



# Maryland POLICY REPORT

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## 15 QUESTIONS MARYLAND'S TEACHERS SHOULD ASK THEIR UNIONS

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It is election season again, and across the state local teachers' unions are campaigning for the candidates featured on their Apple Ballot, which they will distribute to large numbers of voters this November. The Apple Ballot enjoys a somewhat privileged place in the minds of Maryland's voters because of its claim to represent the views of teachers. But the union's interests do not always coincide with the public's interest in improving education, or even the interests of the teachers themselves. Just as the union issues questionnaires to political candidates prior to endorsing them, this paper in turn asks some questions of the unions. This should not be construed as "teacher bashing," "anti-union," or "anti-public education," as unions sometimes label those who offer alternatives to their policies, but rather as a critical examination of whether teacher unionization and the policies unions support have benefited teachers and the general public. It is healthy for any organization—especially one that claims to have the public's best interests at heart—to be challenged from time to time. The Maryland State Teachers Association and its affiliates have been asking candidates questions for decades. The time has come to ask them some questions as well.

### THE NATURE OF UNIONIZATION

#### *Question 1: What do unions do?*

Teachers' unions increasingly present the nature of what they do in terms of improving education. For instance, part of the Montgomery County Education Association's web site entitled "Who We Are" reads as follows:

MCEA is building a new kind of union where:

- Improving teaching and learning is central to our mission
- Collective bargaining is used to improve our schools
- High standards and collective responsibility are valued

MCEA and the Board of Education have an innovative collective bargaining agreement designed to create conditions that allow the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup>

This explanation, however, does not indicate the fundamental structural change that unions introduce into employee relations. According to MCEA's contract, "The Board recognizes the Association for

1. Montgomery County Education Association, "Who We Are," at [http://mcea.nea.org/Who%20We%20Are/who\\_we\\_are\\_2.htm](http://mcea.nea.org/Who%20We%20Are/who_we_are_2.htm), accessed June 12, 2006.

purposes of negotiation as the exclusive negotiating agent for all unit members with regard to all matters relating to salary, wages, hours, and other working conditions.”<sup>2</sup> The key phrase here is “exclusive negotiating agent.” Like all teacher contracts in Maryland, this contract introduces a third party (the union) into employee relations, prevents individual teachers from negotiating on their own behalf even if they want to, and gives competing unions no standing with the school system. Under an exclusive representation arrangement, teachers who are unhappy with the outcome of their union’s negotiations have no recourse. They are prevented from turning to themselves or another union for a better outcome. Even teachers who decide not to join the union must pay representation fees to support an organization whose performance in negotiations may not satisfy them. *Teachers should ask their unions if eliminating competition for representation services is in teachers’ best interests.*

**Question 2: Does a group’s right to bargain collectively trump a teacher’s right to bargain on his or her own?**

Teacher unionization began decades ago in Maryland, and to date no district has de-unionized. While it is possible for teachers to oust their union, this requires that 30 percent of teachers sign a decertification petition to hold a vote in which the majority wins, or that more than 50 percent of the unit members sign the de-certification petition.<sup>3</sup> This rarely happens in any industry, so the practical effect is that a decision made decades ago by a different group of teachers requires today’s teachers to bargain collectively through a third party even if some would prefer to bargain individually and directly. *Teachers should ask their union if workers have a fundamental human right to discuss the terms of their employment directly with their employer.*

**Question 3: Do unions serve the public interest?**

Fundamentally, unions are businesses. They are in the business of labor representation. It would be foolish to regard teachers’ unions as somehow rep-

resenting the public’s interest any more than auto workers’ or building service workers’ unions do, but teachers’ unions frequently claim as much, as the MCEA’s previously quoted statement indicates. Myron Lieberman, a former National Education Association official, wrote this:

