R00A01

MSDE Headquarters

Maryland State Department of Education

Response to the Analyst's Review and Recommendations

House Education & Economic Development Subcommittee –
February 11, 2015

Senate Education, Business & Administration Subcommittee –
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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) welcomes this opportunity to share with the Committee some of its success stories and to address questions raised by the analyst.

Juvenile Services Education Program

The State Superintendent should comment on what factors cause student outcomes to fluctuate year to year for students in DJS facilities and what measures are being taken to increase the GED pass rate and the percentage of students demonstrating improvement in their reading skills.

Outcomes for students in DJS facilities fluctuate for a number of reasons; namely the inconsistent education time for students in detention centers, transition to the new Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), and the transition to a new GED test. Additionally, 2014 marked the first year that MSDE had full responsibility for the education program at all DJS facilities; four of which came on board at the beginning of FY 14. While MSDE is pleased with the gains in student performance in math, the Department recognizes the need to ensure these students are college and career ready. New staff hired to fill key curriculum, instruction and assessment coordination roles were not appointed until mid-year or later limiting the ability to support school faculty.

MSDE has taken several actions to improve the program and accelerate student achievement: Intensive professional development is provided to Juvenile Services Education (JSE) staff on the MCCRS and to increase the use of data to inform instruction. The High School Program of Study has been revised to ensure coursework is aligned to the MCCRS and standardized across all centers. A computer-based testing site has been established at the Charles H. Hickey School and another will open soon at the Greenridge Youth Center. A DJS-approved pilot allowing students to attend school grouped by achievement level and not housing assignment assists teachers to address the learning needs of students.

To support students' success on the new national GED test, MSDE developed and is implementing a new GED MCCRS curriculum. This new curriculum, which is aligned to college and career ready standards, is integrated into each school's high school coursework. The new computer-based testing site enables students to become more familiar with, and ultimately more successful with the online GED assessment. MSDE continues to work with DJS to balance safety and security needs with student outcomes.

The JSE focus on literacy is spearheaded by reading specialists deployed at several locations. While vacancies have delayed student access to additional help, MSDE believes this approach will improve student outcomes.

Overall, MSDE is focused on the need for full staffing and appropriate facilities for the Juvenile Services programs. These programs need to be operated in line with local schools systems and have been negatively affected by the vacancy requirements that are part of State agency budgets. Vacancies in these programs compromise the instructional efforts and put the program at risk for non-compliance in providing Special Education services.

FY 2015 Cost Containment

MSDE should be prepared to discuss how the general 2% reduction will be implemented within the department and the impact that will have on operations.

MSDE is currently undergoing a comprehensive review of FY 2015 expenditures to date and evaluating options for the implementation of the 2% reduction. In addition to the 2% reduction, the Board of Public Works approved an additional $441,000 reduction to increase turnover expectancy to align with the actual number of vacancies. To that end, MSDE will maintain a higher than normal vacancy rate for the remainder of FY 2015 to ensure the anticipated savings are realized. The Department can absorb this reduction as a one-time cost savings but cannot sustain this level beyond FY 2015 without negatively affecting crucial programs and services.

PARCC Assessments and Communication

MSDE should discuss the extent to which the department has maintained communication with LEAs and the public regarding the increased amount of testing that will be implemented with the transition to PARCC. The department should comment on the process and timeline for deciding whether or not to implement the additional testing and what factors will guide that decision.

With the planning for the implementation of PARCC, MSDE has regularly communicated with the State Board, the LEAs, and various stakeholder groups starting with the early planning for Race to the Top and the initial ESEA Flexibility Plan. In the 2013-2014 school year, Maryland field tested the PARCC assessments and through an approved waiver from the US Department of Education (USDE), students who were participating in the field test were not double tested.

Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, Maryland will administer the PARCC assessments for students in grades 3 through 8 (these assessments replace the MSA). At the high school level, there are six PARCC assessments (English 9, 10, and 11 and Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II). In discussion with the LEA superintendents and the State Board, Maryland has chosen not to administer all six PARCC assessments in 2014-2015 but rather to administer only the English 10, Algebra I, and Algebra II PARCC assessments. In the 2015-16 school year, the Department tentatively plans to add English 11. MSDE will work closely with local Superintendents to determine any additional test implementations. The High School Assessments in Biology and Government will continue to be administered.

