

PEDAGOGY  
REFLECTION

RAISING  
OUR RUTHIE

YOUR HEALTH  
& PRIVACY

# ACTIONLINE

The Magazine of the Maryland State Education Association

Volume 16 Issue 5

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Q&A: "SOMEONE HAS TO TAKE A STAND."

How we won in Annapolis



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**SPECIAL FEATURE ▶  
Q&A: "SOMEONE HAS TO TAKE A STAND."  
HOW WE WON IN ANNAPOLIS**

PJ Friend and Kathryn Henn are just two of the kindergarten teachers who took on Maryland's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. Read what it means to these educators to change a state mandated test that more than 85% of their colleagues said did not help them improve instruction.

*Use our Vote the Issues guide to follow candidates on the education issues that affect you and your students.*

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## A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK

they know what's best for schools without asking the educators who are on the front lines.

It needs to stop. One way that it can is by making sure that policymakers hear directly from educators like you. When that happens, we can be incredibly successful—whether it's the educators in Anne Arundel and Howard counties speaking up before their county councils and boards of education about the importance of adequately funding public schools (see pages 4-5) or the kindergarten teachers who came to Annapolis to lead the charge in reducing the amount of standardized testing for our youngest students (see pages 14-15).

It's no secret that our schools are better when your voice is heard.

Think of all the misguided policies that could have been avoided if policymakers had simply talked with educators first. How many resources could have been directed where they were most needed? How much of our time could have been better spent? How much of a stronger and safer environment for our students could we have created?

Here's the thing: we can't get from the policies that we have to the policies that we want without your voice. And the stronger and more united our voices are, the quicker we can get there. I see momentum building and changes happening at the state and local level. I know we can create a movement for the best possible schools that are best able to serve the needs of all our students. But we can't without your voice.

I'm inspired by the educators highlighted in this issue, who made the time to raise their voice and make a difference. I hope you are too, and that you'll take action on the issues that matter to you. Whatever they are, we're here to support and empower you and make sure your voice is heard where and when it matters.

  
MSEA PRESIDENT



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

# LOCALS STAND UP FOR FUNDING AND



## Howard County rallies the community

"You know, we spend so many hours in our schools teaching our children how important it is to be an upstander and not a bystander in the face of bullying," said parent Deeba Jafri, at a May 12 meeting of the Howard County Board of Education.

"That's what we're all telling you tonight. We the parents are here being upstanders for our teachers."

Jafri was just one of the community members outraged over the Howard County Board of Education's approach to the proposed school system budget. She's part of a group that's growing distrustful of the board's decision-making—and demanding action to make things right.

For the past nine months, the Howard County Education Association (HCEA), in partnership with PATH—People Acting Together in Howard, a network of local faith and community-based organizations—worked hard to gain that kind of community consciousness about public education. At 140 HCEA/PATH community meetings across the county, educators, community stakeholders, and members of PATH's congregations discussed public education and collaborated to develop a formal agenda that reflected what county residents wanted to see in their schools.

The movement has grown powerful enough to change the board's makeup to one that is more pro-educator and more pro-student. And it showed at

the ballot box in April. HCEA worked hard this primary season to oust three sitting board members and get their endorsed pro-public education candidates—two parents and one educator—through to the general election. The three HCEA-endorsed candidates emerged as the top vote-getters with just one incumbent making it onto the November ballot.

It was clear: the community gets the importance of quality schools and quality educators leading them. The HCEA/PATH agenda addresses testing, special education, class size and staffing, equity, nutrition, and access to after school student enrichment. So when the board balked at funding negotiated salary increases for educators—increases funded in

the county executive's budget—hundreds of HCEA members and public education community allies, including the police and fire unions, had plenty to say.

On May 12, they said it loud and clear. At a standing-room only board meeting, parents like Jafri, and educators like Ben Schmitt, spoke up to tell the board to keep its word to HCEA members and find a way to honor agreements with educators and promises to students.

"I'm not sure who said it, but the saying goes 'If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.' It was time to stand up. Our contracts were negotiated and signed in good faith—a solemn promise on both sides," Schmitt said. "And the fact that the board is trying to go back on that is unacceptable.

# FAIRNESS

Howard County members and community supporters at the May 12 rally.



Not only is this my paycheck, it's my tax dollars that aren't being used wisely and efficiently. Enough is enough."

## Members raise Anne Arundel

In Anne Arundel County, more than 650 people showed up at a series of rallies protesting the county executive's proposed education budget.

"It didn't bring our steps up to par, adequately address class size issues, or provide the resources to settle our contract or to meet our RAISE Anne Arundel community goals," said Richard Benfer, president of the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County.

"We launched our RAISE Anne Arundel campaign to highlight just what it means to support public education.

"We used email, phone banks,

social media, and rallies to raise our voices. Our email campaign filled the county exec's inbox with stories from around the county," said Benfer. "We brought out record numbers of educators, community members, and students to town halls and the budget hearings. And we made a difference. The county executive included a step increment for all board of education employees.

