

Minutes

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

November 17, 2015

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Anne Arundel Public Schools – conference room 2A

2644 Riva Road

Annapolis, MD

Meeting called to order: 8:55 a.m.

Christopher Scott Berry, Chairman, made a brief statement, which included the following points:

- There is a shifting landscape regarding assessments in the areas of ESEA, state legislation, and the PARCC consortium. There are new ways of doing business. President Obama is also talking about the number and scope of student assessments.
- The Commission needs to stay abreast of the changes as they take place since that will inform our work.
- The Commission must produce a report that is actionable, in the best interest of students, and pragmatic.

1. Introductions

- a. Members introduced themselves and identified which stakeholder group they represented.

2. Summary of Open Meetings Act

- a. Elizabeth Kameen, Esq. from the Office of the Attorney General provided a brief overview of Maryland's Open Meetings Act. She noted that electronic communications involving 10 or more members are subject to the Act.

3. Overview of House Bill 452, which established the Commission

- a. Senator Pinsky, lead sponsor of the Senate bill, said that there was concern about the increased time spent on student assessments which has led to decreased time for instruction. Some assessments may be duplicative. The Commission is to look at issues surrounding assessments and make recommendations. It is important to have a range of stakeholders involved in this process to provide interest-based input and solutions. It is important to look at more efficient, more formative, and more consistent assessment processes to provide more comparable information. All assessments should support higher standards. The Commission's

recommendations already started looking at reducing testing time. The Commission recommendations go to the State Board of Education and local boards of education, for consideration and, hopefully, adoption. If the groups do not adopt the recommendations, they must give a rationale for rejecting them. The General Assembly may or may not take legislative action in the future.

- b. Delegate Ebersole, lead sponsor of the House Bill, noted that the bill is in two major parts. The first section establishes the Commission; the second identified the information that MSDE had to collect and report. That information is detailed but is hard to sort through. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment was amended into the bill. The MSDE report had two sections due at different times, but MSDE submitted both sections on the earlier date – August 2015.
 - c. Mr. Berry reviewed the Commission’s tasks as defined by HB 452.
 - d. The following questions were asked by members:
 - i. Was assessment defined? Answer – yes – in the definition section of the bill.
 - ii. Are Student Learning Objectives considered assessments? There was discussion about this but no definitive answer.
 - iii. What about school mandated tests (vs. school system mandated tests)? Discussion - These were omitted according to the Bill. It is important to remember that school-based initiatives are often based on school results and are personalized to the needs of the students in that school.
 - iv. Mr. Berry discussed the timeline laid out in the bill and noted that the Commission’s report is due no later than July 1, 2016.
4. Summary of the report submitted by the Maryland State Department of Education in response to HB 452.
- a. Dr. Johnson reviewed the report submitted by MSDE in response to HB 452. Both the matrices and narrative portions were submitted in August 2015. Dr. Johnson reviewed the process for collecting and verifying the information collected from local school systems. He emphasized that the report only addresses local, state and federally mandated assessments and does not include school or classroom generated assessments. The MSDE teams quickly learned how much variability exists from school system to school system in the type and number of locally mandated assessments. Many school systems stated that their assessment programs are in a period of transition; in some cases the programs reported in the summer are different from what is being instituted during this school year. MSDE is in the process of collecting and validating local school system information regarding the total number of hours students spend taking mandated assessments at each grade level. This report will be ready for distribution on December 8.

- b. The following questions were asked:
 - i. Is MSDE looking for commonalities? Answer – No. the information is being reported by district because it contains so much variability.
 - ii. The information is complicated and hard to compare; but, it did give local boards of education the opportunity to look at information across school systems. Is it possible to present the information in a more concise way so it is easier for the Commission to look at?
 - iii. Would it be possible to calculate an average number of minutes per grade level? Comment – doing this would not recognize the local flavor of each school system and its needs.
 - iv. The MSDE report is very detailed, but it is unwieldy. The Commission may need to discuss what specific information it needs. The bill does not limit the Commission to the information gathered by MSDE, but that information does provide a good starting point. It also provided local boards of education and school systems to reflect on their practices. Assessments serve an important purpose, but it is a balancing act.
 - c. While it is acknowledged that students with special needs have different assessment experiences because of the time extensions granted in IEPs and 504 plans, it would be almost impossible to generalize and report this information. MSDE can provide information about the number and percentage of population of students with disabilities in each school system.
5. Discussion – What information would each member like to receive and discuss during the coming months?
- a. When looking at the number of minutes spent testing, it is also important to look at the testing imprint in a school.
 - b. Are there any State-mandated formative assessments?
 - c. Is there a way to hear the complaints of people like principals, especially regarding duplicative testing?
 - d. The Commission needs to get teachers' perspectives. The MSEA teacher survey may be informative.
 - e. The recommendations should be about student outcomes. The Commission needs to put data in context of student outcomes. How do we not lose the importance and purpose of testing?
 - f. The Commission should do a cost/benefit analysis – compare the usefulness of an assessment with how much instructional time is lost.
 - g. The Commission must make sure to meet all of its mandates.

- h. The Commission needs to look at how accurately an assessment measures learning. What is the psychological effect on a student? Are there clever ways to administer assessments so it does not affect school operations?
- i. Should the Commission call on other people to present information?
- j. Are there adequate resources to prepare students and administer assessments? Smaller counties have infrastructure issues in their communities. The Commission needs to recognize the differences between the counties.
- k. How can school systems work together to share best practices? How have other states met the federal mandates?
- l. The Commission should have a presentation on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
- m. The Commission should find out what changes have been made in local school systems with a focus on promising practices.
- n. Is Maryland bound to PARCC? Are the Maryland State standards the right standards to measure? PARCC only measures the standards; it does not measure the whole curriculum.
- o. Should HSAs continue?
- p. Are the Maryland State standards helping to close the achievement gap?
- q. It may also be important to look at the College and Career Ready bill and whether this will add testing and lead to duplicative testing. What is required at the high school level in the movement from HSAs to PARCC? What is the interplay between PARCC and the CCR bill? Next Generation Science assessments will affect this in the future as well.
- r. Should there be a discussion about the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment? Can it be pared down? Can it move to a sample administration instead of a census administration?
- s. Is there a way to get the student perspective – perhaps through the State student government association?

Minutes Adopted: December 17, 2015