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State Board of Education Testimony on ESSA

February 28, 2017

Good Afternoon Members of the Board,

My name is Abby Beytin and I am the president of the Teachers Association of Baltimore County.

We were pleased when the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind finally passed into law. As you might remember, No Child Left Behind required every school to be proficient in math and reading by 2013-14. That was completely unrealistic and set up our schools and children for failure. It also set in motion two major concerns.

First, NCLB waivers for states were put in place so they could avoid the worst punishments under the law. Second, the creation of a high-stakes testing culture in schools resulted in the over-testing, narrowed, and often age inappropriate curriculum we have now.

We have kindergarten students being asked to write paragraphs in kindergarten because the first grade curriculum has so much writing in it. This push down to kindergarten doesn't take into account the fact that many of our kindergartners don't possess the fine motor skills to be able to accomplish the physical act of writing.

With the new Every Student Succeeds Act, we see this as an opportunity to set long-term goals here in Maryland. We are asking the State Board to do two things in their ESSA state plan.

1. Choose a more realistic yet still rigorous goal for proficiency, like reducing the number of non-proficient students in half by 2030.
2. Don't just stop with academic indicators in setting long-term goals and interim progress. Include all the school quality indicators in goal-setting too, whether that be chronic absenteeism, school climate survey results, or school counselor caseload.

We have lived far too long on a punishment top-down Federally mandated system. Our schools deserve our support and the help needed to make sure all of our students are receiving the best public school education possible. Our teachers need the flexibility to reach and teach every child. The cookie cutter approach to educating our children has never worked. Cookie cutters might make for great looking sugar cookies, but they never will make a child a healthy and productive adult.

Sincerely,

Abby Beytin

President



MSBE

-PSTEB Public Comment

Jaclyn Paris

February 28, 2017

Good Afternoon. My name is Jaclyn Paris. I am a member of Right to Read – Maryland. I have become very active in striving for teachers to receive **Structured Literacy training** in order to be able to teach ALL children to learn to read. According to the Parcc 2016 Maryland Reading Scores, 60% of all students in Maryland read below grade level. Did you know that, “95% of all children can be taught to read at a level constrained only by their reasoning and listening comprehension abilities” (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998)? How is this possible? When teachers receive Structured Literacy Training, they become successful and so do their students and vice-versa. Here is my story...

I graduated cum laude with a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary and Special Education from Duquesne University. As the recipient of The School of Education Faculty Award for General Excellence in Special Education, I was adept at Standardized Educational Testing and I.E.P. development and excelled at modifying lessons and providing accommodations. While teaching in Baltimore County Public Schools, I was shocked to learn that, in real life, when a child didn’t learn everything on his/her I.E.P., those goals and objectives could simply be placed on the child’s I.E.P. for the next year. There was no accountability. For example, I felt completely devastated when I was unable to help a third grade non-reader learn to read. I cried every night for a full year at not knowing how to help him and other struggling readers on my caseload. I was hired to help them. I was responsible for teaching them. But I was woefully unprepared and therefore, unsuccessful. I had failed myself, but even more crushing, I had failed the students who had depended on me. Unfortunately, my story as a teacher is not unique nor is this unique to Baltimore County Public Schools.

That summer, my frustration prompted me to seek Structured Literacy training. After completing the training, I taught the same third grade non-reader (now in 4th grade) to read at a second grade level! Did you know that when children are taught the way they learn they can improve several grade levels in one year? From then on, over the next 5 years, I worked with many small groups to teach struggling readers to read. It became my passion! Can you imagine if we just began teaching all children in Kindergarten using a Structured Literacy approach? We could prevent reading failure? Children would not become struggling readers! With The Structured Literacy approach, children’s progress is noticeable as each skill that is learned leads to the next skill to be taught. Progress is continuously monitored so that children are experiencing success! This approach is sequential and systematic. In other words, children are set up for success!

Having the cure for illiteracy and not providing it hurts more than just a child and a child’s family. It hurts society as a whole. All of the untapped potential of functionally illiterate individuals is staggering! Did you know that “85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate” (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003).

Many students who struggle to read and write drop out of school and are at risk for unemployment, drugs, crime and ultimately incarceration.

I now work at The Highlands School, which is a private school for children with learning differences. There are many such private schools in Maryland such as Radcliffe Creek School, The Summit School, and Wye River Upper School to name a few. **Unfortunately, children who attend these schools sometimes have experienced frustration and failure for years in the public schools before experiencing success in these private schools.**

Did you know that many children who attend The Highlands School do so as an intervention and may only be there 1 to 3 years before they catch up or surpass their age-level peers? **When children are taught the way they learn, they are successful because they are capable and can now demonstrate that!** Because all children cannot afford to attend these private schools, it is our responsibility to have teachers trained in Universities so that children in all public schools can learn the essential skill of reading! If a teacher has not received the Structured Literacy Training perhaps they should be trained before they are hired or immediately when they are hired in a public school.

Please support having teachers receive Structured Literacy training whether in Universities or while already teaching! Imagine the difference that could be made in a child's life, family's life and society as a whole!