"This is a huge win for us, but the fight is far from over." Between regular meetings with county council members and working with the Public School Labor Relations Board on determining a possible bargaining impasse, TAAAC is building on the member-led momentum and continuing the fight for adequate and equitable education funding in Anne Arundel.



Anne Arundel County mobilizes to fight for funding.

# HACKING "OUR EXCEPTIONAL RUTHIE" IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY



After Samir Paul's first year of teaching at Montgomery Blair High School, AP computer science scores reached a five-year high. In 2015, 84% of his AP students received a top score of 5. And those students make up a promising student demographic for computer science—his magnet class is almost 40% young women and his AP class is over half African American and Latino.

This year, Paul received a \$500 MSEA Community Grant to support his school's first official hackathon, an all-day event where student teams put finishing touches on the mobile apps they've been working on all spring.

"Our project shows how learning computer science can impact real-world problems and strengthen the connection between school and life," Paul said. "Our goal was to finish great projects and to create a memorable experience for students that fuels their further excitement, creativity, and investment."



Ruthie's best friends—South Penn Elementary School Advanced Enrichment Program students.

You'd hardly know she was there. She's quiet, gentle, and very well-mannered with a good hand-shake that's sure to impress. Her attendance is perfect. Everyone wants face time with Ruthie.

Ruthie is the Labrador Retriever mix puppy in residence at the South Penn Elementary School in Allegany County. She's the heart and soul of Susan Sommers's Canine Companions for Independence (CCI)\* puppy-raising project, funded in part by a \$500 MSEA Community Grant.

Sommers, a pre-K teaching assistant, is a veteran of the program. She's raised 12 puppies that moved on to professional training by CCI before becoming full-fledged assistance dogs

for people with disabilities. She brought Ruthie to the school as a special project for the Academic Enrichment Program's third, fourth, and fifth grade students who began their journey in September by spending time with Ruthie and learning about equipment, commands, and proper service dog etiquette.

The program has legs (so to speak), with far-reaching lessons that evolved into public speaking, creating PowerPoints and posters, and more as the students visited every class with a Ruthie-inspired program.

"Having Ruthie here is teaching our whole community about service dogs and how important they are," said AEP 5th grader Allison Schultz.



South Penn's Susan Sommers.

Not the least of the lessons learned by the school community will be generosity of spirit. When it's time to say goodbye to their puppy Ruthie, every child in the school will be reminded of the gift of giving. "They will know," Sommers said, "that our exceptional Ruthie will enhance the life of an exceptional person."

*\*CCI is a non-profit that provides highly trained assistance dogs to people with disabilities.*

## ST. MARY'S AND WICOMICO COUNTIES TAKING CHARGE

Membership-building activists at the Education Association of St. Mary's County (EASMC) have spent the past year making connections they need to grow their union. This year, they used an MSEA Innovative Engagement and Organizing (IEO) Grant to create the Voice-Raiser program.

With a focus on energizing the vital members who carry the flag for the association—school-based building representatives—EASMC's Voice-Raiser offers points to building reps for activities ranging from committee work, to speaking out at public meetings, to sharing Facebook posts. "We're developing association leaders and advocates," said Diana Johnson, EASMC's membership committee chair. "When we need to raise our voice during budget time or contract negotiations, our members will be ready."

The program adds up to big wins for building reps and their members. Point totals of up to 75 per association-related activity score wins like royal-blue branded EASMC polo shirts, hoodies, fleece jackets, duffle bags, and more. Each win for a building rep includes a second prize to share

with a member—an important opportunity to share EASMC's agenda.

"EASMC is focused on building grassroots public education activism among our members. We want every member to be a voice in the community for the value of public education and the investment it requires from the community," said Dawn Pipkin, EASMC vice president.

The grant funded new training manuals for each rep with everything they need to be the best advocate for their members. "It's empowered me to address member concerns and interests quickly, effectively, and at the first level—my building," said building rep Pat Gronert. "The end result has been peace of mind for our members and better relationships with our administrators."

On the Eastern Shore, the Wicomico County Education Association is making a big comeback. "We faced possible disaffiliation from MSEA and NEA in 2013 when a small group of disgruntled members decided they could go it alone," member Stephanie Lewis told *ActionLine* in 2014.



Katherine Lucas, a fifth grade teacher and EASMC member, Mechanicsville Elementary, St. Mary's County.

They used a 2014-15 MSEA IEO Grant to make early progress. "Our members understand what a healthy association looks and feels like now. Newly trained building reps are joining committees, like the Less Testing, More Learning task force and our negotiations team, which had 14 members this year," said Gary Hammer, president of WCEA.

"Now, we're digging deeper," said Lewis. WCEA's 2015-16 IEO grant focused on three areas: engaging education support professionals, recruiting and retaining new teachers, and empowering all members through a clear understanding of their negotiated contract.

"In our 2014 building rep trainings, we found the smaller the group, the better the conversation," Lewis said. "This year, we continued our outreach to

education support professional members and found new ways to meet and connect, like Saturday morning breakfasts and meetings at our offices in Salisbury.

