

Minutes

Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools

January 11, 2016

1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Lowe House Office Building – room 145

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, MD

Meeting called to order: 1:10 p.m.

1. Welcome

- a. Chairman Chris Berry welcomed members to the third Commission meeting and gave an overview of the agenda.

2. Review and Approval of December 17 minutes

- a. For Item 3.c. it should indicate that not all students move directly into college after high school graduation. Some students have a break between K-12 and higher education. Therefore, when students need remediation, it does not necessarily reflect a gap in their K-12 education. This item should include a statement about this.
- b. The December 17 minutes were approved as amended.

3. Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) presentation

- i. The first panel consisted of Cheryl Bost, Vice President; Sean Johnson, Asst. Executive Director, Center for Public Affairs; and Steven Hershkowitz, Press Secretary and Policy Research Specialist.
- b. The presentation followed the PowerPoint – see attached.
- c. MSEA was a strong proponent of the Commission. MSEA has heard that testing has come to take too much time and with increased testing, there is a loss of instructional time. There is a role for appropriate testing, but the balance has gotten out of whack. School systems should not test students solely for the purpose of teacher evaluation.
- d. MSEA established Time to Learn Committees (TTL) to identify missing data or information from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) summary report mandated by the General Assembly and submitted in August 2015. There were 21 TTL committees statewide with teachers from all levels – elementary, middle and high. 20 committees reported back to MSEA with their findings.
- e. MSDE updated the report several times between August and December 2015. MSEA believes that even after the updates, the data and information in the MSDE reports are incomplete. Changes make it impossible for constituents to react in meaningful ways.

- f. MSEA conducted an educator survey and received 5451 responses. See Attached PowerPoint for summary and key findings.
- g. MSEA made 8 recommendations to the Commission, which are noted in the PowerPoint.
- h. Questions and Answer session between members and MSEA panel:
 - i. How is the 2% of instructional time calculated for the testing cap? MSEA used 1088 hours of instructional time divided by the number of hours spent in mandated testing in the school system.
 - ii. Which school systems did not participate in the survey? Dorchester and Caroline. Washington, Caroline and Somerset did not reply on their own testing data.
 - iii. One Commission member suggested that the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment be given during the summer to avoid disrupting instructional time. She also asked for clarification of the recommendation to eliminate duplicative high school testing by replacing PARCC with other tests. This can be done only for College and Career Readiness, not for HSA/graduation requirements.
 - iv. Would calculating the 2% lead to more bureaucracy? That would be a challenge at the beginning, but then there would be a common understanding moving forward.
 - v. Is there a correlation between the number of hours of mandated tests and student achievement? Test results are only one data point. We should check with teachers to see if testing is useful. System wide unit tests are the most common reason given for over testing.
 - vi. The superintendent in Montgomery County was not aware of the TLL work. Was the conversation more collaborative in other systems so there was common understanding of what is mandated? Yes, that was the case in some counties, but not in as many as MSEA would have hoped.
 - vii. Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) have changed the focus in Maryland to student growth; this is different from performance based assessments. To what degree was the feedback from teachers focused on assessments that might have been school-based initiatives? MSEA put the district, State and federal assessments into a drop-down menu in the survey.
 - viii. ESSA does not require states to tie teacher evaluation to student performance. What relief does MSEA think this will provide? Many tests are put in place just for SLOs. There are other ways to get information for SLOs besides tests. All stakeholders should come together and look at what is useful and what is not. The MSEA survey shows that 40% of tests are SLO related.
 - ix. Is the KRA developmentally appropriate? Teachers do not think that student use of iPads for assessment is appropriate. Other assessments are better than KRA.
 - x. Are there trends and themes regarding which tests teachers find valuable (see slide #9). Yes, but MSEA would have to pull this data.