No matter who is supposed to benefit from a union policy—the poor, the disabled, the preschool child, minorities, whatever—the union proposals always benefit teachers and teachers unions simultaneously. The union litmus test is not whether a policy benefits students; it is whether it benefits teachers or unions. The teachers unions... have been extremely successful in packaging teachers and teachers-union benefits as benefits to pupils or to ‘education.’<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes union policies may in fact serve the public interest, sometimes not. Unions have repeatedly resisted reforms such as school choice, differentiated and merit pay, and alternative certification, and have been noticeably absent on other issues such as the quality of Maryland’s Voluntary State Curriculum (see Question #14). *Teachers should ask their unions for evidence of how “new unionism,” collective bargaining, and the union’s policy positions have directly improved student achievement, and for evidence that successful reforms could not have succeeded without unionization.*

**Question 4: Can unions truly represent all teachers?**

Like workers in any industry, individual teachers are likely to have varying views on salaries, benefits, and working conditions. In Montgomery County, for instance, the teachers’ union represents over 12,000 employees, so it would be impossible for the union to represent everyone’s views. For example, different teachers might be willing to teach larger classes in exchange for higher salaries or smaller classes in exchange for lower salaries. So far no union contract in Maryland offers teachers this type of choice. *Teachers should ask their unions whether teachers would be better off if they could nego-*

2. Contract Agreement between Montgomery County Education Association and Board of Education of Montgomery County, at <http://mcea.nea.org/Publications/Contract/CONTRACT%20FINAL.pdf>, accessed June 12, 2006.

3. National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, Inc., “Decertification Election,” at <http://www.nrtw.org/d/decert.htm>, accessed June 12, 2006.

4. Myron Lieberman, “Do Teachers Unions Have a Positive a Positive Influence on the Educational System?” Education Policy Institute, at <http://www.educationpolicy.org/files/insitoc.htm>, accessed June 12, 2006.

tiate flexible arrangements with their principal at the local school level instead of having working conditions negotiated at the school system level.

**Question 5: Are teachers' unions different than teachers associations?**

While this may seem fairly obvious, some teachers and many members of the public are surprisingly unaware that teachers belong to unions. Teachers' unions in Maryland substitute the word "association" for "union," i.e., the Allegany County Teachers Association, the Howard County Teachers Association, the Montgomery County Teachers Association, the Washington County Teachers Association, and so on. Even at the state level, the Maryland State Teachers Association avoids the union designation. There is no difference between a union and an association except semantics. The fact that all public school teachers are unionized has significant practical and political consequences, including the fact that in most counties, teachers—unlike professionals in other fields—are paid according to fixed salary schedules and work under contracts full of rules and regulations. *Teachers ought to ask their unions if they avoid using the term "union" in an effort to present a more professional image, and to keep their union status under the radar screen of most voters.*

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

**Question 6: Does the influence of unions result in higher salaries?**

The basic premise of any union is that workers will be better off if they exchange their right to individually negotiate for the right to bargain collectively. But is this true? Unions often argue that teachers aren't making enough compared to private sector workers, but 92 percent of private sector workers are not in unions, so the idea that unions are the best vehicles for enhancing salaries seems questionable.<sup>5</sup> Economists generally agree that there are two main reasons that salaries rise in a free market: a shortage of labor or an increase in pro-

ductivity. Maryland's unions have rejected paying higher salaries to teachers in hard-to-staff subjects, so that option is not available to teachers. In terms of increasing productivity, one big factor is class size. An article by Dr. Chester Finn in the Hoover Digest points this out:

During the past half-century, the number of pupils in U.S. schools grew by about 50 percent, whereas the number of teachers nearly tripled. Spending per student rose threefold too. **If the teaching force had simply kept pace with enrollments, school budgets had risen as they did, and nothing else had changed, today's average teacher would earn nearly \$100,000, plus generous benefits.** We'd have a radically different view of the job, and it would attract different sorts of people.

Yes, classes would be larger—about what they were when I was in school. True, there'd be fewer specialists and supervisors. And we wouldn't have as many instructors for youngsters with "special needs." But teachers would earn twice what they do today (less than \$50,000, on average), and talented college graduates would vie for the relatively few openings in those ranks.<sup>6</sup> [*Emphasis added.*]

Despite a lack of evidence that lowering class sizes improves student learning (there are exceptions; see Question 13), teachers' unions have consistently supported the practice. Lowering class sizes places downward pressure on teachers' salaries because smaller student-teacher ratios increase the number of teachers that must be hired, which results in spreading financial resources more thinly over a larger number of teachers. While a number of studies show that teacher unionization tends to increase salaries and benefits as compared to non-union teachers (from 8-12 percent by one report,<sup>7</sup> with benefits increasing by an even larger margin<sup>7</sup>), this would seem to pale in comparison to the dramatic financial effect of lowering class sizes over the

5. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members Summary," at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>, accessed June 14, 2006.

6. Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Too Many Teachers, Too Little Pay," *Hoover Digest*, Spring 2005, at <http://www.hooverdigest.org/052/finn.html>, accessed June 23, 2006.

7. Tom Loveless, ed., *Conflicting Missions?: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform*, Brookings Press, 2000, p. 49, at <http://brookings.nap.edu/books/0815753039/html/49.html>, accessed October 24, 2006.

last 50 years. In the article, Dr. Finn also argues, “Instead of deploying technology so that gifted teachers reach hundreds of kids and others function more like tutors or aides, we assume that every classroom needs its own Socrates.” *Teachers should ask their unions if continuing to advocate for smaller class sizes and giving short shrift to finding innovative ways to raise productivity are counterproductive to raising teacher salaries.*

**Question 8: Why do unions oppose paying higher salaries to teachers of hard-to-staff subjects?**

It is hard to imagine that the union would reject efforts to pay teachers more, but they do, at least when it comes to paying teachers in hard-to-staff subjects more. It is difficult to see how offering higher salaries for hard-to-staff positions would hurt teachers, especially since there is already a precedent for differentiating salaries. Teachers’ unions have negotiated stipends for extracurricular activities that vary by sport, subject, grade level, athletic level, and, in some cases, gender. Generally speaking, high school coaches make more than middle school coaches, varsity coaches make more than junior varsity coaches, and basketball coaches make more than baseball coaches. Some differentiation seems a bit peculiar, such as the fact that the high school girl’s tennis coaches receive \$70 more than high school boys’ tennis coaches in the latest MCEA contract.<sup>8</sup> (It would be interesting to know the argument for differentiating this stipend so precisely, and also why the difference is apparently based on gender.)

The MCEA contract also pays a stipend of only \$1,400 for high school “It’s Academic” coaches but \$1,638 to Matheletes coaches. The contract specifies \$4,200 for high school choral directors but \$4,718 for high school drama directors. What accounts for these differences? How can the union justify agreeing to differentiate extracurricular stipends by sport, subject, and various other factors, but object to doing the same for classroom subjects? Isn’t the same principle involved?

**Question 9: Why don’t unions insist on merit pay?**

Despite frequent claims that teachers should be treated like other professionals, no teachers’ union in Maryland has started a campaign for merit pay, which many professionals in other industries have the opportunity to earn. A good merit pay program would consider both objective factors (student gains in test scores) and subjective ones (classroom observations, parents’ comments, leadership qualities, etc.). Maryland’s unions object to merit pay, usually claiming that it is unfair, but isn’t it also unfair to pay all teachers the same based only on their degrees and years of service? Unless unions believe that all teachers with the same educational background and experience are equally effective, which is surely not the case, it seems that Maryland’s unions aren’t doing all that they can to improve teachers’ compensation. Other unions, such as the Denver Classroom Teachers Association in Denver, Colorado, have started merit pay programs that have resulted in increasing teachers’ pay.<sup>9</sup> Why not Maryland’s? *Teachers should ask their unions if teachers would be better off if unions stopped rejecting the idea of merit pay on its face and instead used their considerable influence to bargain for merit pay plans that are fair and gave excellent teachers the ability to considerably raise their salaries.*

**Question 10: Why doesn’t the union insist on having the option for portable pensions?**

In the 2005 General Assembly session, the Maryland State Teachers Association won a major victory when the legislature voted to increase teachers’ pensions. Now that teacher pensions have been increased (which the union wrongly termed “pension reform,” since the major change was increasing funding and not structural), the time seems right for true pension reform. Instead of requiring that all teachers participate in the plan administered by the Maryland Pension and Retirement Agency, why not give teachers the option to take the same funding that the pension administrators would contribute on their behalf and put it into a 403(b) in which the funds were fully vested immediately?