"Through WCEA's new teacher initiative, 90% of new teachers enrolled before school started and we'll be following up with every one of them to ask about their first year."

At a series of dinners, members learned the key components of their contracts—planning time, grievance procedures, salary schedules, and more. "Armed with a clear understanding of their contract, members are more empowered and confident," said Lewis.

"Revitalizing our association and growing membership have been the focus of WCEA leadership for the last two years and it shows," Lewis added.

### CALENDAR



## EDUCATORS LEAD

MSEA SUMMER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE  
JULY 17-20, 2016 SALISBURY UNIVERSITY

### July 17-20 | Summer Leadership Conference: Educators Lead

MSEA's 2016 Summer Leadership Conference builds educator leaders who can fight for change and progress in their buildings, professions, and counties. Eight different schools focus on professional issues like differentiation and over-testing, conflict resolution, empowering education support professionals, advocating for workplace rights, and more.

# MSEA ELECTS NEA DIRECTORS

MSEA members this spring elected Paul Lemle and Jacob Zebley to join Maryland's team on the NEA Board of Directors, which lobbies Congress on national education issues. Lemle and Zebley will also serve on the 17-member MSEA Board of Directors.

**PAUL LEMLE** | HOWARD COUNTY



I'm really excited to bring what I've learned from the effort to build relationships and power

at the local level. MSEA and NEA have resources locals need, and locals have on-the-ground knowledge our state and national affiliates need.

We do a great deal of community and internal organizing at HCEA, and MSEA has directly supported us with staff and grant money. I'll be helping other locals access this kind of support,

which we use to work with religious congregations and other unions.

We can create strong member confidence in MSEA and NEA. I'll be working to help members get involved, because NEA provides such great opportunities for educational and union leadership.

**JACOB ZEBLEY** | CECIL COUNTY



I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve Maryland educators as one of

your next NEA directors.

Over the years MSEA and NEA have stood on the front lines of issues challenging educators across our state and nation. Today is no exception as we stand strong in the face of a whirlwind of state and federal legislation targeting students and educators alike.

As an NEA director, I will help guide our state affiliate in assisting locals with their organizing efforts to advocate for education funding, educator rights, and electing pro-public education candidates. I will lead the charge to protect the rights of students and educators in the LGBTQ community because

every student and staff member should feel safe in their school. I will continue to prioritize minority affairs in association work because our schools deserve a diverse workforce that represents the communities they serve.

I will support NEA's renewed efforts to provide assistance to early career educators because I understand the need for our association to provide the necessary strategies and supports for those new to the education professions. I look forward to serving members over the next three years as an NEA director and working with fellow directors, members, and association leaders across the state.

## CALENDAR



### MSEA's ESP of the Year

Nominations are open! Leadership, advocacy, and community contributions set the bar for MSEA's new ESP of the Year Award. Nominees must be active members of their local association and MSEA.

Selection is based on five criteria, including: a strong professional practice that includes leader-

ship, creativity, and innovation on the job; education advocacy and association in-

volvement; community involvement; personal achievement, goals, and success; and helping to promote public education and the work and contributions of education support professionals.

The deadline for nominations is September 1, 2016. Learn more at [marylandeducators.org/ESP2016Award](http://marylandeducators.org/ESP2016Award)

### MSEA's Educators in Residence

MSEA welcomes its first educators in residence to our Annapolis headquarters June 22. The four educators will unpack the findings of MSEA's VIVA Online Idea Exchange and the seven-member VIVA Writing Collaborative. Keeping young educators in the profession is a long-standing challenge and developing MSEA policy recommendations to support and enhance their experience is one of the group's goals.

They'll be gathering members

to sift through mentoring and induction ideas and programs to find the ones that work the best.

With MSEA's first New Educator Conference set for December 3, educators in residence will also make suggestions for conference content and issues to help MSEA make a meaningful contribution to the early educator experience. *MSEA's 2016 educators in residence are: Robin Beers, Anne Arundel; Kyle De Jan, Prince George's; Henoah Hailu, Montgomery; and Jasmine Stewart, Prince George's.*



# Looking Back

BY SANDRA SKORDALOS

Reflection throughout the year, especially if it's recorded, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our entire school year in a more informative way. Remember to start with the positive: what went right with this school year?

In teaching, reflective practice is essential in driving professional growth. As teachers we set goals, both formally and informally, individually or collaboratively. A new school year brings with it a new set of goals and by the end of that year, there have been many opportunities to reflect on the progress we've made.



Through the process of National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification, I learned the importance and impact of the reflective process on my own professional growth. There are several models one can examine to implement the reflective process, but most involve a cycle that includes: experience, analysis, research of best practices (which may be the result of collaboration with fellow teachers), and re-implementation. This generic cycle could be applied to many of the experiences we have in education: a lesson, SLOs, test scores, a presentation to the faculty, a parent-teacher conference, and many more.

