



June 5, 2013

Dr. Lillian M. Lowery, Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

RE: Teacher Principal Evaluation Submissions

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association

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BETTY H. WELLER
President
CHERYL BOST
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Great Public Schools
for **EVERY** Child

Dear Dr. Lowery:

Given our sincere, multiyear efforts to work collaboratively with your office, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and local school systems in the development of sustainable local evaluation systems, I am disappointed by MSDE's recent attempts to short-circuit these efforts and strong-arm local school systems into outcomes that do not best serve our students. It is important that the reforms we make are done right and help improve our #1 ranked public school system, rather than jeopardize its high quality.

In response to your articulated requirements and proposals, we seek the following:

1. To ensure the credibility of the evaluation system, the 2013-14 school year should be a no-fault year as it relates to the inclusion of state assessments in any evaluation.
2. For MSDE to rescind any demand for 20% state assessment or any phase-in thereof and provide the necessary time for the inclusion of a valid state assessment.
3. That MSDE engage in a more open and transparent process in the development of future ESEA waivers/grants.

We received from MSDE on Friday, May 31 a new proposal tying needed flexibility in the student growth component to a three-year phase-in of the 20% weighting of PARCC, an underdeveloped, unvalidated, and untested assessment, as an obligatory component of local evaluation systems. This completely contravenes the spirit and substance of the compromise which Maryland's superintendents and MSEA sought of 10% MSA and 10% MSA-based local school index as well as the mutual agreements between local associations and school systems. Such a proposal is not acceptable and all evaluation plans will be



subject to further review on the local level upon expiration of the Race to the Top grant.

Over the last year, despite the clear mandates of the law and regulations, MSDE has attempted to repeatedly supplant local autonomy and mutual agreements and dictate the performance evaluation criteria in the student growth component of the local evaluation systems. In doing so, MSDE created confusion and frustration first by publishing in the April 2012 Evaluation Guidebook that 10% MSA was acceptable, and then indicating in November 2012 that 20% MSA was required despite continued publication on MSDE's website that a 10%/10% split was acceptable.

By this time, local teachers, principals, and administrators had been collaborating for years on the development of evaluation systems that made sense for their students. MSDE's apparent internal confusion and mixed signals delayed progress and contravened the simple fact that the Education Reform Act (ERA) does not specify or define the type of data to be included as part of the student growth component. Rather, it states that it "may not be based solely on an existing or newly created single examination or assessment," although an assessment "may" be one of multiple measures used [Section 6-202(c)(4)(5) of the Education Article]. Furthermore, while ERA states that the local evaluation systems must be mutually agreed upon by local associations and local school systems, there is no allowance for MSDE to invent and impose arbitrary criteria on school systems that override mutually agreed upon plans that otherwise comport with state law and regulation.

However, in the hopes of reaching a compromise, we initiated conversations with the local systems that had mutually agreed to something less than 20% MSA and were threatened by MSDE with being defaulted to a state model evaluation that does not take into account local diversity and previous collaboration. Local associations and superintendents worked diligently to come to a compromise agreement for implementation in 2013-14. In sharing the compromise with MSDE, we requested that all stakeholders would be a part of any conversations with the U.S. Department of Education to ask for their support on this critical flexibility. The refusal to include all stakeholders in these conversations is detrimental to the progress we've made. When we were excluded from the process, and when MSDE came back with a proposal that violated multiple principles of our compromise, we are forced to question MSDE's willingness to



advocate for a system that truly is about improving teacher effectiveness and that is in the best interests of students.

Moreover, MSDE's haste to implement a high-stakes evaluation system that relies upon standardized testing data from MSA for the 2013-14 school year and PARCC thereafter is misguided. As you know, next year will be the first year of Common Core-based curriculum, yet students will still be tested with MSA, which is not in full alignment with the Common Core. As Megan Dolan reported in April, this will result in data that will neither be valid to assess a teacher's effectiveness nor informative for the teacher, creating an immediate lack of credibility for the new evaluation systems. MSDE's insistence that evaluation systems go live next year, despite the advice of education leaders and experts from across the state, is nonsensical. **To ensure the credibility of the evaluation system, the 2013-14 school year should be a no-fault year as it relates to the inclusion of state assessments in any evaluation.**

We welcome accountability. We welcome data and the professional development that will help educators improve their practice. But this must be done right. The course that MSDE is proposing avoids the hard work and hard choices that our students deserve and that is required to develop evaluation systems that will inform and improve a teacher's effectiveness, leading to better instruction for students. **We urge MSDE to rescind any demand for 20% state assessment or any phase-in thereof and provide the necessary time for the inclusion of a valid state assessment.**

We stand ready to work collaboratively moving forward to have open and thorough discussions with all stakeholders in the development of future ESEA waivers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betty H. Weller".

Betty Weller
President, Maryland State Education Association