

TAAAC ACTION REPORT

Your Professional Organization

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Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County, An MST/NEA Affiliate

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Governor Under Funds Education, Again!

In 2002, the Thornton Commission made recommendations that became the Bridge to Excellence Act. The Commission concluded that the level of state funding was \$1300 per student below what was needed to provide an opportunity for children to succeed in school. The adjustment in State education aid to reflect regional differences in the cost of providing educational services is known as the Geographic Cost of Education Index or GCEI. (This determination was developed prior to the additional mandates of the federal No Child Left Behind.) **(3130)**

In FY 2004, 19 million was included in the State Budget for distribution in four jurisdictions. In FY 2005, the State Budget was due to include \$47.8 million for distribution to seven jurisdictions. Governor Ehrlich considered the GCEI to be discretionary because there was no specific formula already written into the law and he therefore did not include the money in his FY 2005 State Budget.

In the 2004 session, Legislators rewrote the law to include a specific index for calculating the amount of state aid for the GCEI. The new GCEI law provides for a phase-in of the state funding beginning with \$54.2 million for FY 2006 and \$106 million in FY 2009, for distribution to 13 jurisdictions.

Governor Ehrlich is once again refusing to fully fund education by ignoring the mandate to fund the GCEI. Anne Arundel County will lose \$3.5 million as a result. This unfair cut in State funding will add

Task Force Recommendations Threatens Employee Healthcare, Retiree Healthcare, Custodial and Cafeteria Staff

In the fall of 2003, the Superintendent created a Budget Task Force with the responsibility of evaluating the funding of AACPS. Subcommittees were organized around five budget categories and Howard County Public Schools was used as the benchmark, though not for salary purposes. In February, the Task Force made its final presentation to the Board of Education and the County Council.

A Summary of the work reaped the following recommendations:

- Re-examine teacher compensation to lower turnover, absentee and benefits rates... offer stability
- Consider outsourcing non-educational services, where feasible, to improve performance and/or reduce short and longer term costs
- Aggressively examine employee benefit rates and retiree costs — they are potential time bombs
- Aggressively attack the issues surrounding maintenance and renovation — this is a very critical issue
- Immediately begin to increase funding for intervention programs that are applied early, and then made available whenever needed — it is an investment that has great payoff

While the work of the Task Force was admirable, there were leaps to recommendations that cannot be supported by the research. We'll tackle those issues when space allows.



COMMENTARY

At the time of this writing, the Education budget being placed in front of the County Executive is up to \$735,919,371. The Board chose not to cut the Superintendent's proposed budget as expected. In fact, the Board increased it by nearly \$1M. The total budget now reflects an increase of 11% over last year, and full funding would require \$49.7 million in new county money in addition to state and federal aid. Based upon comments from the County Executive, as quoted in local news, full funding seems unlikely.

TAAAC has been supportive of the budget even though negotiations are still underway. The budget is one that is intended to meet the needs of the system. It contains over \$31 million in "employee related items," and TAAAC continues to work at the negotiating table on the best allocation of that money. If utilized correctly, there is enough to provide salary increases that will begin to close the salary gap between Anne Arundel County and its neighbors. In addition, the budget reflects necessary increases in staff to address our growing workload and to implement some new programs.

Anne Arundel County has been quite strapped for revenue in recent history and has fallen behind in the funding of Education, along with other essential public services. Not only is Anne Arundel's per pupil funding less than any of the surrounding urban counties, but also it is below the state average. The result has been understaffed schools, underpaid teachers, and too little student success despite all the new programs. At the time of

“AACPS Budget, Could It Be ‘Now or Never?’”

this writing, 12.1% of our county schools, including one third of its high schools, are identified by the state as "in need of improvement." If our system was to be rated based upon the portion of its schools carrying that designation, we would be ranked 17th in the state. That speaks very poorly for such a wealthy county.

What I'm about to say may be unpopular, but let us not sugarcoat this issue at the cost of historical accuracy. Having forewarned you in advance, there are three major culprits.

