

BILL: Senate Bill 407
TITLE: Education - Education Accountability Program - Limits on Testing
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 2, 2016
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 407, which would strictly limit the amount of time that may be devoted to federal, State, and locally mandated student assessments for each grade to 2% of the statutorily mandated 1,080 annual instructional hours.

Historically, MABE has played a leading role in advocating for a high quality academic performance accountability system in Maryland. Our students deserve nothing less. Therefore, MABE is actively participating in the work of the Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools to develop recommendations regarding "how local school systems and the State can improve the process in which local, State, and federally mandated assessments are administered and used to inform instruction" (House Bill 452, 2015).

MABE also recognizes the Commission's charge to make recommendations regarding "the most efficient and effective methods to ensure that adequate time is allotted to both administering assessments and instruction." However, MABE firmly believes that policy considerations regarding testing methods should remain within the purview and decision-making authority of local boards of education, superintendents, and local school systems. In this context, MABE opposes enacting Senate Bill 407 not only because it is a very limiting mandate regarding student assessment policy, but also because it is premature with respect to the ongoing work of the testing Commission recently established by the General Assembly.

MABE supports local decision-making authority in developing curriculum and assessments, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, as these entities are charged with the responsibility to research, investigate, and evaluate curriculum and assessments, and are ultimately accountable for student performance. In Maryland, the General Assembly created the State Board and local boards of education and expressly delegated to these bodies the responsibility for developing curriculum and student assessments. With the exception of federally mandated assessments under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), student assessments in Maryland are governed largely by regulations adopted by the State Board, and local policies and practices adopted by 24 local school systems.

To assist the work of the state's testing Commission, MABE has encouraged local boards to participate fully in the survey to identify local, state, and federally-mandated assessments within our state. The resulting "Report on Local, State, and Federally-Mandated Assessments in Maryland," includes a comprehensive history of student and school assessments in Maryland, and survey responses from each of the 24 local school systems. Following the compilation of the survey results, the Commission requested reviews and responses from local boards of education and other educational stakeholders.

MABE believes the Commission's survey report aptly describes the state's adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 2010, the subsequent development of Maryland-specific College and Career Readiness Standards, and implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. Similarly, the report compiles responses from local school systems on the array of locally-adopted assessments. As the report states, "This variation reflects the strong tradition of local autonomy and decision-making that exists in Maryland. Local school boards are elected or appointed to make decisions that best reflect the values and desires of local communities."

School systems are fully engaged in the thoughtful consideration of the role of both formative and summative assessments in educating students; measuring what students know and informing appropriate instruction to benefit individual students. Common themes in school system responses to the Commission survey include: the use of data systems and interactive platforms to analyze student assessment data and immediately inform teachers in the classroom; the recent and ongoing transition to on-line state assessments; and the responsibility to provide professional development for teachers and principals.

MABE firmly believes that the coordination of these efforts by educational professionals within local school systems is essential to the continuous improvement of public education in Maryland, toward the goal of each student achieving his or her highest potential as a learner. On behalf of all local boards of education, MABE will continue to respectfully request the Commission, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly to continue to adhere to the principle of locally-governed education policies and practices regarding student assessments.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 407.