Reflection could and perhaps should occur on a daily basis. As teachers, we have all experienced lessons that we spent hours to develop—perhaps for

a formal observation—and for some we didn't achieve the intended result. To keep my reflection positive, I always start with the question: What went right in the lesson? I follow this by asking: what could I have done better? (I find this to be most effective if I record the responses in the curriculum guide, journal, or even a blog.) After asking these questions, I will generally seek feedback from my peers or do some additional research about the content or skill I sought to teach and, most importantly, revise the lesson for the next group of students.

Perhaps the best—but maybe the most daunting—way to reflect on your instruction is to videotape yourself teaching. I would recommend doing this at least four times a year. An analysis of a videotaped lesson can provide reflection on many aspects of that lesson and your teaching: movement/placement in the classroom, body language, student engagement/disengagement, miscues, questioning technique, student praise, and equity in the classroom (student placement, selection for answering, etc.), as well as the aesthetics of your classroom. I would recom-

mend videotaping both whole group/direct instruction as well as student-centered learning. Reflection on student groups can be helpful in determining group dynamics, clarity of instruction, proper differentiation, and more. Reflecting often on an informal basis makes reflection on the formal aspects of teaching more productive. This can be true for SLOs and standardized test scores. When tasked with creating SLOs, we are forced to consider the needs of our students and blend them with the initiatives of the school in which we teach.

At the time of creation we may not fully understand the students' needs. But by the time we reassess them, we hope to have addressed them. The results provide an opportunity for reflective practice. Did I fully understand their needs? Was I able to address these needs completely? Were there any instructional practices that would have been more successful in achieving these goals? Was I rigorous enough? The same is true when examining standardized test scores. Although these scores challenge our ability to act in a timely manner, they can

still provide direction to inform instruction. Whether or not you have previously taught this content or grade level, the first question you may want to consider for reflection is: did the scores for this group of students match or exceed their potential? What barriers could I have identified and addressed that may have resulted in greater success?

Reflection throughout the year, especially if it's recorded, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our entire school year in a more informative way. Remember to start with the positive: what went right with this school year? Then ask: what can I improve? Afterwards, do a little research, talk to your colleagues, and set new goals for the following year. To teach is to evolve.

*Sandra Skordalos, a member of the Teachers Association of Baltimore County, has been a National Board Certified Teacher in Adolescent and Young Adulthood Social Studies-History since 2000. She has taught in Baltimore County Public Schools for 28 years and is currently the social studies chair at Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts.*

**REFLECTION  
COULD, AND  
PERHAPS SHOULD,  
OCCUR ON A  
DAILY BASIS.**

## INSIDE MSEA WITH DAVID HELFMAN



### When he addressed delegates

at our Spring Representative Assembly (RA) in April, NEA Executive Director John Stocks spoke about reaching educators early in their careers: “Listen carefully as they express their greatest hopes and needs, and then make sure that they understand that it is the union’s

priority to help them succeed.”

In January, *ActionLine* featured seven young activists, working with their local unions to drive positive change in their professional lives and success for their students.

The April issue highlighted how Prince George’s County educators are effectively supporting English language learners as they begin their journeys in our schools. We also featured a story on improving support for teachers in their first two years on the job.

This issue highlights community and member organizing efforts around local school funding, reducing testing for our youngest learners, and involving the community in our efforts to enrich student learning.

Strengthening connections, building community, and supporting member success is reflected in everything we do. It certainly was the basis of the 2016-18 budget adopted at our Spring RA, with new resources dedicated to programs recommended by members in recent surveys, focus groups, and online projects like the VIVA Idea Exchange.

From a new conference in December focused on supporting new educators to dedicated support for grassroots organizing efforts, this budget will keep the association agile and responsive to our members. As we welcome thousands of millennial educators to our ranks in the coming years, we need to make sure that new educators feel excited, supported, and a deep sense of belonging to their union.

As you reflect on this past year and plan for the next, make sure your work site, school, or department is ready to reach out to new educators. Listen to their stories and let them know how important their success is, both to you as a colleague and to our union.

## A WORD FROM MSEA’S LEGAL TEAM

### Who needs to know what when? Your health is your business.

It may be that you lose some of your privacy at work when using your employer’s email, desk, filing cabinet, or classroom, but when it comes to your health and your medical information, your right to privacy is not debatable—yet, it continues to be an issue for Maryland educators. Follow the tips below to keep your health your business.

#### Submitting a medical note

- Submit any medical notes required for sick leave directly to your local board of education ADA/FMLA\* compliance officer, not to your principal.
- A medical note should simply state that you were under a doctor’s care during the relevant time period. If extended leave is involved, your doctor should complete the necessary FMLA forms.
- Documentation needed to verify accommodations should also go directly to the ADA officer, not your principal.

#### What about fitness for duty exams?

When a local board of education directs an employee to a fitness for duty exam, the doctor’s office often requires the employee to sign a broad release that gives the doctor access to your complete medical history and allows the doctor to share that information with your employer. Remember these three things:

1. An overly broad release is likely in violation of the ADA, which prohibits disability-related inquiries that are not job related.
2. An overly broad release also violates the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), which prohibits employers from collecting genetic information, such as family medical history.
3. DO NOT sign an overly broad medical release for your employer. Call your UniServ director—the law strictly regulates an employer’s right to medical information.

