

# UP

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MSEA LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



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Issue 93

## **MSEA LEGISLATIVE TOWNHALL MEETINGS**

Starting next week, MSEA President Betty Weller and Vice President Cheryl Bost will be participating in legislative townhall meetings with educators, community partners, and other interested parties around the state. This is your chance to talk about critical funding and testing issues and find out how you can take action. [Find the townhall meeting nearest you and RSVP today!](#)

## **THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS**

### • **Marathon Session in the House Ways and Means Committee**

The House Ways and Means Committee hosted an eight-plus hour hearing on Thursday that covered a variety of key education bills. Highlights of the hearing and links for more information and to send a message to legislators are below:

- [Public Charter School Expansion and Improvement Act of 2015, HB 486](#). Governor Hogan's proposal to lower standards and accountability in an effort to expand charter schools in Maryland was dissected. The governor failed to present or testify in support of the bill and many of the bill's advocates appeared to be unaware of the specific provisions in the bill that are detailed in MSEA's [policy paper](#). Legislators asked important questions and were encouraged to not confuse the quantity of charter schools with the quality of charter schools. The Senate version of this bill receives a hearing next week. [Email your legislators and encourage them to oppose HB 486](#) and [SB 595](#).
- [Maryland Education Credit, HB 487](#). Earlier in the week, private school and business advocates testified in support of a similar bill in the Senate, [SB 405](#). Those same interests stood in for Governor Hogan in support of the administration's proposal to redirect \$5 million in the first year, \$10 million in the second, and \$15 million in the third from the General Fund to corporations in the form of tax credits. Those tax credits would then be converted in a voucher-like scheme that would allow families to apply for scholarship relief to cover tuition and other related education expenses at a private or parochial school. Public dollars should not be used for unaccountable private schools, especially at a time when Governor Hogan's budget shortchanges Maryland's public schools by \$144 million. You can also [email delegates and senators and ask them to oppose this voucher proposal](#).
- [Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools, HB 452](#). If we are going to make necessary strides in reducing the amount of state and local testing in our schools, we must first have reliable data with which to make decisions. If approved, this 19-member commission will be tasked with collecting that data and making recommendations to Boards of Education and the General Assembly. Earlier in the week, MSEA Vice President Cheryl Bost joined bill sponsor Delegate Eric Ebersole (D-12, Howard/Baltimore) on the [Marc Steiner Show](#) to discuss the bill. [Email your legislators and ask them to support legislation that will help create more Time to Learn and Time to Teach](#).
- [Education – Beginning of School Year – After Labor Day, HB 389](#). While a popular sounding concept, a state mandate to require schools start for students after Labor Day is oblivious to the learning realities for students today. Whether it is days of instruction before high-stakes tests, time for professional development, holiday planning, efforts to minimize a summer "brain drain," or inclement weather accommodations, the needs of every school district are unique. Passing a mandate robs local stakeholders from developing a calendar that works for students, parents, educators, and community members. MSEA **opposes** the mandate and has issued this [policy paper](#).

- **Positive Headway on the State Budget**

House and Senate leaders are sending encouraging signs in their efforts to find alternative budget actions to help restore education dollars in the state's FY16 budget. The House Appropriations Committee will have decision meetings in less than two weeks. It is critical that Governor Hogan and legislators continue to hear from educators, parents, and other public school advocates about the need to restore education funding. Emails, through [DontShortchangeMaryland.com](http://DontShortchangeMaryland.com), phone calls, via MSEA's Legislative Hotline at 1-888-520-MSEA (6732), tweets, using MSEA's Twitter tool at [marylandeducators.org/tweet-your-legislator](http://marylandeducators.org/tweet-your-legislator), and personal visits with legislators will help win this all-important battle.

- **News and Notes**

- *Alternative Pension Funding Plan Proposed*

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) is [recommending a significant change in pension funding](#). The proposal is based on the prudent notion of making actuarial recommended contributions. Designed to properly fund benefits as they are earned, this calculation considers factors such as the current funded level of the system, expected investment returns, employee contributions, anticipated salary increases, and life expectancy. The state adopted the "corridor funding" scheme in 2002, which enabled the state to contribute less than the annually determined level, accelerating the drop in the funded level. Since its adoption, MSEA has sought the elimination of corridor funding and a return to full funding of the actuarial rate. In recent years, the state decided to jointly phase-out of corridor funding while making supplemental payments to help pay down the unfunded liability.

DLS has realized that the combination of benefit reductions, increased employee contributions, and higher than anticipated investment returns over the past several years means that the state can make the full actuarial funding contribution. This enables the state to immediately eliminate both the corridor method and the supplemental payment. If this recommendation is adopted, it would save the state \$70 million in FY16, but it would also alter the time it will take for the pension fund to reach the goal of 80% funded. Under current law and projections, that benchmark is expected to be realized in FY2021. Under this joint repeal of corridor and supplemental pension payments, 80% funded status would be reached in FY2023.

MSEA is still collecting data on the impact this proposal has on the short and long-term costs to the state as it continues to manage a \$19 billion pension liability. Specifically, we are interested in understanding how the two methods compare when investment markets experience losses. We cannot simply adopt new funding plans every year that game the system based on stock market returns.

- *Congressional Action with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*

The House of Representatives has the Student Success Act (H.R. 5) on the floor this week. This is the latest attempt at the reauthorization of ESEA. Just last night, NEA was successful in adding several key amendments to protect collective bargaining, paraprofessional qualifications, flexibility and transparency in testing, and a requirement for audits of state and local testing. The base bill still has tremendous flaws, however, and NEA is urging a NO vote on final passage. The U.S. Senate is the expected chamber to get serious about pushing a bill that can pass and be signed this year. Maryland's senators will play an important role in the debate, which is why they need to hear from educators immediately. Visit [getESEArigh.com](http://getESEArigh.com) to send an email to your members of Congress.

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