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Up the Street: MSEA Legislative Updates

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*March 11, 2016; Issue 110*

## THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS

- **MSEA Holds Week of Action on Testing**

Today is the last day of MSEA's Week of Action—and we cannot thank you enough for the work you did to communicate with Maryland lawmakers about the importance of reducing standardized testing. We've seen incredible engagement on social media, email, and phone lines and our message was definitely heard. Here are some of the results:

- On Monday, we held a Facebook rally and asked members to repost our shareable graphics about testing, resulting in more than 50,000 impressions
- On Tuesday, we asked members to wear red and post a photo to social media with the hashtag **#lesstesting**, and then call your legislators, resulting in hundreds of posted pictures and more than 300 phone calls that day
- On Wednesday, March 9: we asked educators to send an email to their legislators, resulting in more than 3,000 emails delivered this week alone
- On Thursday, we huddled with 2,550 members to strategize on our **Less Testing Tele-Town Hall**
- **You can still participate in our Week of Action today** by joining our Twitter Storm and tweeting your legislators about the importance of reducing testing at [lesstestingmorelearning.com/tweet](https://www.lesstestingmorelearning.com/tweet).

We'll follow up the engagement next Monday, when MSEA's Legislative Committee holds their annual lobby night in Annapolis.

- **FY2017 Budget Update**

After a roller coaster budget battle last year over **Gov. Hogan's proposed \$600 million cut to public schools**, this year has felt much more calm. However, there are still important developments as the Senate does its work on the governor's FY2017 budget. One of the possible sticking points has been over what to do about school districts with declining enrollment. But that disagreement appears to have been solved after **the governor sent down a supplemental budget to add \$12.7 million of funding to Baltimore City schools** granted the City matches the contribution. The governor has also provided supplemental funding to account for declining enrollments in Garrett, Kent, Carroll, and Calvert. The Senate is set to pass their budget as early as next week, largely keeping the governor's proposal intact.

That being said, MSEA is actively trying to prevent two budget actions from occurring that

would make it more difficult to fully fund public schools in future years. One is budget language included by Gov. Hogan to allocate \$5 million to a tax credit voucher program, a right-wing scheme that educators have worked with legislators to reject for more than a decade. The other is the possibility that some budget leaders in the Senate are considering amending a bill to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (which provides tax relief to working families) to also include tax breaks for the state's wealthiest residents. At a time when income inequality is actively slowing our economic recovery, this makes absolutely no sense. We will be in touch soon with ways to communicate with legislators if either action looks likely to gain traction.

- **Testing Commission Meets Again, Senate Begins Work on Testing Bills**

The state testing commission had their latest meeting on Monday, where they heard from middle and high school principals, agreed on a definition of "mandated assessments," and broke into subgroups to review the value of certain mandated tests. They also received a legislative update from **Sen. Paul Pinsky** (D-Prince George's-District 22), who reported that some of our testing bills are likely to pass the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee—who started their work on the testing legislation later in the week.

- **News and Notes**

- *MSEA Urges Legislators to Reject Tax Credit Voucher Schemes*

Budget language isn't the only way Gov. Hogan and private school advocates are trying to create tax credit voucher programs. As we wrote about previously in *Up the Street*, there are two legislative ideas in the General Assembly this session to divert funding from public schools to private schools: the Maryland Education Credit (**HB 453**, **HB 1343**, **SB 706**) and the BOOST program (**HB 1213**). Today, we teamed up with other public education coalition partners to send **this letter** to legislators asking them stand with public school students as they have for the last decade and reject these ideas, which have consistently failed to produce results in states where they have been implemented.

- *MSEA Continues Push for Expansion of Community Schools*

Yesterday was the bill hearing for **Del. Mary Washington's** (D-Baltimore City-District 43) bill to expand community schools in Maryland (**HB 1139**), and MSEA President Betty Weller joined other advocates in submitting testimony to show support for this proven poverty-reduction strategy. **You can read MSEA's background paper on community schools here.**

- *Special Educators Advocate for Case Management Task Force*

After hearing from special educators about the difficulty balancing the two full-time jobs of teaching and case management, we worked with **Del. Andrew Platt** (D-Montgomery-District 17) to introduce legislation to create a state task force on lessening these ridiculous workloads (**HB 1058**). Today, special educators Robin Szymanski (Carroll), Sheena Washington (Prince George's), and Betsy Perry (Montgomery) testified in front of the House Ways and Means Committee in support of the legislation at its bill hearing.

- *MSEA Works to Guarantee Teacher Arbitration Rights*

MSEA also worked this week to support legislation that would allow teachers to request binding arbitration instead of a hearing before the county board of

education within 10 days of being notified of disciplinary action (**HB 1228/ SB 832**). We joined the House bill sponsor, **Del. Alonzo Washington** (D-Prince George's-District 22), for the bill hearing in front of Ways and Means yesterday and will do so again in the Senate next Thursday.

## CAMPAIGN 2016

- **Hillary Increases Pledged Delegate Lead After Huge Mississippi Win**

While Sen. Bernie Sanders made headlines for his razor-thin Michigan win, Hillary won Mississippi by a dominating 83-17 margin. As a result of the Democratic primary's proportional allocation of delegates, this mean Hillary increased her lead to 221 delegates on Tuesday night. There's still a long way to go before Hillary clinches the nomination, so she still needs educators to be front and center in her campaign. Sign up to become an Educator for Hillary at [www.strongpublicschools.org](http://www.strongpublicschools.org).

- **Yet Another Poll Shows Van Hollen and Edwards in Statistical Tie**

A new Gonzales poll released earlier this week showed **Congressman Chris Van Hollen** and **Congresswomen Donna Edwards** in a statistical dead heat, with **Van Hollen squeezing out a 42-41 lead over Edwards—well within the poll's margin of error**. In January, Gonzales showed Van Hollen with a tight 38-36 lead. The new poll comes as further proof that the race could go either way, spurring television ad buys by both candidates and Emily's List (in support of Edwards).

For a pdf version of this edition of *Up the Street*, [click here](#).

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