOUT THAT KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT...

In a recent survey, MSEA asked kindergarten teachers across the state about their experience delivering the new Kindergarten Readiness Assessments.

## HOW MUCH TIME HAVE YOU SPENT PER STUDENT ADMINISTERING THE KRA?



30-45 minutes



60 minutes

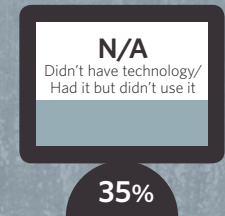
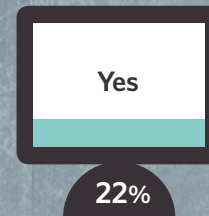
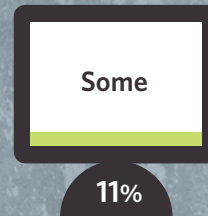
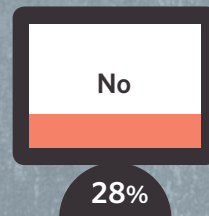


60-120 minutes

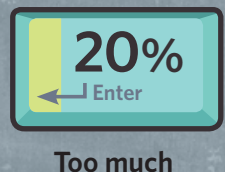
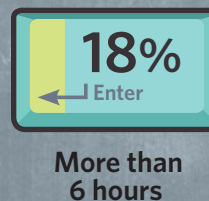
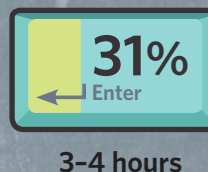
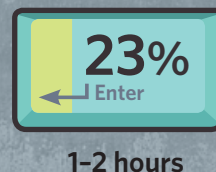


Too much!

## ARE YOUR STUDENTS ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND USE THE TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED TO TAKE THE KRA?



## HOW MUCH TIME HAVE YOU SPENT ENTERING INFORMATION AND RUNNING RECORDS FOR THE KRA?



## HAVE YOU RECEIVED MEANINGFUL DATA FROM THE KRA?



No



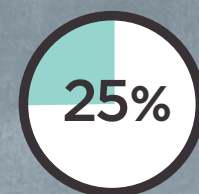
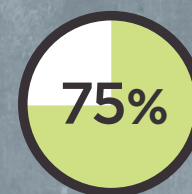
A little




Some



Yes



## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED TECHNOLOGY PROBLEMS ADMINISTERING THE KRA?



once again, educators and students had to spend valuable instructional time struggling to implement a poorly rolled out and ill-conceived notion. The tsunami continues.”

**Here’s what one teacher had to say about professional development to support the test:**

“The technology wasn’t fully loaded on my device and neither I nor our school tech person had any training on setting it up. The required training dates at the beginning of the school year conflicted with other trainings so we had to set aside our own time to access the training we missed. We were lucky to have our principal’s empathy, but it was frustrating that time was taken away from my classroom preparation!”  
—Frederick County

**Many of the comments were about the “actionable data to identify individual student and program strengths and weaknesses:”**

“Sometimes the kids have no idea what they are being asked to do, and, because we have to stick to the script, we can’t really find out what our kids really do know. How helpful is this data to the teachers when it’s presented that way? I know if I was really teaching, coaching our beginning writers, working with groups of readers, working in math groups, I would know my kids as learners. I would be able to tell you who can segment words. All I know now is that they are pretty resilient little people who have put up with a lot.” —Montgomery County

**And on perhaps the most often mentioned issue—the time to administer the KRA and record data:**

“I began the KRA testing process with a positive attitude, but I now feel otherwise. The amount of time that has been lost from reading groups, small math groups, and every day whole group lessons is a huge concern. Giving the KRA to the students was not the challenge. The challenge came when I realized how much time had been taken away from my students’ opportunities at the beginning of their kinder-

garten journey.” —Worcester County

“Entering data took 18 hours of tedious work hampered by many site malfunctions. The amount of painstaking data entry took away planning time and had an adverse impact on my educational program.” —Montgomery County

“Over and over again during training, this test was compared to MSA. However, there is one key difference. During MSA administration, teachers did not administer it one-on-one and did not have to write sub plans, nor did they have to hand enter each score into the computer after the test was over.” —Anonymous

MSEA is sharing the results of the KRA survey with MSDE this month, with the goal of the department listening to educators and modifying its course.

The use of PARCC testing as a graduation requirement was another of the high-profile issues discussed by delegates in October. Over the summer, the State Board of Education voted to replace the 10th grade English and Algebra I HSAs (which had been graduation requirements since 2009) with PARCC tests. Educators across the state immediately became concerned. How could high school students be held accountable for a test which had not been validated and for which no data existed to inform the establishment of appropriate cut scores?

At the RA, delegates voted unanimously to support removing the tests as a graduation requirement until MSDE can demonstrate that the tests can be successfully administered statewide and until there has been time to assess the test’s validity in practice. Right after the RA, Weller sent a letter to the State Board and Superintendent Lowery urging delaying the use of the test as a graduation requirement. MSEA was joined in opposition by superintendents and school boards, and in November, MSDE backed down. Students will take the tests for the next two school years, but not until



the 2016-2017 school year will passing results be required for graduation.

“Last year, the General Assembly made a wise decision to delay using assessments to make personnel decisions for teachers and principals,” said Weller. “Our students deserve the same consideration. The high school assessments are not yet reliable on any level and experience-informed cut scores cannot be established. As in all reform, fair, equitable, and thoughtful implementation is key.”