- x. This is a transition year for PARCC. Was this taken into account in analyzing responses to survey? Will the number of practice tests, for example, go down in future years? There is anecdotal information that practice tests are created for high stakes tests. We do not know if this will decrease in future years. We need to prioritize some tests over others.
- xii. Are you saying that if there is an ACT/SAT option there should not be PARCC – PARCC is aligned to the curriculum and the ACT/SAT are not. If MSEA is saying that we should use the ACT/SAT, wouldn't this be assessing in an inappropriate way? The high school PARCC is very disruptive to the instructional day. Our recommendation is to address duplication at the high school level to reduce disruption.
- xiii. If the Commission recommends putting together a work group to look at these issues, would MSEA be willing to participate? Yes.
- xiv. Maryland law specifically states that we must test students for their readiness for college and careers no later than 11th grade. The local superintendents, higher education and the community colleges looked at options to meet this requirement. The only test that MSDE pays for is PARCC. Other test options are at the cost of local school systems.
- xv. The MSEA Teacher Panel made the following points:
 - 1. Rachel McCusker, Carroll County Teacher of the Year – Common sense testing needs to be implemented. The Arts give children a way to focus; these experiences are in jeopardy as we whittle away at the non-tested curriculum. We also need to look at successes that are not measured by tests.
 - 2. Betsy Perry, Montgomery County Special Education teacher – Data collection is important in preparing students. Students depend on consistent services which are disrupted when teachers are pulled to proctor tests, etc. Testing affects students' attitudes toward school. How does testing based on grade-level standards benefit students who are severely impacted by disabilities? Medically fragile students who are unable to attend school are not excused from testing. This negatively affects the school system's ratings. More flexibility needs to be offered in this area.
 - 3. Diane Baycheck, Howard County kindergarten teacher – Many hours of instructional time are lost to the administration of the KRA. I opted to give the test orally to all of my students, which gave me the ability to watch the student's facial expressions, etc. Scores are skewed toward the students who take the test last. Giving the KRA is disruptive to the classroom environment. Results were not received until January, so the results did not help guide instruction. The test should be given to a sample of students instead of to all students.
 - 4. Melissa Dirks, Frederick County art teacher – Good assessments provide valuable information. Teachers need to be part of developing the assessments. Frederick County is a good model for this. Recently, the

Board of Education adopted a new assessment policy that includes substantial input from stakeholders.

5. Questions to teachers:
 - a. Do you have specific ideas for processes in place for training and monitoring policies? Frederick County has an Education Reform Council that monitors practices.
 - b. How does testing hurt the Arts? This varies widely. Students have difficulty participating in high school arts classes because they are cut at the school level or because students are pushed into core academic classes. There is sometimes a philosophy that if you can't test it, it is not worth teaching.
 - c. Some students with an IEP that calls for questions to be read to them do better with a human reader. There are sometimes issues with the technology.
 - d. If the student's accommodation is allowed, would the student benefit from taking PARCC? IEPs are written at the student's instructional level while PARCC tests at the student's grade level. The information that PARCC gives, therefore does not show the student's growth based on the information in the IEP.
 - e. Why do you say that the KRA is not instructionally appropriate? The following components are not appropriate: length, questions that do not necessarily go along with kindergarten curriculum, and using the iPad, which is appropriate for students who lack impulse control.
 - f. If the accommodation is not carried out, the test is not accurate. Can special education students opt out of PARCC? Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. We need standards set for students that are fair and appropriate. The results need to show growth rather than comparing the student to age-level peers.
 - g. What happens for those students not being tested? Special Education students can be negatively affected because their teacher may be pulled for test administration, and is thus not available to provide services.
 - h. The federal government requires subgroup analysis of results. What are your ideas for this if we look at students in such a highly individualized manner through the IEP process? There is no cookie-cutter measure. There should be a task force of people doing the work and parents to look at this question. The spectrum is so broad and there are many nuances. We need to show multiple ways of learning.

- i. Teachers are often pulled out of the classroom during standardized test administration. How does this impact instruction? PARCC testing changes the whole school's schedule which puts students out of sorts. Resource supports (e.g. administrators, guidance counselors) are not available during this time. This varies greatly from system to system. We need to look at best practices and learn from those who do it well.