A 403(b), which is the public sector equivalent of the better-known 401(k) plans that are prevalent

8. Contract Agreement between Montgomery County Education Association and Board of Education of Montgomery County, at <http://mcea.nea.org/Publications/Contract/CONTRACT%20FINAL.pdf>, accessed June 17, 2006.

9. Denver Public Schools, Professional Compensation System for Teachers, at <http://procomp.dpsk12.org/earningscalc/>, accessed June 20, 2006.

in private industry, is a tax-deferred retirement plan that teachers can take with them if they leave teaching or switch in and out of the profession over the course of their careers. Today's workers switch jobs more frequently than in the past, so portable pension plans are the logical response to that reality. Instead of having to wait until retirement to access their funds, 403(b) plans allow workers—with or without the advice of a financial firm—to manage their own investments and to borrow from the plan in the case of a financial hardship. Since teachers would be in charge of their own money, there would be no risk of the state “raiding” the pension funds in the case of a statewide fiscal crisis. And since teachers would be given the option to choose a portable plan or remain in the existing one, teachers would have an additional choice for planning their retirement. *Teachers should ask their unions to explain why they haven't supported giving teachers the option for portable pensions.*

## TEACHER SHORTAGES AND TEACHER QUALITY

### *Question 11: Have the unions' policies contributed to teacher shortages?*

Lieberman summed it up best when he wrote this:

If your child does not have a qualified mathematics or science teacher, you can thank the NEA and AFT for the salary policies that are to blame. Teachers unions advocate single-salary schedules—paying all teachers the same salary regardless of subject. Under single salary schedules, teachers are paid solely on the basis of their years of teaching experience and their academic credits. The teachers unions have made sure that teachers' salaries are not based on merit or the type of subjects taught. It is a fact—frequently cited by NEA and AFT officials themselves—that school districts are unable to find and hold qualified mathematics and science teachers.

The obvious solution is to pay mathematics and science teachers more to attract qualified people in these fields. Unfortunately, the unions are opposed to this commonsense solution. They cite the shortage of teachers in mathematics and science as an argument to raise the salaries of **all** teachers, even those in fields where there is a plentiful supply.

Higher-education administrators know it would be practically impossible to operate a university by paying all professors, regardless of subject, the same salary. Universities would be unable to employ qualified medical professors if their salaries were the same as for English professors. Similarly, people who can teach mathematics and science can earn more in occupations outside of teaching. Thus, when the teachers unions insist that all teachers be paid the same regardless of subject, they help create shortages of qualified teachers of mathematics and science.”<sup>10</sup>

Not only have unions rejected paying the higher salaries to attract more teachers to shortage subjects, but they have also made it unnecessarily cumbersome for teachers to become certified. The state's traditional certification requires two additional courses in reading for all teachers—even for high school math teachers—which is an unusual requirement not found in many other states. Even the state's alternative certification program requires 180-270 hours of study to attain certification, despite a lack of evidence that these courses improve teacher effectiveness. In Maryland, the standards for teacher licensure are set through the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board. This board consists of 25 members, including teachers' unions (32 percent), teacher education school representatives (24 percent), board of education, superintendent, and principal associations (20 percent), independent school representatives (12 percent), ex officio members (8 percent), and one representative from the Maryland State Department of Education (4 percent).<sup>11</sup>

10. Myron Lieberman, “Do Teachers Unions Have a Positive a Positive Influence on the Educational System?” Education Policy Institute, at <http://www.educationpolicy.org/files/insitoc.htm>, accessed June 12, 2006.

11. Maryland State Department of Education, Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board Members, at [http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/certification/certification\\_branch/professional\\_practice/psteb\\_members](http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/certification/certification_branch/professional_practice/psteb_members), accessed June 23, 2006.