If you are pressured or required to release a medical note to your principal or to sign releases giving access to your medical records, your local affiliate and MSEA will take action to protect your right to privacy.

*\*Americans with Disabilities/Family Medical Leave Act*

# Sue Caswell

Instructional Assistant, Media  
Kent County Middle School



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PHOTO: BRION MCCARTHY PHOTOGRAPHY © 2016

**1 MASK** I wore this mask on Fat Tuesday and built my lesson around Mardi Gras. We have a Harry Potter festival in Chestertown and I dress up to encourage the students to participate, too. I've been Daisy from *The Great Gatsby* and the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*!

**2 FAMILY** The pictures are my husband, son and daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, a precocious five-year old who speaks Thai and English. She fills my life with laughs and love.

**3 PHOTOS** Photographs are one way we communicate with each other. We study and discuss iconic photos that have initiated social change.

**4 BOOK CART** There is nothing like a good book—"So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray, Go throw your TV set away, And in its place you can install, A lovely bookshelf on the wall." —Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

**5 SCANNER** Our media collection is entirely computerized and the scanner is our new library card.

**6 PEN** The Promethean Board brings the internet alive for my students when I describe how to do research or when we discuss current events.

## Institutional Racism

Last year after the NEA Representative Assembly (RA) voted on several new business items (NBIs) addressing racism in schools and education policy, educator and blogger José Vilson declared, “Not business as usual at the NEA RA.

“The NEA RA managed to introduce and pass some bills in session that I wouldn’t have thought possible even a few months ago, but the struggle to assure that these bills made it across felt strained in ways,” Vilson wrote. “If we’re really about moving forward, let’s make this a core value of what we do.”

NEA passed a broad, laudable, and well-intentioned business item (NBI B) about institutional racism that was unanimously adopted by delegates. But delegates defeated another item (NBI 94) that would have “discouraged” the use of derogatory/racist images at NEA events and boycott vendors that do use them, which illustrates the difficulty in tackling the topic. Institutional racism is built in to our culture and can’t be ignored, yet we still struggle for an easy opening

to badly needed conversations among individuals.

On EduColor, a collaborative of educators raising their voices for educational equity and justice, Vilson wrote: “Institutional racism does not reside in the walls of a school building. It lives in the beliefs, actions, and policies of people who, despite their best intentions, have been socialized in a deeply unjust society.

Transformational anti-racist work shouldn’t be temporary or optional for anyone.”

In an interview with NEA, Dr. Lenworth Gunther, a history professor and 38-year NEA member who started fighting for racial equality as a student at Columbia University, said, “People tend not to explore what’s beneath the surface of their everyday world. History is about the four-fifths of the iceberg people don’t see.

“Institutional racism ignores the four-fifths of the iceberg that’s underneath the water—but that’s what sinks the Titanic. There’s an unwillingness, on the part of some people, to believe that institutional racism is a reality.”

Dr. Lenworth Gunther and José Vilson agree: institutional racism begins with the individual—issuing broad statements and expecting change is not an answer.

### **GUNTHER DESCRIBES INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AS:**

1. Structured personal racism that transcends the individuals practicing it.
2. Systematic practices introduced by individuals through policies and laws that sanction the mistreatment of a targeted group.
3. Policies established by institutions, but carried out by people.

### **EDUCOLOR OFFERS ITS OWN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOWARDS EQUITY:**

1. Addressing systemic inequities of race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, class, occupation, age, religious belief, language,

and power—and fighting for and building alternative equitable structures for public education.

2. Recognizing that all of us have been socialized in oppressive ways, and thus need to embark upon an ongoing process of un-learning and relearning to address our own privilege and/or internalized oppression as a necessary first step towards dismantling the systemic oppression our individual biases reinforce and reproduce.

3. Amplifying the voices of communities of color to advocate for their own vision for public education.

Racism is deeply complicated, fraught with an ongoing narrative that bears constant analysis and discussion. Educators will do best to dig deep into their own beliefs and social responses to find their ingrained biases and find their

way through them to provide what every student needs and deserves.

*Read EduColor’s complete guiding principles and join the movement at [educolor.org](http://educolor.org).*



# Q&A

Testing has become an overwhelming focus of our schools, despite serious consequences that every educator can tally. Concerns about over-testing students—the time, stress, and lost instructional time—this year motivated thousands of members to take action as legislators debated the issue. Read the member interviews on the following pages to learn more about our success on the issue and the work still ahead with legislators in the Maryland General Assembly.



**“You can grumble all you want in the building, but nothing is ever going to happen unless you step up and do it.”**

## **PJ Friend**

*PJ Friend, a teacher in Montgomery County, didn't like the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. It just didn't make sense. So she took action by joining MSEA's Less Testing, More Learning campaign and testifying in Baltimore and Annapolis. And her activism worked. In the end, the General Assembly voted to make the KRA a sampling test and relieve thousands of students and their educators from weeks of disruption.*

What action did you take about the KRA after the first year it was administered? My local, the Montgomery County Education Association, worked with the board of ed to change the start date so I didn't have to rush into testing.

