

BILL: Senate Bill 452
TITLE: Education - Accountability Program - Assessments
(Less Testing, More Learning Act of 2017)
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 15, 2017
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 452, 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 annual number of instructional hours. In addition, the bill would eliminate a more recently mandated statewide middle school social studies assessment in favor of newly mandated, locally developed, social studies tests.

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.

Historically, MABE has played a leading role in advocating for a high quality academic performance accountability system in Maryland. During 2015 and 2016 local board members and superintendents actively participated in the work of the Commission to Review Maryland's Use of Assessments and Testing in Public Schools. The Commission developed 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). The Commission issued its final report in July of 2016; and MABE concurs with the following conclusion:

There are No Simple Solutions

"Many of the proposed public and policy solutions regarding mandated assessments have centered on seemingly simple solutions: across the board caps on testing times, the elimination of specific assessments (which in many cases are mandated by the federal government), and a return to one dimensional test formats such as multiple choice. Had the Commission viewed these as feasible solutions, they would have become recommendations. However, many of these seemingly straightforward options were not realistic; they would create their own unintended consequences."

In this context, MABE opposes enacting Senate Bill 452 because of the arbitrary cap on the amount of instructional time allotted to student assessments, the costly mandate for local school systems to develop yet another system-wide student assessment, and regarding student assessment policy. MABE firmly believes that policy considerations regarding student assessments should remain within the purview and decision-making authority of local boards of education and superintendents; and that this local governance role should be exercised in conjunction with the assessments within the purview of the State Board of Education.

Lastly, this legislation would require the establishment of local assessment committees. MABE recognizes that the Commission agreed that “the establishment of the District Committees on Assessment (DCAs) and annual reporting by superintendents of the scope of local assessment to their local Boards of Education as two of its most important recommendations.” While the DCAs have not been mandated, the recommended reporting requirements are in place. In 2016, this Committee approved and the General Assembly enacted House Bill 412 (Chapter 264) to establish a new annual reporting requirement regarding student assessments. Today, each local board provides detailed information for each mandated assessment administered in the school system, including: title, purpose, testing window, grade level, accommodations, and source of the mandate.

Again, MABE will continue to lead advocacy efforts to support a sound state approach to student assessment policies, and to protect the autonomy for school systems to administer student assessments, including locally mandated assessments, determined to be in the best interests of the teaching and learning of all students.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 452.