Teachers' unions have an interest in restricting the entry of more teachers into the labor pool because increasing the supply of teachers can place downward pressure on salaries. Colleges and universities—not to mention the faculty of the education departments themselves—have an interest in the state continuing to require education coursework for certification, since requiring these courses provide increased revenue to their schools. Perhaps this is why the Steele Commission report argued the following:

Maryland's Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB) has not been an effective vehicle for advancing the teaching profession and meeting the needs of children. Too often it has focused on the concerns of adult interest groups and has moved slowly on needed reform efforts to serve Maryland's children, standing in the way of vital education changes. PSTEB should be re-established as an advisory board, and its membership should be comprised of a broad spectrum of stakeholders focused on preparing, credentialing, and evaluating high performing education professionals and not on monitoring status quo interests within the education system. As an advisory group to state policymakers, its purpose should be redefined to include an action-oriented focus on children and how best to meet their education needs. Short of such reform, PSTEB should be abolished.<sup>12</sup>

With such a significant representation on the board, the teachers' union has missed out on an opportunity to use its influence to streamline the state's certification requirements to bring more teachers into the profession, not to mention increasing its membership. *Teachers should ask their unions why they have not advocated for streamlined alternative certification programs that don't require prospective candidates to sit through hours of education courses of dubious value.*

### **Question 12: Have unions helped to improve teacher quality?**

Just about everyone associated with education, including the teachers' unions, agree with the idea that high quality teachers are the most important element of education reform. But if this is true, then why hasn't the union insisted on tracking more data about teacher quality? Though most of the factors associated with being a good teacher are not measurable, two measurable factors—a teacher's level of literacy as measured by a vocabulary and other standardized tests, and the selectivity of the undergraduate institution attended—correlate with student achievement.<sup>13</sup> These statistics could be reported annually to provide the public with greater insight into the academic characteristics of teachers at each school, district, and the state as a whole, and could be made part of the Maryland Report Card.

More important than formal credentials, however, are the actual results in the classroom. If the teachers' unions want to help improve teacher quality, then they ought to encourage the state to adopt a value-added assessment system that measures the progress individual students make throughout the school year. Such a system could be combined with other measures such as formal classroom evaluations to provide a more complete picture of teacher effectiveness. *Teachers should ask their unions why they have not insisted on providing the public with more data about teacher quality, and if they will advocate for a value-added assessment system and publishing more data about teachers' academic credentials.*

## **EDUCATION POLICY**

### **Question 13: Does unions' support for smaller class sizes improve education?**

Maryland's unions have long argued for reducing class sizes, and in one instance claimed, "The benefits of smaller classes are now widely acknowledged and verified through research" and cited Tennessee's longitudinal class-size study, the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project, as evidence.<sup>14</sup> But Eric Hanushek, one of the nation's

12. The Governor's Commission on Quality Education in Maryland, *September 2005 Report*, at <http://www.gov.state.md.us/GCQE/GCQE-FINAL-LO.pdf>, accessed July 12, 2006.

13. National Council on Teacher Quality, *Increasing the Odds: How Good Policies Can Yield Better Teachers*, at [http://www.nctq.org/nctq/images/nctq\\_io.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/nctq/images/nctq_io.pdf), accessed July 12, 2006.

preeminent researchers in the subject, found a number of problems with STAR, including:

- Between 20 and 30 percent of students in STAR quit each year, leaving less than half of the original group by the study's end.
- The students who quit were disproportionately low performers, providing a statistical boost to smaller classes.
- No pretests were given to students at the beginning of the study, providing no baseline by which to measure achievement gains.
- While students for the program were chosen randomly, teachers and schools were not.<sup>15</sup>

Another scholar, E.D. Hirsch, had a different criticism of STAR:

In fact, it was not the experimental structure of STAR but its intellectual structure that was deficient. This multi-million dollar study does not hazard a clear and detailed theoretical interpretation of its own findings. It does not, for example, answer such nitty-gritty questions as: What are the various causal factors that make smaller class size more effective for earlier grades than for later ones? Could there be alternative and even more reliable ways of achieving similar or higher student gains? Much of the literature I have read in connection with STAR quietly assumes that smaller class size is itself the causal agent. But even the more sophisticated interpretations of STAR which posit deeper causal factors do not systematically explore the following critical issue: Given the probable causes of student gain, are there even more effective and less costly ways of applying those causes and achieving the same or greater gains? If, for example, an important causal advantage of smaller class size is more interaction time between student and teacher, are there alternative, less expensive policies for achieving more interaction time and even greater student gains? These are the questions that a

policymaker needs to have answered, and it is the duty of the informed researcher on the ground—not the beset legislator—to ponder and answer those questions.