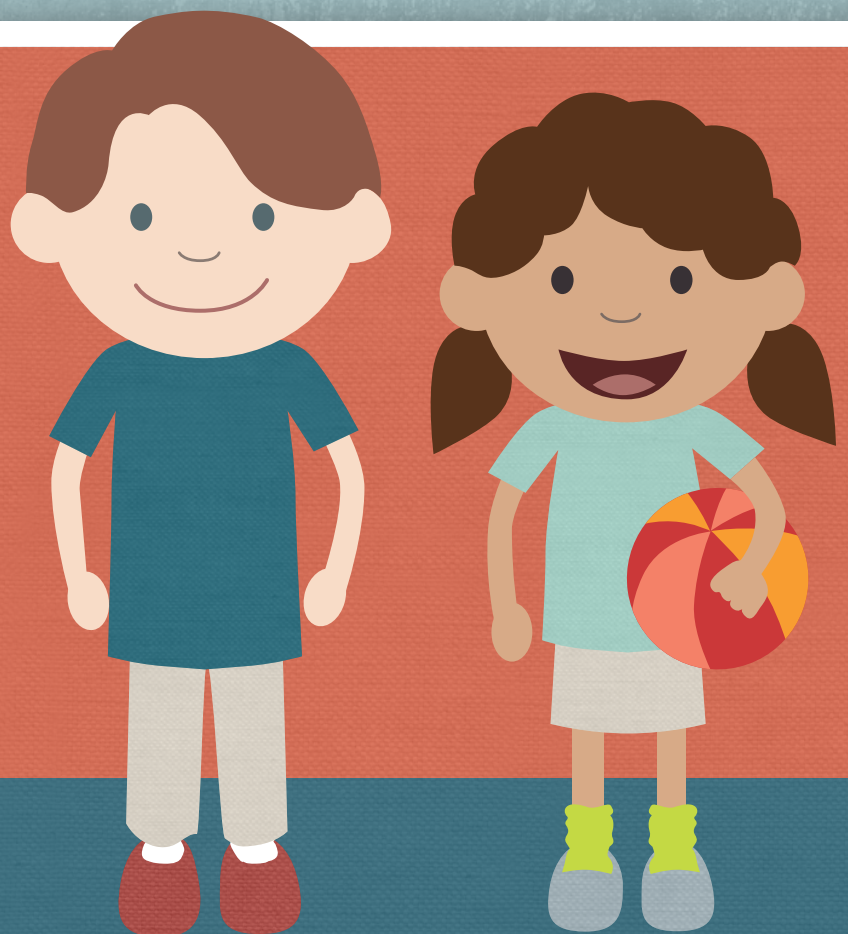
MSEA is taking the lead by pushing back on testing mania. Whether the issue is working to protect educators and students from testing overload, or the formidable presence of Weller and Vice President Cheryl Bost on state committees and workgroups, educators must continue to flag unfair and inequitable testing issues and prevent the use of invalid and unproven test scores. Federal policy has made for a challenging environment, but MSEA will continue to be the strongest voice for common sense assessments, whether it’s in ESEA waiver conversations or sharing the concerns and reservations that educators have about how testing affects their students.

“This is a dynamic process,” Weller said, “and we must continue to learn from the mistakes in implementation of the reforms of the last several years. Turning the tide on over-testing is more than successfully pushing back on the inappropriate use of test scores in educator evaluations, the use of PARCC as a graduation requirement, or the detrimental effects of the KRA.

“Students deserve an education that is more than test prep, and our committed advocacy as educators must break this destructive cycle of over-testing. Educators, parents, and students must all unite and put the focus back on great teaching rather than gratuitous testing.”

## ACTIVIST GROUPS LIKE FAIRTEST

are pursuing an indefinite national moratorium on testing until assessment and accountability programs are thoughtfully considered and created. This would remove teachers and students from the dispiriting culture of failure and punishment. In high-performing countries, assessments—like the kind many local associations are now including in the student growth portion of their evaluation models—are routine as a demonstration of student and teacher accomplishment.



# Reba Miller

School Counselor  
MacArthur Middle School  
Anne Arundel County  
Public Schools

*Reba Miller began her professional career with the Department of Defense as a civilian, where she served as a logistician, group services program manager, and employee development officer. She later earned a degree in school counseling and in 2004, she began a second career with the Anne Arundel County Public Schools.*

I tell students to take my hand—as partners we can achieve your academic and personal goals. I am very passionate about offering this to my students because I have seen the rewards.

I believe that the school counselor is also the number one advocate for their family, the school staff that serves them, and the community that supports them. We facilitate, mediate, and negotiate many of the situations that deeply affect the student, whether it is college applications, career opportunities, social services concerns, or encounters with law enforcement.

Good educators make a positive difference in students' lives. We all have our stories, and one about a student named Lori moves me the most. She was the victim of bullying and a fight left her face badly bruised. She asked if she could stay with me during lunch because she was embarrassed to be seen. I couldn't be there every day, so Lori's English teacher said she could join her on the condition that they read and discuss a book together. Lori developed a passion for books and it continued throughout her education.

I am passionate about advocating for students and the rest of my team. I want to make a positive difference in a young person's life. When we work on building positive relationships with students, society wins. This is my passion—it is why I do what I do.



**When we work  
on building  
positive  
relationships  
with students,  
society wins.**

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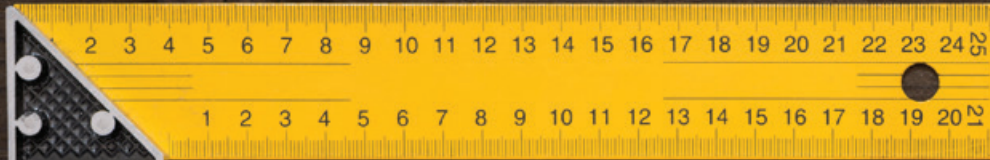


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