MSDE has been communicating regarding PARCC since 2010 through regular publications for parents and teachers, many of which have been translated into Spanish, and through additional documents provided to other organizations including, but not limited to the Maryland PTA, the Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM), the State principals' organizations – MAESP and MASSP, the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), and the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC). In preparation for the field test in the 2013-2014 school year, MSDE provided principals in every school with a flash drive containing multiple handouts, videos, and power points to use in communication with teachers and parents.

MSDE has increased communication and strategic messaging around the State's new PARCC assessments developing new communication resources (including information sheets, FAQs, timelines, and more) that speak specifically to how PARCC is being implemented in Maryland and what students and parents can expect. Since mid-January 2015, MSDE has provided weekly "Prepare for PARCC" updates, with links to new tips, tools, and resources to help inform parents, students, and other members of the school community about Maryland's new state assessments. These updates are emailed each week to local superintendents, assistant superintendents, and school principals, with instructions to share that information with their school staff and parent communities.

MSDE has also developed a new website, "Prepare for PARCC: What Every Parent Should Know," dedicated to providing parents with the resources that will be most helpful and informative to them, including new PARCC videos and information about upcoming webinars. MSDE is also continuing the PARCC conversation through social media using the hashtag #PrepareForPARCC. The State's PARCC communications push, including weekly PARCC email updates, will continue through the end of 2015.

PARCC Implementation

MSDE should provide an update on the identified technological issues with implementing PARCC and administering the assessments online. The agency should also comment on the status of providing online assessment for special needs populations, such as students at the Maryland School for the Deaf. Finally, the department should discuss potential next steps for closing the identified gaps in technological infrastructure.

All Maryland schools will administer the PARCC Assessments to students beginning in March. Twenty-three local school systems will administer 75% of the tests online. Local school systems are currently participating in a statewide infrastructure trial simulating the testing environment to identify and resolve technology issues in advance of the test administration.

The PARCC Assessments support a number of accommodations for students with special needs, including American Sign Language via streaming video, spoken text, braille, keyword translation, line reader and others. The students at the Maryland School for the Deaf will take

the PARCC assessments online utilizing American Sign Language streaming video. Paper and pencil assessments will be made available for those students whose IEP requires it.

The PARCC assessments were designed to be administered online and include accommodations for students with special needs. MSDE expects the assessments will be administered completely online by 2017-18.

Maryland has integrated the use of computers in its assessment system for more than a decade, utilizing computer-adaptive testing with the functional assessments. More recently, MSA Science and HSA assessments have had an online administration for more than five years. MSDE will continue to provide paper assessments through 2016-2017. MSDE will work closely with local education agencies by providing technical assistance and support as they continue to upgrade technology infrastructure.

Update on Race to the Top Initiatives

MSDE should comment on the RTTT progress made since the release of the USDE year three progress report and identify any potential concerns that might be raised in the year four report. In addition, MSDE should discuss the status of the P-12 data dashboards, STEM online courses, and other outstanding IT-related projects, particularly speaking to efforts made to accelerate project timelines and address staffing deficiencies.

Maryland has continued to make progress in RTTT through Project Years (PY) 4 and 5. Following the Project Year (PY) 3 progress report, MSDE ramped up efforts to provide LEA support, communication, and training. MSDE conducted 24 LEA site visits where content teams visited schools and identified the implementation status of a variety of State and RTTT-specific initiatives. Data collected from the site visits was used to plan support and additional follow-up activities. MSDE held LEA Support sessions (reflection and support) to collect feedback and reflection of the RTTT work that had been completed or in development and to provide assistance as needed.

In PY5, MSDE added Regional Symposiums for educators to discuss the needs of represented LEAs with state specialists on hand to answer, assist, and collaborate with educators to help improve instruction. State content specialists provided a range of resources and tools to assist educators, many coming from the RTTT work completed after PY3.

All components of the infrastructure necessary to deliver RTTT tools and resources are completed and up-to-date with all necessary security measures. Monitoring, software patching, and software upgrades continue as needed. Maryland is continuing to work with LEAs to integrate logon capabilities to ease access to the resources and tools – this work needs to be completed by the end of RTTT.

MSDE has completed the development and release of 34 out of 36 P20 Data dashboards on an external facing portal. The remaining two dashboards, which were not completed by the end of

PY4 are currently in development. All data dashboards can be found at the following web address (https://wcp.k12lds.memsdc.org/public).