Traditionally, scientific work is considered 'good' if its results foster deeper theoretical understanding. One of the most disdainful remarks in the sciences is that a piece of work is 'a-theoretical.' It's true that in common parlance the word 'theory' has an overtone of impracticality. Scientists, however, regard the formulation of theories about deep causal factors to be the motive force of scientific progress—a view that has rightly replaced an earlier just-the-facts conception of scientific advance. The STAR study is a first-rate illustration of the way in which the a-theoretical tradition in education research hinders its utility. Wolfgang Pauli once remarked about a scientific paper: 'It is not even wrong.' That is exactly what can be said about the STAR study, and by extension many other classroom studies. Most of them are profoundly a-theoretical. They neither enable good policy inferences nor advance the research agenda.<sup>16</sup>

Let's consider Hirsch's point in more detail. If class size reductions work, why do they work? The usual explanation is that reducing class sizes allows teachers to give students individual attention, but does this make sense? A typical middle school or high school class has around 30 students and runs for 45 minutes. Even if a teacher wanted to spend the entire class period giving students individual attention, each student would only get 1.5 minutes of the teachers' time—hardly enough time to explain anything. If we reduce class sizes to 20 students, now each student can have 2 minutes and 15 seconds of the teacher's time, an increase of a mere 45 seconds that would require a great expense to achieve. It's reasonable to assume that teachers usually teach for at least 30 minutes, so if we had a more realistic assumption that the teacher might have 15 minutes available to help individual stu-

14. Cheryl Bost, "Testimony in Support of House Bill 70 Education – Class Size Reduction," before the House Ways and Means Committee, February 23, 2006, at <http://www.mstanea.org/political/GA06/hb70.php>, accessed July 13, 2006.

15. Neal McCluskey, "Sizing Up What Matters: The Importance of Small Schools," Center for Education Reform, May 1, 2002, at <http://www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=document&documentID=863>, accessed July 13, 2006.

16. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., "Classroom Research and Cargo Cults," *Policy Review*, at <http://www.policyreview.org/OCT02/hirsch.html>, accessed July 13, 2006.

dents, the numbers are even worse. If we then say that we'll assume that teachers only need to help 4 or 5 students, the numbers don't get much better. Plus, every time a teacher spends time helping an individual student, the rest of the students are not getting instruction from the teacher. Looked at this way, the argument that reducing class size increases the amount individual attention a student receives seems suspect.

Other research, too, raises important questions. Many of the nations that outscore the U.S. in international comparisons have much larger class sizes, especially at the secondary level. A study of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) found that for the 17 nations with consistent test and pupil-teacher ratio data, larger class sizes were actually associated with *higher* test scores.<sup>17</sup>

There does appear to be an exception for the early elementary grades. The Brookings Institution examined both sides of the issue and said the following about the findings of Hanushek:

When Hanushek looks at the same results in chapter 7, however, he argues that smaller class sizes improve test scores in the first year of an experiment (kindergarten or first grade), but that no further gain is realized from maintaining small classes in subsequent years. Hanushek's interpretation is that children get a one-time gain from smaller classes that is retained even when children return to average-sized classes. Thus he argues that reductions in class size should be limited to kindergarten and first grade, because the evidence does not justify the great expense of reducing classroom size in other grades.<sup>18</sup>

No matter how you analyze it, there are considerable doubts that across-the-board class size reductions will improve achievement. Perhaps more experiments with class size reduction should be conducted, but based on the available research it seems fair to say that class size reduction is not a proven reform. *Teachers should ask their unions if they have overstated the case for class size reduction, and overlooked evidence that contradicts their position.*

**Question 14: If teaching and learning are central to the unions' mission, why don't the unions speak out about state and local curricula?**

The Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum describes the grade-by-grade expectations in math, science, English, and history. The math curriculum is so poorly written that 50 professors from Maryland's college and universities have signed a petition which says the math standards will "deny students the essential skills and knowledge needed for college level mathematics" and that they prescribe "pretend algebra" that is actually at a fifth or sixth grade level.<sup>19</sup> The Fordham Foundation gave Maryland's math standards a C, its science standards a B, its English standards a C, and its World History standards a D. Do Maryland's teacher unions believe these standards are good enough? No affiliate has yet to start a campaign for curriculum improvement.