4. Students' Perspective

- a. Nate Fithian, Morganne Blazajak, Avery Boege, and Anu Sharma, students at Kent County High School, and Emily Spencer and Tennant Allen from Kent County Middle School provided perspectives on testing. They answered questions from Commission members.
- b. Answers from multiple students are included in each response.
 - i. How do you feel when you know a high stakes test is being given? I feel under pressure from teachers and administrators to make the school look better and make it look like the teacher is good. I feel as if everything shifts and that people think only about the test.
 - ii. Do you feel there is an enormous amount of time spent giving tests? Yes – our school has a countdown to the AP test, which builds stress. Tests take a lot of time. We spend the whole day preparing for and taking the test. Everyone is worried about doing well.
 - iii. Are some of your teachers more concerned about test performance than about educational progress? I feel this does happen. Some teachers pressure you to do well. Teachers the following year see you as how you did on the test.
 - iv. Do you feel test results give an accurate picture of who the student is and what they are capable of doing? They are not accurate about who the student is. Some students don't do well on tests, but they are still good, well-rounded students. A student can be borderline in academics, but outstanding in other areas such as music and sports.
 - v. What is your day like when others are testing but you are not? It is almost like free time because they are not worried about you at all.
 - vi. Tell me about the level of seriousness with which students take tests like PARCC and MSA. Some students don't take it seriously while others understand the implications for the future.
 - vii. Does your school system require you to take the exam if you are in an AP

course? I think so, but I am not sure.

- viii. I am interested in the test before the test. Can you connect benchmark or unit assessments to how you perform on the MSA or PARCC? PARCC was hard. In our school, benchmarks do not affect our grades, so they are not taken seriously. They don't connect with PARCC.
- ix. Is there a strong connection between what you learn in class and what is on PARCC? Did you feel prepared for PARCC? We didn't prepare for PARCC, so we went into it not knowing what it would be. I did not feel prepared.
- x. What tests do you consider valuable? The SAT and ACT because they determine getting into college. Midterms and finals are important because they affect my grade.
- xi. Some tests are gateways to other things. The purpose of education is to get you a better job. What kind of assessment could you imagine that really shows that you have learned something in class? In Spanish, we do an essay and the beginning, middle and end of the year. Any presentation that is oral and in front of the class is good.
- xii. Should PARCC be considered a final exam or become part of your grade? No. PARCC was very difficult. It didn't match what we learned in class; it is a completely new test.
- xiii. How could PARCC better match what you learn in class? Teachers said they didn't have time to prepare for PARCC. If they had more time, they would have better prepared the curriculum. When I took PARCC, I recognized some things from class, but not everything.
- xiv. Why did you do so well (asked of a student who said she did well). I'm normally a poor test taker, but the teacher really worked with me because I was anxious and helped me prepare.
- xv. Did you know content, or did you know tricks? I didn't know what to expect on the test.
- xvi. What was your feeling when you got your results? I was pleasantly surprised by my results because I had no idea what would be on the test.
- xvii. Do you feel you got the results in a timely manner? No response.

5. Introduction of work to be done by the Maryland Assessment Research Center for Education

- a. Local school systems have reviewed the MSDE survey results for their own county on multiple occasions to ensure the information is accurate. In addition, some school systems have made changes in their assessment programs since the original August report. They are always thinking about what they would do differently to serve students better. These changes were reflected in the updated matrices from the counties.
 - b. Last month there were questions about what the data means and what conclusions can be drawn. We gave the August and December reports to MARCES, which is a group of psychometricians, housed at the University of Maryland, and asked them what meaningful analyses could be done. They will report to the Commission in February.
6. The date for the April meeting will be changed. A new date will be sent to the Commission.
 7. Mr. Berry said that he will probably form subcommittees to focus on certain aspects of the work. There will be a number of stakeholder presentations on February 8.
 8. The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Minutes Adopted: February 8, 2016