

Minutes

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

February 8, 2016

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Howard County Public Schools, Board Room B

10910 Clarksville Pike, Ellicott City, MD

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

1. Welcome

- a. Chairman Chris Berry distributed an email from Acting USDE Secretary John King outlining 7 principles of good assessments. He stated that these are good criteria to consider as the Commission continues its work.
- b. A member noted that it will also be important to note what each assessment is being used in relation to teachers, students and schools.

2. Review and approve January 11 minutes

- a. Corrections to the minutes include:
 - i. Note that students presented to the Commission. Include their names and the schools they attend.
 - ii. Add the question “What happens to students who are not being tested?” Students receiving special education services are negatively impacted because their teachers are often used to monitor PARCC testing.
 - iii. Add the question “Would students like their PARCC scores reflected in their grade and/or reported on their report card? The answer by students was “No.” Students do not want their PARCC scores reflected on their report cards in any way.
- b. The January minutes were adopted as amended.

3. Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM) presentation

- a. Terry Alban, Superintendent, Kristen Canning, principal, and Rachel Rhinehart, special education teacher, Frederick County Public Schools; and John Ewalt, Superintendent, Lee Sutton, principal, and Kathryn Belmont, teacher, Caroline County Public Schools;

and Renee Spence, PSSAM Executive Director, addressed the Commission.

- b. Dr. Alban said there is consensus among the superintendents that curriculum, instruction and assessments need to be aligned. Multiple means of assessments are essential; no child should be defined by a score on a single test. In addition, measuring progress, not just achievement, is essential. Ongoing assessment is essential to move instruction forward. Both formative and summative assessments are important; if formative assessments are used effectively, the results of the summative assessment should not be a surprise. Accountability through assessments is important to all stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents and the community. School systems are obligated to ensure that students can meet the standards and are college and career ready.
- c. Mr. Ewalt introduced the staff members from Caroline County. He noted that assessment plays a critical role, takes many forms, and occurs at various times. Assessment must be ongoing, and there must be a balance between assessment, teaching and learning. Timely results inform teachers and students, who can monitor their own progress. Mr. Ewalt controls assessment windows as much as possible to increase instruction and time spent learning. Putting limits on assessment time does not respect the various needs among schools and districts. He advocates against setting a state mandated time limit on testing, and, instead, permit local districts to determine this based on their particular circumstances and needs.
- d. Lee Sutton and Kathryn Belmont noted that Caroline County participates in FAME, a formative assessment program. This helps students assess where they are so they can move to where they need to be. They do not agree with a 2% statewide cap on assessment time.
- e. Rachel Rhinehart and Kristin Canning said assessment is part of effective instruction. This ensures that instructional decisions are based on data rather than assumptions. Data can be used to compare standards across grade levels to ensure that students get a strong foundation and move faster where necessary. PARCC scores are used to adjust curriculum and instruction moving forward. A big part of how students approach assessments is how adults approach assessments.
- f. Questions from the Commission included the following:
 - i. You are all from small systems. Is what you are doing adaptable to large systems? Yes, with the right leadership and time allotment. No matter where you are, students need to focus on their learning. There is a core of good instruction: practices look the same, and the focus is on continuous improvement.
 - ii. Algebra 1 in high school is a problem. Classes are large. How can you prepare students? The following can help: enrichment and academic help periods in high school; alignment of the curriculum from kindergarten to high school; being selective about who teaches the courses; offering boot camps in the summer to reinforce skills; providing professional development on the standards; and using

common assessments to provide information to adjust curriculum and instruction.

- iii. We need to look at reducing assessment redundancy among state and local assessments so there is more instructional time.
- iv. Can the KRA move to a sampling method instead of a census method? Is it informative? Does it change instruction? KRA is still new – in its second year. We are struggling to find valuable information that is commensurate with the amount of time it takes. So far, we are not finding wide spread benefit. A sampling method would be OK, in my opinion.
- v. Have you instituted any assessments that you use solely for SLOs? Each district superintendent responded “no.”
- vi. What is pushed aside so students can get 80 plus minutes a day of math in your school? We have been on a block schedule for a decade. This may need to change, however, with the upcoming science assessment.

4. Baltimore Teachers Union presentation

- a. Marietta English, President, and teachers Nicole Ahern and Caroline Schmidt presented on behalf of the BTU. Ms. English said that high quality assessments are essential. The BTU supports the Maryland State Education Association recommendations made during a previous meeting.
- b. Ms. Ahern said she spends about 1 hour per child administering the KRA; this is time she should be using to provide direct instruction. If the KRA is to assess readiness for kindergarten and a student is deemed to be not ready, why is that student in kindergarten? She still does not have her students’ results from this fall. Perhaps the KRA should be given at the end of PreK or during the summer.
- c. Ms. Schmidt distributed a handout reflecting the standardized and summative assessments her high school students must take. Students lose a large amount of instructional time. In addition, testing takes other resources - such as media centers - and teachers are being pulled to administer tests. Her personal recommendations include: any test a student cannot have understanding of should not be used; data should be available to students and teachers quickly; there should be a cap on the amount of testing time allowed; there needs to be more testing in the area of career ready; there should be real opt-out options, especially for special education and English language learners; and assessment results should not be tied to teacher evaluations.
- d. Ms. English said that tests need to be tied to the curriculum. Students should not be tested on material that has not been taught. Schools should pilot tests before they are taken system wide. The KRA should be administered to students before they arrive in September.