Online STEM courses are available in Blackboard. The instructional toolkit, which currently includes a bank of 3,000 approved resources for educators, is available in the Learning Management System (LMS). MSDE continues to add resources as they are completed and approved and is considering an expansion of this system by working with other states on a Resource Exchange. MSDE continues to work on the completion of the Educator Information System (EIS) which was not completed in RTTT PY 4. Program and IT resources are completing the EIS system in PY 5.

Learn MD serves as Maryland's Instructional Improvement System (IIS), a one-stop shop for all educational stakeholders across Maryland. From Learn MD, authorized users and the public will be able to access tools and resources that will support the improvement of education across the state. Maryland is working with LEAs, other State agencies, and national workgroups, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), to expand on the number of resources available to our educators. Maryland is also working to access the New Jersey resource exchange to share non-secure resources. Other states are joining this effort as well. Overall, Maryland is developing the platform for the tools that have been developed.

The executive director of the MLDSC should address when the MLDSC website may have new content available to either legislators or the general public.

The following information has been provided by MLDSC:

Implementing the MLDSC has effectively moved Maryland from among the poorest performers in the nation to one of its top performers in the development of critical educational data systems in only a few years. The creation of the technological infrastructure is complete, the system is being loaded with data, and that data is being linked together. These tasks are enormous and very challenging, particularly while maintaining the highest levels of safeguards for privacy and security.

The next step is to ensure that any reporting originating from the MLDSC is of the highest possible standard and provides the MGA and other audiences with information that can help guide policy decisions and operational actions. This requires addressing issues of data quality that arise due to issues with data collections and in some cases, data errors.

To address these data quality issues, the MLDS Governing Board instructed the MLDS Center staff to develop standards to ensure accuracy of information reported by the Center. The MLDS Center staff, in consultation with the inter-agency Research and Policy Group, has developed appropriate standards for use within the last two weeks. The MLDS Governing Board will review the standards at their March meeting and this will allow the rapid development of reports

in numerous areas over the next year. It is planned that the first original content may be available before the 2015 Legislative session is complete

Teacher Principal Evaluation (TPE)

MSDE should be prepared to discuss its evaluation of the 2014 Educator Effectiveness Ratings, the next steps to be taken to improve the evaluation process going forward, and the role the ratings are anticipated to play in terms of making personnel decisions at the local level.

In 2014, Maryland produced Teacher Evaluation Ratings for 43,805 teachers and 1,112 principals. This was the first time that a Statewide rating has been conducted.

The ratings data exclude student assessment data and include Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), a component agreed upon with school systems and education stakeholder groups. Of the 43,805 teacher ratings published, 40.8% were rated highly effective, 56.4% were rated effective and 2.8% were rated ineffective. Of the 1,112 principal ratings, 48.3% were rated highly effective, 50.3% were rated effective, and 1.4% were rated ineffective.

A statewide convening of Local Education Agency Teacher-Principal Evaluation Teams will occur on March 3 and 4, 2015. The teams include teachers, principals, executive officers (supervisors of principals), and Superintendents from LEAs. The teams will investigate the data relationships among different elements, including the Effectiveness Ratings, the Component Measures, and the Student Learning Objective progress survey.

MSDE's future direction in guiding discussions and making determinations about the evaluation models will be facilitated by feedback from the LEAs as well as information and analysis from: the Mid-Atlantic Assessment Consortium at WestED, which is analyzing the evaluation models; the Aspen Group, which facilitates feedback from principals and executive officers; and the Community Training Assistance Center, which is the leading national resource on SLOs. The information and analyses can also assist LEAs in making adjustments to local evaluation models. This feedback and analysis process is expected to be an annual effort for the foreseeable future.

Data from the second administration of PARCC in SY 2015-2016 will produce test-related student growth measures and will help determine how student test scores will contribute to Effectiveness Ratings in SY 2016-2017. Effectiveness Ratings will be used in making personnel decisions in SY 2016-2017. In the interim, SLOs and approved local measures will be used for the Student Growth portion of the evaluation. The introduction of a new school accountability measure in SY 2015-2016 will allow for a renewed examination of the role of whole-school measures in teacher and principal evaluation for SY 2016-2017. Maryland's ESEA Flexibility Waiver Renewal reflects these same timelines and deliverables.

MSDE's Office of Teacher and Principal Evaluation will continue to provide professional development and technical assistance on Teacher and Principal Evaluation. Emphasis will be given to the developmental needs of promising principals, current principals, and executive officers. LEAs are encouraged to provide similar professional development and technical assistance for teachers and principals in their districts.

The department should also comment on the status and content of its proposed Flexibility Waiver request.