The 12-year existence of the property tax revenue cap. In 1992, 75%

of the voters adopted a property tax revenue cap that set an arbitrary limit on total collections. The county must limit any increase in total property tax revenues to the lesser of 4.5% over the prior year or the rate of inflation. With only one exceptional year attributable to each of the County Executives in office during the life of the cap (not coincidentally, occurring in election years) every annual budget bumped up against the ceiling it imposed. **(7586)**

The Gary years. From 1994 to 1998, under the leadership of then County Executive John Gary, the portion of the county budget allocated to education fell sharply. It impacted us in a number of ways, one of which was in teacher earnings. There was only one negotiated across-the-board increase funded during his four-year term. By the time Mr. Gary's re-election was upset by the campaign of the current County Executive, starting teacher salary in Anne Arundel County had fallen to 19th of the 24 Maryland districts. In prior years, we had been as high as 9th. Please do not reject this point as irrelevant and ancient history. Due to the limits imposed by the property tax revenue cap, those four years dug a funding hole out of which we can climb only very slowly.

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TAAAC Action Report

Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County	Officers	Board of Directors	Editors	
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From Contentia this month . . . *Student False Allegations*

It starts simply enough. One Friday afternoon, you handle a student behavioral problem in the classroom by implementing expert management skills. Calm returns to the classroom and instruction continues. The student is referred to the office for disruptive behavior and the incident is presumably over. You've probably forgotten about the issue, when you are summoned to the administrator's office to explain why you hit the student! Of course you are shocked and adamantly explain that you never hit, or even touched the student. Shaken by the accusation, you head for home, hoping to relax and contemplate the events of today over the weekend, but you are met in the driveway by a courier with a letter from the BOE. It states that you are not to return to school, that you are being investigated for allegedly hitting a student and the matter is being referred to Child Protective Services for further investigation of the charges of child abuse. You are instructed to attend a meeting at central office to receive your temporary re-assignment. (8123)

After many sleepless nights and worrisome days, the investigation is complete and you have been exonerated of all the allegations and returned to the classroom, but what happens to the student who made the false accusation? Prior to last year, nothing. Last year, the BOE voted to accept a *Student Code of Conduct*, which lists offenses and infractions and their subsequent disciplinary options and levels of consequences for student violations thereof. Unfortunately, for an infraction such as false accusations, there is a wide range of disciplinary options available to the administrator, including a letter or call to the parent, and up to and including an extended suspension of ten or more days. How does the administrator decide which consequence is warranted?

The *Student Code of Conduct* implies that progressive discipline should be used for each infraction, since a level of consequence is appropriate only after the previous level consequence has been ineffective. However, it is TAAAC's contention that the severity of the infraction should be taken into consideration to determine the appropriate level of consequence. In the aforementioned scenario, a letter or call to the parent is not sufficient or appropriate, given the impact of the student's accusations, and disciplinary action of a more serious nature is more suitable.

Teachers should recognize the importance of their involvement when determining appropriate disciplinary action for students, regardless of the nature of the infraction. The consequence a student's inappropriate behavior has upon the teacher is integral to determining the appropriate level of disciplinary action for the student. TAAAC will support all teachers' input and aggressively pursue the rightful disciplinary action against any student in violation of the *Student Code of Conduct*, particularly when action is taken against the teacher as a result of the student's behavior.

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(Commentary continued from 2)

Lack of political will to seek other revenue. In light of the cap's passing with such a huge portion of the popular vote, the local political culture has evolved into little more than a we-won't-dare-tax-you platform; and local elected officials have eschewed revenue generators that could make the cap less painful. The local income tax rate has not been changed since the late 60's; efforts to create a cell phone tax, an increase in the county's portion of parking receipts at BWI, and other efforts have failed. Anne

Arundel County is the 3rd or 4th wealthiest county in the state (depending upon the measure used) but we, as an electorate, have expressed a great reluctance to pay for education, public safety, and other quality-of-life services for which our neighboring counties pay for and enjoy. In doing so, we frightened our elected officials away from raising the necessary revenue.

Why is all this discussed here and now, you ask? The answer is this:

For the first time in recent history, Anne Arundel County is in a posi-

tion to fund public schools at an appropriate level to meet the needs of the system. FY04 left an undesignated \$38 million general fund balance, and TAAAC's consultant projects year end surplus for FY05 of an additional \$20.8 million. That would create a fund balance of \$58.8 million with which to kick-off FY06, before the first dollar in new revenue arrives. County coffers are at their fullest in recent history.

If our elected officials cannot do what is right for public education and for public educators in a good year, when will they?

2005 Mills-King Award Ceremony

Unfortunately, Mother nature did not cooperate with our scheduled Mills-King Award Ceremony. The event had to be postponed due to inclement weather, and as of this printing, another date and time had not yet been selected.