I used my time to get to know my students and create the classroom structure we need to do our work. They better understood rules and behavior expectations when a sub had to cover for me while I administered the tests.

Did your local district change the delivery of the KRA after the first year? We started the KRA after our county testing for kindergarten was finished. Therefore, we weren't testing all of our kids two times during the same month. We didn't use data or anything else from the KRA in our classroom. It was simply a test we were mandated to give.

How did your colleagues and family react to news that you were speaking out on the issue? My colleagues were very excited about it and the prospect for their voices to be heard on an issue that was important to them. I got a lot of “go get ‘em” types of emails.

My husband wrote this on a social media site: “I'm proud of my wife for taking a stand and working on an issue she felt was hurting the children she was trying to teach more than it was helping them.” My son was interested in hearing about the process as well.

Where did you speak out about the KRA? The first time was to the State Board of Education and then two times to the State Senate. The first time, I was very nervous because I really hadn't done anything like it before.

What kind of support did you have from your local and MSEA? MCEA was very helpful in letting me talk their ear off about the issue and MSEA proofed my testimonies. MSEA lobbyist Amy Maloney was very helpful to me in walking through how the process worked.

How does it feel to have contributed to a change in state policy that reduces the stress of testing on

your students and allows you to do your job better? I am very pleased and happy that the KRA changed. It feels good to know that I don't have to waste hours of time testing every child. Now we can concentrate more on getting to know the kids rather than frustrating them with a meaningless test.

Will you be involved in more efforts to address professional issues? I have done more in the past two years with MCEA than I have in my 15 years teaching in the county. I'm currently the elected kindergarten representative for the MCEA Councils on Teaching and Learning.

I like being able to help teachers on issues they don't feel they have control over. We do have control if we speak up and use the resources of our local association and MSEA. We have to take some ownership of our profession to improve it.

Would you recommend getting involved to your colleagues? Yes, definitely. Getting involved is the only way that they are going to have a voice in it all. You can grumble all you want in the building, but nothing is ever going to happen unless you step up and do it. We worked on this for two years and made a difference.

**“So many teachers are afraid to speak up. I am past that. Someone has to take a stand.”**

## **Kathryn Henn**



*Kathryn Henn is a kindergarten teacher in Carroll County. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment gave her no information that she could use for meeting with parents, grouping students, or planning for their educational needs. The existing county assessment was well-aligned with Common Core curriculum and county benchmarks and thus helpful.*

What was your impression of the intent of the KRA after administering it the first year? The intent is to let parents and teachers know if a child is ready for kindergarten, but that doesn't matter—if they meet the state requirements, age, residency, and medical shots, they HAVE to come to school.

MSEA introduced a moratorium on the KRA in the 2015 General Assembly. Were you disappointed it didn't pass? Yes, I was disappointed but it made me more determined to make a change. I voiced my concerns at a local less testing meeting and by the end of the three meetings most supervisors heard my concerns but said it was out of their hands.

When the opportunity came available to go beyond my local school board, I realized I had to do something—especially if I felt that strongly that the KRA was disruptive to my students and my work with them. When I realized how many teachers

had reached out to MSEA for help, I knew I had to be the voice.

How did you go about preparing and writing your testimony? What kind of support did you have from your local and MSEA? I worked directly with my kindergarten team, and through the Carroll County Education Association (CCEA), emailed every kindergarten teacher in the county and asked for their input. I tried to be a voice for all the teachers and express all of our concerns.

When I was finished writing it I was far beyond the three-minute testimony requirement. I sent it to MSEA and their writers did a fantastic job taking my thoughts and making my testimony a clear and concise three-minute speech.

How would you describe your experience advocating, leading, and speaking up for change? My experience was wonderful! I'm proud I took the chance to speak up. At the Senate hearing, I realized that the Carroll County supervisor of early childhood for my county, who is also my building supervisor, had been asked to testify in favor of the KRA. I knew that she had never given the assessment and had never been in my room in the two years we had given the assessment. I wasn't concerned.

The lobbyist for MSEA reminded us to make our testimony personal. The day I testified, my pregnant daughter-in-law was admitted to the hospital, but I went to Annapolis anyway. I opened my testimony by saying that this bill was so important that I was possibly missing the birth of my grandchild.

So many teachers are afraid to speak up. I am past that. Someone has to take a stand. We teach our children to stand up for what they believe in; teachers have to be heard, too.

Has your impression of how your local and MSEA can help educators affect public education policy changed because of your experience on the KRA? I hear from people all the time that the dues are too high, that the issues MSEA or CCEA support don't always align with their political views, that it doesn't make a difference what we do, that nothing will change.

Well now I can say, we can make a difference, because I did! I was impressed that my local contacted me and asked me to represent kindergarten teachers, locally and at the state level. I was impressed with MSEA. MSEA provided a substitute so I could come to Annapolis, helped with writing the testimony, and walked me through the entire process. It showed me how my dues are spent.