- e. Questions include the following:
 - i. Is there diagnostic value to the iReady test? In Baltimore City, the data is only available to the content-specific teacher. It only indicates whether a student is on grade level, but does not give information about specific areas of weakness. Teachers could give a better and shorter assessment.
 - ii. Do the tests inform instruction? No.
 - iii. Is instructional time lost during online tests because there are not enough computers? My school has more computers than most, but instruction is also lost because teachers are pulled for testing.
 - iv. Would you prefer that PARCC be administered only as paper/pencil? Yes. In English, students can make notes on their papers. But math teachers seem to like the computer-based test. There are technology (network) issues that disrupt testing.
 - v. Do you see a discrepancy between what students know and how they did on the test? Yes – that is common. Students do better with paper/pencil because they are not used to the computer.

5. Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) presentation

- a. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, and Joy Schaefer, Legislative Chair, presented to the Commission.
- b. Standardized assessments are critical to the work of school boards. They tell us if students are college and career ready. They give us data points to evaluate policies, see if there are gaps, and ensure equity. Boards are accountable for student learning. They are concerned with making sure that standardized tests take into consideration diverse student populations. Technology is a concern – training is needed, and there needs to be adequate resources for both testing and instruction. Staff members need help unpacking the data and communicating what it shows. We have come through an era of incredible change. We cannot depend on just one tool (PARCC) to tell us how our students are doing. Boards of Education have the authority and are uniquely positioned to make decisions about what individual school communities need.
- c. Questions included:
 - i. If you are against the 2% cap on mandated testing, how do you suggest we make sure that over-testing does not continue? Putting a cap on something that affects the ability of local school systems to implement policy is detrimental. Each school system has different needs. At a local level, systems can be asked why they feel they need the assessments.
 - ii. If not a cap, then what do you recommend? Boards are working hard to balance

instructional time and assessment time. What is required is a deliberative and meaningful dialogue with multiple stakeholders on the intent of the test, the use of the test results, and accountability measures.

- iii. We need to be proactive in teaching students. We need more time for instruction and not more time for tests. When parents say “no more tests” they are not just talking about standardized tests. That is why everyone needs to be at the table.
- iv. This Commission has everyone at the table to look at this in a dispassionate way. The majority of the assessments in the survey were mandated by local school systems. Part of the Commission’s charge is to make recommendations.
Answer: When your recommendations come out, that should not be the end of the dialogue.

6. Maryland Parent Teacher Association (MDPTA) presentation

- a. Elizabeth Ysle Leight, President, spoke on behalf of the 170,000 Maryland PTA members. It is important to identify the amount of time students spend taking federal, state and local mandated assessments. Most assessments are mandated by local school systems. MDPTA believes that assessments provide valuable information, but over-testing greatly affects students. MDPTA partnered with MSDE presenting at 29 sites across the state to talk about what PARCC results mean. The number one question at each site was “Why is there so much testing?” Parents are concerned about lost instructional time and about students with IEPs. Parents and students are stressed out.
- b. MDPTA does not support students opting out of assessments.
- c. When producing materials, it is important for communications to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- d. Questions included:
 - i. Is it correct that if the National PTA takes a position (e.g. no opt out provisions), the MDPTA must support that position? Yes.
 - ii. Is one of the reasons for not allowing students to opt out is because it will negatively affect the learning of some students? Data comes back that affects programs that are offered in schools. Decisions need to be made based on a full set of data.
 - iii. Can you suggest specifics regarding communications about the purpose of assessments, a comprehensive testing calendar, etc? Back pack papers never get home. We need to look at best practices (websites, texts, emails, phone calls) that are culturally and linguistically accessible to reach diverse communities.

7. Maryland Assessment Research Center (MARC) presentation

- a. Dr. Robert Lissitz reviewed research questions asked by the Commission about how data collected in the MSDE survey can be interpreted. He distributed a table and questions. He outlined that an analysis can fall into 4 categories: qualitative, quantitative, purposes and consequences, and mode of delivery. His group has the ability to take the information in the survey and put it into summary form. He asked for feedback and direction.
- b. Questions and comments included:
 - i. The Commission needs to agree on a definition of locally mandated. And, what is a non-mandated test? The Commission also needs to define “assessment” and “purpose.” MSEA disputed some numbers in the survey because there were differences among groups about the definition of “mandated.” Sometimes principals identify an assessment that would provide meaningful information to that school. Is that mandated? This speaks to the issue of local control.
 - ii. Dr. Lissitz said he can only analyze the data he is given. He cannot provide definitions. No further direction was given to MARC.

8. General discussion

- a. MSDE will draft definitions and bring them March 7 for discussion.
- b. Maybe a survey update/audit should be collected annually and reported to parents.
- c. Does the bill that caps time spent on assessments at 2% address only state and federally mandated tests? It includes locally mandated, but excludes teacher generated test.
- d. In March, can there be an update of pending legislation impacting assessments? How will these affect the work of the Commission? We need to look at Commission findings and move recommendations forward as required.
- e. Mr. Berry will ask the Commission to form 4 subgroups:
 - i. Administrative aspects – resources involved, impact on school calendars, when assessments are given, whether assessments are formative or summative
 - ii. Elementary testing (K-5) – number of hours, purpose, amount
 - iii. Secondary testing (6-13) – number of hours, purpose, amount
 - iv. Four special services issues – special education, English learnings, other groups with special needs.
 - v. Commission members should let Mr. Berry know what work group they want to serve on. He will send an email soon. Subcommittees can bring in outside

experts.

- vi. Subcommittees should have a template to work from to structure responses for full group consideration. This will provide some structure for the Commission report.

Minutes Adopted: March 7, 2016