Nominees:

Judith Crawford
Ann Georgiou

Tracey Klug
Kathy Piet

Christopher Shelby

All the nominees have exemplified true excellence in human relations in education, and all are worthy of recognition for their dedication and commitment to the students and communities of Anne Arundel County.

Stay tuned for future announcements regarding the possible rescheduling of this important event and the winner of the Mills-King Award.

**“Not to know is bad;
Not to wish to know is worse.”**

TEACHERS...NOT JUST CRYING WOLF

While every other state in the region is trying to attract and keep highly qualified teachers, pension benefits are seen as a key to retention and Maryland is falling behind.

With its fourth place ranking in Personal Income Per Capita, Maryland is not paying its fair share into the state pension system for teachers who are entrusted with the future of the state — our children. Maryland's pension benefits rank among the lowest, if not the lowest, in the country.

THE FACTS:

There is a real teacher shortage in Maryland.

Pension benefits for Maryland teachers are the worst in the state system (including state troopers and the legislature).

At best, under the current system, a Maryland teacher will receive no more than 42% of his/her salary and will still have to pay taxes. In contrast, a retired teacher in Pennsylvania will receive a pension benefit of 75% of his/her average final salary and it is tax-free — as is New York.

How are we to retain highly qualified teachers if we give them nothing to show for their years of service?

That's why it is imperative that the Maryland General Assembly pass the MSTA Pension Enhancement Bill of 2005. Lead sponsors of this legislation are Delegate Adrienne Jones and Senator Nathaniel McFadden. It would:

Require benefits to be based on entire compensation (i.e. payment received for coaching, National Board Certification, etc.);

Increase multiplier across the board at intervals (2% for those with 1-15 years experience and 2.2% for those with 15+ years experience); and

Increase employees' contribution from 2% to 5%.

You can make a difference in your future and that of your fellow teachers. Be counted. Contact your senator and delegates and tell them to CO-SPONSOR & SUPPORT the MSTA Pension Enhancement Bill.

Christmas/Winter Break Extended

At the February Mid-month meeting, the Board adopted a new 2005-2006 Calendar. The new calendar reflects two additional days added to the Christmas/Winter Holiday in December and two days added at the end of the year. Schools will close on December 22nd and reopen on January 3rd. The last day for students will be June 15th, and for teachers June 19th.

These changes reflect concerns raised by staff and parents about the shortened holiday, as well as a contract issue for twelve-month employees.

Workshop Presenters Needed

MSTA is looking for presenters for workshops at the annual Convention in Ocean City Maryland, October 21 and 22, 2005. This is a great opportunity for teachers and support personnel who have a particular expertise or have some specific skills or knowledge to share with their colleagues from around the state. MSTA provides expenses and one night's accommodation per workshop given by a presenter. Individuals can enhance their resume and hone their presentation skills through this opportunity. The proposal form can be downloaded from MSTA's website www.mstane.org

Employment Opportunity

Spend Summer in the Sun

DRD Pool Management, Inc. is accepting resumes for summer job openings as swimming pool field supervisors and swimming pool managers. No Experience Necessary. For more information, call Noelle Navarro at 410-923-7665, 1-888-785-7665 or email: n_navarro@drdpools.com

NOMINATIONS OPEN

The TAAAC Nominating Committee is accepting nominations for **Credentials and Nominations Committees.**

Nomination forms will be accepted until the April 6th Association Representative Council Meeting.

NOMINATION FORM

Name _____
 Home Address _____
 School _____
 Phone (H) _____ (W) _____
 Ethnic group _____

I would like to place my name in nomination for the following position(s):

- Credentials Committee
- Nominations Committee

NOMINATIONS OPEN

The TAAAC Nominating Committee is accepting nominations for **Sick Leave Bank Approval Committee and AACPS Calendar Committee (Secondary).**

Nomination forms will be accepted until the May 4th Association Representative Council Meeting.

NOMINATION FORM

Name _____
 Home Address _____
 School _____
 Phone (H) _____ (W) _____
 Ethnic group _____

I would like to place my name in nomination for the following position(s):

- Sick Leave Bank Approval Committee
- AACPS Calendar Committee (Secondary)

Have you spotted the last four digits of your phone number? You may be a winner! Contact the TAAAC office.