In November 2014, USDE released guidance for States to apply for a three or four year renewal of their ESEA Flexibility plan (Maryland qualifies for the three year extension). The application for this extension is due March 31, 2015 and the plan would last through the 2017-18 school year unless Congress reauthorizes ESEA/NCLB.

MSDE has established an ESEA Renewal stakeholder committee, co-chaired by Dr. Jack Smith and Penelope Thornton Talley, which has been meeting to guide this work (started meeting in October 2013 for the first Extension of 2014-2015). This group is developing a renewal plan which will be presented to the State Board of Education for approval on March 24, 2015.

An update was provided to the State Board at their January Meeting and a draft of the proposal will be presented at the February Board Meeting. The draft will be posted on MSDE's website, shared with the General Assembly, and shared with various stakeholder groups.

The ESEA Flexibility Renewal Request will include reassurance that Maryland will continue to implement College and Career-Ready Standards and Assessments (Principle 1), recognize and support low performing schools (Principle 2), and support and evaluate teachers and principals (Principle 3). There are no major changes to Principle 1. This section provides Maryland's plans to continue to support all schools in the transition over the next three years to College and Career Ready Standards and the new assessments.

Principle 2 focuses on Maryland's Accountability System and identifying and supporting low performing schools. Maryland will propose a conceptual framework for a revised accountability system and provide an updated plan of support for these schools. The proposed plan for Principle 3 continues the support for the evaluation of teachers and principals and further supports the significant role of Student Growth and the traditional role of Professional Practice as measures that contribute to both the development and accounting of educator effectiveness.   With attention to multiple quantitative and qualitative measures, Maryland's educator evaluation models are intended to attribute student performance to the work of the teacher and the principal and to ultimately affect the continuous professional development of each. However, the State recognizes that the translation of student assessments into student growth measures in reading and mathematics cannot be accomplished until June 2016.

DLS Reccomended Actions:

1. Add the following language:

Further provided that at least $43,500,000 of the appropriation made for the Maryland State Department of Education shall be expended on State assessment contracts.

MSDE respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.

While MSDE agrees that $43.5 million will be sufficient to cover projected assessment costs in FY 2016, restricting funds appropriated for other purposes will have a detrimental effect on other MSDE programs.   Like all State agencies, MSDE is facing a 2% reduction in FY 2016. Further restricting $6.8 million only to be used for assessments essentially increases the 2% reduction to a 9% reduction. Over 72% of MSDE's general fund budget is dedicated to assessments, personnel costs, or restricted agency objects. Because we cannot reduce these areas, it limits how the Department can implement further reductions.

Although not ideal, to implement a reduction of this size, the Department would need to reduce grants for crucial early childhood programs such as Family Support Centers and the Maryland Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MCCRN); DORS would serve an estimated 316 fewer adults with disabilities and 105 fewer transitioning students with disabilities negatively impacting their seamless transition from high school to post-secondary education, career training, and employment; and, reduce operations supporting and maintaining the systems built through the Race to the Top grant in the Office of Information Technology. Finally, a reduction of this size has the potential to drop the State below the federal maintenance of effort requirement, resulting in the loss of additional revenue available to support DORS programs.

2. Add the following language:

Provided that it is the intent of the General Assembly that no individual loaned educator beengaged by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for more than six years. For loaned educators engaged in fiscal 2010, the time already served at MSDE may not be counted toward the six-year limit.

Further provided that it is the intent of the General Assembly that all loaned educators submit annual financial disclosure statements, as is required by State employees in similar positions. Further provided that MSDE shall provide an annual census report on the number of loaned educator contracts and any conversion of these personnel to regular positions to the General Assembly by December 15, 2015, and every year thereafter. The annual report shall include job function, title, salary, fund source(s) for the contract, the first year of the contract, the number of years that the loaned educator has been employed by the State, and whether theeducator files a financial disclosure statement. MSDE shall also provide a report to the budget committees prior to entering into any new loaned educator contract to provide temporary assistance to the State. The budget committees shall have 45 days to review and comment from the date of receipt of any report on new contracts.

MSDE concurs.

3.   Add the following language:

Provided that 50 vacant positions shall be abolished within the Headquarters of the Maryland State Department of Education as of July 1, 2015.

MSDE respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.