# Gary Brennan

CHAIR, MSEA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE



*Gary Brennan is the chair of MSEA's 63-member Legislative Committee. He's a former president of the Frederick County Teachers Association and currently a member of both the NEA and MSEA boards of directors with a global view of how local, state, and national policy impacts educators, students, schools, and classrooms.*

## What did MSEA set out to accomplish during the 2016 General Assembly session?

We set big goals this year. Our proposal was to push big initiatives around reduced testing, increased funding, and expanded opportunities for students. We know that if we give students and educators more time to learn, provide additional resources to reduce class sizes, build on successful programs including expanding early childhood, and offer wrap-around services communities need, we will be better positioned to meet the needs of students and communities.

## Who chooses what MSEA fights for in the General Assembly?

MSEA has a very member-driven process. Our interests as educators and advocates are far-reaching. We lean on our 63-member MSEA Legislative Committee to review and discuss our agenda and ultimately identify priorities that we will push throughout the session. The Legislative Committee adopted MSEA's focus on testing, funding, and opportunities this year.

## How does MSEA educate lawmakers on its priority issues?

Most lawmakers are not education experts, and we are lucky if and when they realize that! The best legislators are the ones who listen to the real experts on the issues. That's why the real-life expertise of on-the-ground educators is so important. When educators are speaking out, we have the ability to push an agenda and educate legislators at the same time. Our team of full-time lobbyists

are constantly talking with legislators, strengthening relationships with stakeholders, and building coalitions so there is understanding, support, and advocacy for our issues. Our lobbyists are experts on education policy and have a combined 60 years in Annapolis working to promote sound state public education policy that works for students, schools, educators, families, and communities.

We also have a press strategy. When legislators hear directly from members *and* read about the same issue in the paper or online, *and* hear discussions on the radio, *and* see ads online, they feel immediate pressure. We hope they view our solutions as their answer to addressing the issue.

## How will MSEA pursue the promise of opportunity through community schools?

Winning on the issue of community school expansion will require more state and local funding to support the wrap-around services we know students and families need and that make the school the reliable center of a community. We made some progress this year, but a greater victory might be another year or two away when we will be closer to adopting and funding a next generation state education funding formula.

**What roadblocks did MSEA run into this year?** After running our Less Testing, More Learning back-to-school campaign, we hit a roadblock on the first day of session when Governor Hogan said

that efforts to reduce testing were not a priority for the 2016 legislative session. We knew from that moment that it would take a bigger campaign to educate legislators and convince them that the issue was a critical one for educators, parents, and students and their time to act was now.

The campaign organized members and helped us win in our efforts to pass legislation to limit the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. While we did not win on passing a 2% cap on the amount of instruction time that can be used for mandated testing, we made tremendous progress when it passed the House of Delegates unanimously. We'll build on this year's momentum to push future testing-reduction legislation next year.

## After so many years of successful pushback, how did public funding for private schools pass? How can we fight it next year?

The governorship in Maryland is one of the strongest in the country, and that is because the governor has tremendous budget authority—including the power to create a new program to support private schools in his budget. Governor Hogan's focus on a narrow education agenda that prioritizes private schools is incredibly disappointing and threatens the future success of our public schools. It will be hard to gut this program from his future budgets, but we will fight hard to eliminate public money for private schools so that we can invest in better meeting the needs of all students in our public schools.



# Vote the Issues

## YOUR GUIDE TO TRACKING CANDIDATES AND EDUCATION ISSUES

It's a big year here in Maryland and across the country. Expect to see campaigns building momentum over the summer, the start of ad blitzes on social media and TV and, of course, tons of literature in your mailbox. Use this guide as you weed through the issues and candidates to help keep your eye on the prize—public education, your students, and your profession.

### FIVE ISSUES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL RACES

1

**THE SUPREME COURT** Who will fill the current vacancy? And who will fill the next one or two seats in the next term? The stakes couldn't be higher when it comes to labor rights, voting rights, and civil rights. Find out more at [weneednine.org](http://weneednine.org).

2

**A NEW SECRETARY OF EDUCATION** Who will be in charge of the implementation of the new Every Student Succeeds Act and its impact on student testing? Regulations are in the works now that will impact your evaluation, funding for low-income students, and more.

3

**PUBLIC MONEY SUPPORTING PRIVATE SCHOOLS** Do your candidates really support research-proven programs that narrow opportunity gaps for all low-income students? Private school vouchers have reached Washington, DC and now Congress will decide if the program will continue to be funded despite widespread evidence of its failure.

4

**HEALTHY AND HUNGER-FREE KIDS** Do your candidates support funding for the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA)? HHFKA allows local educational agencies and high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students at a school.

5

**HIGHER EDUCATION** Are your kids heading to college soon or struggling with massive student debt? Do your candidates support full funding of the Higher Education Act and other measures to make college more affordable? The national crisis of student loan debt is growing and must be addressed by the next president and Congress.

