



April 8, 2020

Dr. Karen Salmon, state superintendent
Brigadier General Warren Sumpter, Ret., president, Maryland State Board of Education
Members of the Maryland State Board of Education
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Dear Dr. Salmon, Brigadier General Sumpter, and Members of the State Board,
I hope you are all staying healthy and safe. We're all adjusting to a new way of working and doing our best during these uncertain times.

As schools have now been closed for nearly four weeks, I'm extremely proud of the flexibility and hard work of our educators. Our food and nutrition colleagues, custodians, and other essential employees have been working each day to make sure students are fed, buildings are clean and maintained, and the business operations of each district continues. They are our education heroes as we navigate this health crisis.

Educators and administrators have stepped up to the challenge to learn how to deliver distance learning through a plan for continuity of learning that has been rolled out by each local district. Many educators are not only learning to teach and provide connections with students using only technology, but they are doing so with their own children at home. In many cases there is a lack of supplied technology or tools for educators and students, and educator families are faced with family members who are either sick from the coronavirus or who have become unemployed due to the pandemic's economic impact. I'm in awe of our educators who are doing their best to meet the needs of all students and their families. Hats off to the parents and students who are giving this new way of learning their best effort and providing grace to educators as we get through this together.

MSEA has taken on the responsibility of disseminating as much information as possible to educators in a timely manner through a variety of channels—including teletown halls, weekly Facebook Live Q&As, our website and social media, text messaging, and through our local associations. We've been answering educators' questions, helping them obtain the resources and supports they need, advocating on their behalf at the local, state, and national level, and assisting to relieve their anxiety during these uncertain times. When we're all so isolated, communication is critical and helps to reduce fear and stress. I've been disappointed to have to share with educators that there has been no outreach or collaboration from you, or anyone at the state department. It is unfortunate considering I personally reached out on the very first day schools were closed via email, followed by a letter submitted to the State Board March 23, and now this letter. I will again offer that we are here to work in collaboration and help to get information to our over 75,000 members.

EDUCATORS
TOGETHER



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On behalf of those over 75,000 educators, I'm bringing forward immediate issues of concern that if addressed would help to relieve anxiety as educators continue to go above and beyond for students and families.

1. **Maintaining or earning a Maryland certificate:** Educators on various levels of the certification continuum, especially those with conditional certification, are concerned about the shutdown of colleges and universities as well as the suspension of school system courses. They are missing valuable time to complete the necessary requirements to stay on track to successfully meet needed requirements to either renew or qualify for an additional conditional certificate or move to a professional certificate. In addition, all ETS testing sites are currently closed so educators cannot take the required Praxis test. Following the explanation provided to PSTEB last Thursday, we understand MSDE believes they are held to Governor Hogan's executive order providing an extension for all licenses, permits, and similar items conducted by state agencies for only 30 days past the end of the Governor's order. **We recommend the State Board and MSDE advocate on behalf of teachers and seek an exclusion from that executive order and request a one-year extension for all certification requirement deadlines.** Obtaining a certification is nowhere near the same as getting or renewing a driver's license or building permit. After speaking to ETS representatives and school system representatives, there is no possible way for a teacher to do all of the following things in 30 days: get registered for a Praxis test, get a date to take the test (especially with the backlog of people who will be rushing to get tested), get the results back (ETS states this takes anywhere from 7-16 days), have their local system process their information, and then submit to MSDE for review. A one-year extension has been agreed upon in other states.
2. **Incoming teacher eligibility:** Many colleges and universities have shut down classes and senior education majors will not have the opportunity to complete needed course requirements, internships, or take required Praxis assessments. Here again, all testing centers are currently closed and some school systems in Maryland are refusing to even interview these candidates since they don't have their completed test scores or a prospective date to take the test. **We are recommending the State Board take action to provide a one-year waiver for completion of needed tests in order to begin teaching in Maryland.** Again, other states are offering these waivers so our Maryland graduates who may have wanted to stay in Maryland will leave to go to other states that are more accommodating. We are mired in a teacher shortage with few of our teachers coming from in-state. Let's be proactive to keep them in Maryland.
3. **Tenure and non-renewal:** Teachers and other educators who will be brought up for non-renewal this spring in many districts have neither been notified nor provided an opportunity to engage in a dialogue regarding the appropriateness of non-renewal or continuation, particularly those in their first or second year of teaching. What will be the process and



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timeline for non-renewals of non-tenured teachers? We have similar concerns for tenured teachers and other educators who may be recommended for dismissal without receiving the full support guaranteed through the evaluation processes. Even if there is a return to school this year, is there any consideration to suspending the evaluation process, specifically the student growth component, for the remainder of this school year?

These are three issues that we are getting asked about daily by educators and administrators from across the state. Educators are afraid of losing their jobs, especially during an uncertain economy with already high unemployment, and this uncertainty adds to their already high levels of stress in this environment. Taking these actions will be a fix during a crisis and not something that will be forever. We've asked educators to step up and go above and beyond and they are stepping up, we now ask you to provide them with some peace of mind on these issues so that they may focus on doing what is best for their students.

Finally, educators are also concerned about graduation requirements, needs being met for students receiving special education services, the inequities apparent in the digital divide, and more. We continue to stand ready to partner and help during these unprecedented times. I know other organizations have offered as well, and we hope you and the State Board will work with all stakeholders for the best interests of educators, families, and students. Dr. Salmon did mention to the legislative COVID-19 workgroup that the department is working with stakeholders and responding to concerns, so I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Bost". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cheryl Bost, president
Maryland State Education Association