Thank You!

Jaclyn Paris
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Richard Benfer
AAAPS - Teachers
Association of
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Remarks for SBOE Public Comment

Hello President Smarick and members of the Board. My name is Richard Benfer, I'm an elementary school teacher and president of the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County. Like so many of the kids we have taught over the years, I was the first in my family to attend college. And I can say with absolute certainty that I wouldn't have accomplished that milestone and I wouldn't have entered the teaching profession without having public school teachers who were dedicated to my specific needs, challenges, and hopes.

The connection between teachers and their students is the bedrock of quality instruction. You and I both know this from available research and experience. But I have to say, we have faced real challenges in maintaining those strong connections with growing class sizes and school counselor caseloads in Anne Arundel and throughout the state. Our system has not hired the number of teachers needed to keep up with growing enrollment. In fact, a report from last June shows that our student enrollment is estimated to grow 10% by 2025.

We have a real opportunity with the "Every Student Succeeds Act" to send a message to our districts and schools that where there is an extra dollar, it needs to go

into creating more individualized instruction for our students. It needs to go into reigniting that flame, that connection between teacher and student. We know from No Child Left Behind that district leaders and principals really do react to the incentives embedded in accountability indicators. For the last 15 years, that has been standardized test scores. And while teachers see the importance of this data, it's not enough to fully capture the strength of a school. We need to see what goes into making those test scores, too.

If we are truly dedicated to improving student outcomes, if that is the key goal in our work to implement this new law, then let's focus on the very strategies that lead to those better results. Class size and school counselor caseload matter in a student's achievement. It's the difference between having time in a class period to follow up with the students who need more help, or not. And it's the difference between having the time to make that important phone call to a kid's parent, or not.

On behalf of the educators in Anne Arundel, and on behalf of the students in our school system, I ask that you consider including class size and school counselor caseload as school quality indicators in your ESSA state plan. Thank you.

Public Comment
Maryland State Board of Education
February 28, 2017
Christopher Lloyd, NBCT

“In the history of education, the most striking phenomenon is that schools of learning, which at one epoch are alive with a ferment of genius, in a succeeding generation exhibit merely pedantry and routine.” That’s from the late Ted Sizer, who studied schools, and sought to reform them using authentic learning and authentic assessments. Sizer understood the need to think differently about schools, education, and the young scholars we all serve.

Today, I come to you again as a teacher, honored to serve children in Montgomery County. And as a teacher leader, National Board Certified, and president of my local association. And while we all can understand the importance of assessments in learning, we also understand there must be a good balance between teaching and learning and assessing what we know. That’s why I’m excited about ESSA and the opportunities it presents when it comes to assessments.

I wanted to speak with you today about three areas: 1) using the pilot program opportunity under ESSA to spark innovation in testing, 2) using ACT and SAT with greater impact in our high schools, and 3) tapping federal dollars to conduct an external audit of testing, instead of relying on self-reported data.

New Hampshire’s Performance Assessment for Competency Education (PACE), provides a framework for innovation. Students will continue to take the Smarter Balanced statewide assessment in four districts – once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school – but then they’ll have an opportunity to apply authentic learning in an authentic assessment.

For instance, in fourth grade, students might design and cost out a park, and then write a letter to convey the information and advocacy to an elected leader. This type of learning is both engaging and essential to connecting children to our world. High school students could demonstrate mastery through a research paper, with primary and secondary sources. This kind of work leads to deeper learning which lasts over time. The brain research is clear that this kind of connection leads to greater meta-cognition.

We should be one of these pilot states. We should take advantage of the opportunity to continue to give PARCC once at each level, but then push ourselves harder to create valid and reliable measures that better engage students and our employees in learning.

We need to leverage the strength of the ACT and SAT in high school. Students and universities know the significance of these long-standing assessments, which

provide a window into college readiness. Yet, students this year will take PARCC and many will take the ACT or the SAT. If we were to use the ACT or SAT as a measure in high school, we could move on several fronts. First, we can provide each and every student the opportunity to take a test that all colleges recognize, and which we can use to compare ourselves to others. Second, we can increase the time for learning by eliminating the need to take PARCC in high school, substituting the ACT or the SAT. And third, we can hold ourselves accountable to a standard used nationwide. Replacing the PARCC in high school with the SAT or ACT will focus our attention on learning.

ESSA provides an opportunity to secure federal funding to conduct an independent audit of assessments. Currently, the self-reported data of what constitutes a mandatory test varies in each system, from those working in a classroom to those working in the administration of the system. Without an audit, this Board, and Boards around the state are left to try and sort through the panoply of testing opportunities to determine what is being given, at what time, to whom, by whom, and about what. Good systems exercise periodic audits to assess a landscape, so that good decisions can be made. We should take advantage of the federal dollars available to do this work under ESSA.

While testing is a necessary part of our public school experience, it cannot become the focus of our work. We need to find the balance to return to an era where the ferment of genius engages us all, and takes precedence over educational routine. Thank you for your consideration of these thoughts.