### FIVE ISSUES IN SCHOOL BOARD AND LOCAL RACES

1

**LESS TESTING, MORE LEARNING** Where do the candidates stand on student testing? Will they support MSEA's effort to create local testing commissions to reduce duplicative and unnecessary tests?

2

**COMMUNITY INPUT** Is your school board inclusive? What's the policy on community input? Will your candidate fight to have every stakeholder's voice heard?

3

**FULL AND FAIR BUDGETS** Will your candidate stand up for a fair and inclusive budget process that respects the needs and safety of educators and their students? Will your candidate support your contract in the next budget year?

4

**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS** The promise of community schools is great. Does your candidate support this proven approach to reducing the opportunity gaps?

5

**CRITICAL EDUCATION POLICY DECISIONS** Your local school board hires and fires your county superintendent who hires and fires your principal and supervisors. Can you trust them to make sound decisions?

How do the candidates compare on funding and innovations for student nutrition, alternative programs for at-risk teens, immigrant student education, accelerated programs, drop-out prevention, and restorative practices?

# Brendan Gallagher

*Teacher, Biomedical Sciences*

Carroll County Career & Technical Center

Before starting my career in education, I was the director of microbiology research at a small pharmaceutical company where I made significantly more money and lobbied legislators and federal and international healthcare policymakers.

But something was missing as I drove to the lab each day—I loved teaching in graduate school and the idea of training the next generation of scientists was a far more exciting prospect than working in virtual isolation in my lab chasing profits in the private sector. As an educator, I've found immense satisfaction in educating budding scientists and watching them grow into competent individuals.

I am passionate about my content and that excites my students and creates a strong desire to learn. Sharing that passion with my students is a tremendously rewarding experience and is something that I cherish every day in the classroom.

This appetite for learning has allowed me a diverse teaching experience and the opportunity to cross curricular boundaries by participating in programs such as National History Day's Understanding Sacrifice project where I was one of 18 teachers in the nation selected to develop a website and inquiry-based lessons focusing on the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers during World War II. I gained an entirely new appreciation for history.

That experience has shown me the importance of sacrifice and selflessness so that in my professional life, I can make the world a better place by living a life for others. Coupled with the loss of my own father last year, I now have the perspective that life is short and that I need to make every minute count.



**"I am passionate about my content and that excites my students and creates a strong desire to learn."**



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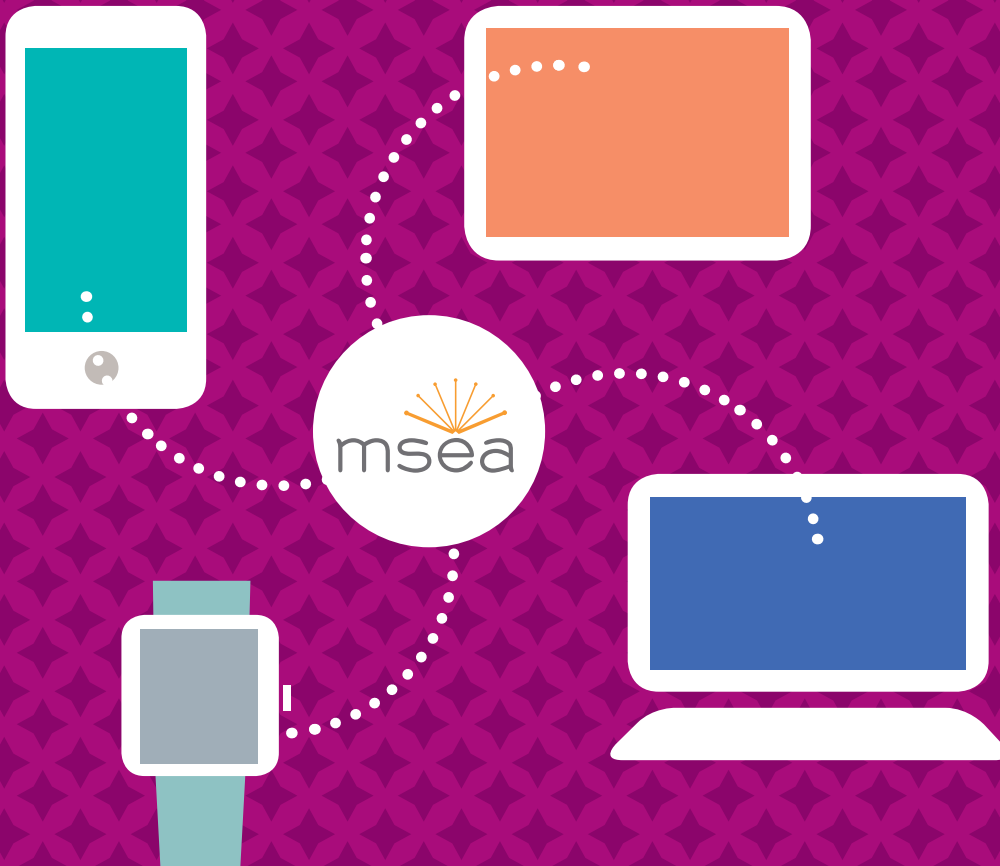


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