A reduction of 50 budgeted positions would have a detrimental effect on MSDE's programs and reform efforts. Nearly 70% of MSDE's positions are in the Division of Early Childhood Development, the Juvenile Services Education Program, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. The proposed position reduction, if approved, would result in a decrease in the number of inspections performed at child care centers, a decrease in the number of teachers in DJS facilities, and an increase in the number of individuals waiting for services with the Division of Rehabilitation Services because MSDE would no longer be in a position to limit reductions in these programs. Furthermore, MSDE will have 48 fewer contractual positions in Fiscal 2016, primarily due to the ending of Race to the Top funds. As the RTTT funds expire, MSDE is identifying regular positions that will continue the work and build on the achievements of RTTT.

The analysis compares current vacancies (FY 2015) with the expected turnover rate in FY 2016. The current budgeted turnover rate in FY 2015 is 7.8% while the budgeted turnover in FY 2016 is 6.1%, a difference of 25 positions. Operating with a turnover expectancy that has exceeded 7% has been detrimental to many of our critical programs. Consequently, MSDE scrutinized the FY 2016 budget submission for possible efficiencies so that we could decrease our turnover expectancy to a reasonable level. Many positions are currently in the recruitment process.

At the same time, MSDE has to address significant Statewide cost containment actions that affect the agency's ability to fill positions. In January 2015 cost containment actions, $441,000 was added to MSDE's turnover expectancy, and a Statewide target of eliminating 1,000 positions was established, to which MSDE will have to contribute. The Fiscal 2016 Allowance includes a provision to reduce the State workforce by 500 positions, which would affect MSDE.

Finally, it is important to point out that MSDE has lost over 190 positions over the last six years. MSDE has successfully used existing positions and resources to address critical staffing needs, but is no longer in a position where this is possible without a significant impact on the services provided to Maryland citizens.

4.   Add the following language to the general fund appropriation:

, provided that $500,000 of this appropriation may not be expended until the Maryland State Department of Education submits a report to the budget committees on all federal grants appropriated in programs R00A01.01 through R00A01.18 in fiscal 2015, the amount of each grant that is unexpended at the end of the State fiscal year, and anticipated expiration date for each award. The report shall be submitted by September 1, 2015, and the budget committees

shall have 45 days to review and comment. Funds restricted pending the receipt of a report may not be transferred by budget amendment or otherwise to any other purpose and shall revert to the General Fund if the report is not submitted to the budget committees.

MSDE concurs.

5. Add the following language to the general fund appropriation:

, provided that $500,000 of this appropriation made for the purpose of accountability and assessments may not be expended until the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) submits a report to the budget committees on the progress made toward administering the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments online. The report shall specifically include:

(1) the number of students and percent of the total tested population taking the PARCC exams in the online versus paper-based format;

(2) any technological problems encountered by MSDE or the local education agencies (LEAs) in the preparation, administration, and evaluation of the PARCC exams;

(3) the progress made by the LEAs in addressing previously identified technological issues regarding the implementation of PARCC and digital learning; and

(4) any outstanding or newly identified issues related to the implementation of PARCC and the advancement of digital learning.

The report shall be submitted no later than December 1, 2015, and the budget committees shall have 45 days to review and comment. Funds restricted pending receipt of a report may not be transferred by budget amendment or otherwise to any other purpose and shall revert to the General Fund if the report is not submitted to the budget committees.

MSDE concurs.

6. Strike the following language from the general fund appropriation:

, provided that this appropriation shall be reduced by $2,173,655 contingent upon the enactment of legislation delaying the requirement to establish a Deaf Culture Digital Library and phasing in the increased funding provided for the Maryland Library for the Blind per Chapter 498 of 2014 over ten years.

MSDE concurs.

7. Reduce funds by delaying implementation of a Deaf Culture Digital Library until October 1, 2015.

Reduction: $232,672 GF

MSDE concurs.

Given the current budgetary constraints, MSDE understands the need to delay the implementation of new programs. Therefore, MSDE concurs with the DLS recommendations regarding the Deaf Culture Digital Library with the understanding that the anticipated funding will be provided in the future.

8. Extend the phase-in of the newly mandated funding formula for the Maryland Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped over a 10-year period to be consistent with other changes to library aid formulas.

Reduction: $1,940,983 GF

MSDE concurs.

Given the current budgetary constraints, MSDE understands the need to scale back significant funding increases. The action still would provide an increase for LBPH over the Fiscal 2015 level. While the funding increase under current law would provide optimal resources, patrons currently are receiving and would continue to receive materials under this action.   Therefore, MSDE concurs with the DLS recommendations regarding the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped with the understanding that the anticipated increase will be phased-in over ten years.