Frederick County's math curriculum, which is in part based on the VSC, contains an enormous number of objectives per year. California's curriculum, which received the highest grade of all states by the Fordham Foundation and was cited by the Maryland professors who signed the petition as an example of a high quality curriculum, is significantly more focused, as Table 1 illustrates.

17. Eric A. Hanushek, "The Evidence on Class Size," W. Allen Wallis Institute of Political Economy, University of Rochester, *Occasional Paper* No. 98-1, February 1998, at <http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/size.pdf>, accessed July 13, 2006.

18. Susan E. Meyer and Paul E. Peterson, eds., "Earning and Learning: How Schools Working," Brookings Press, 1999, p. 109, at <http://brookings.nap.edu/books/0815755295/html/109.html>, accessed July 13, 2006.

19. Department of Mathematics, University of Maryland, "Petition to Upgrade Maryland's Mathematics Standards," at [http://www.math.umd.edu/~jnd/subhome/petition\\_w\\_sign.htm](http://www.math.umd.edu/~jnd/subhome/petition_w_sign.htm), accessed July 12, 2006.



Table I

Grade	# of Frederick Standards	# of California Standards	# More	% More
K	57	26	31	119%
1	76	39	37	95%
2	88	49	39	80%
3	101	60	41	68%
4	111	69	42	61%
5	102	47	55	117%
6	100	63	37	59%
7	99	68	31	46%
8	106	*	*	*
Algebra	35	31	4	13%

\* California defines algebra as the standard for 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In two grade levels Frederick county has more than twice the number of objectives per year as California, which the equivalent of attempting to fit two years worth of work into one year. In all but two years Frederick has 50 percent more objectives than California, which is like adding an additional half a year's worth of material. There are only 180 days per school year, so assuming that teachers on average would need at least one day to teach an objective and one day to have students practice it (which is a very aggressive timeline for most topics in math) it seems impossible that teachers could possibly teach all of the material in grades 3–8, since those grade levels contain from 99–111 objectives.

One would think that such an unrealistic set of expectations would warrant a strong rebuke from the Frederick County Teachers Association, which is rightly concerned about teacher workload, but to date they have not issued any such statement, despite claiming a commitment to “Promoting the highest level of professional practice in the classroom while identifying and eliminating barriers to effective teaching and learning.”<sup>20</sup> *Teachers should ask their unions if they should place more emphasis on advocating for better state and local curricula.*

## MOVING FORWARD

### **Question 15: What would school systems look like without unions?**

This is probably the wrong question to ask. While it is possible that some charter schools will be able to become non-union, the reality is that teachers' unions will likely remain a fixture in the public schools for a very long time. The more relevant near-term question is whether unions will remain obstacles or become supporters of needed reforms. Some unions, such as the Montgomery County Education Association, have begun to support important changes. The MCEA established a Peer Assistance and Review program that provides a mechanism to improve or remove poorly performing teachers, though unfortunately the process does not yet include value-added student achievement data as an objective component to help ascertain teacher performance. Still, this is progress for which the MCEA deserves great credit. The Washington County Teachers Association worked to establish a career ladder that promotes teachers who achieve defined levels of performance and offers stipends for working in hard-to-staff schools, and this, too, is a very promising development.

20. Frederick County Teachers Association, at <http://myfcta.org/myfctaisabout.html>, accessed October 26, 2006.

Despite some good developments, teachers, policymakers, and the general public ought to advance the discussion of how to best improve Maryland schools by starting to ask more questions of the teachers' unions. Now that this questionnaire has

been issued, one last query remains: Will Maryland's teachers' unions choose to answer it?

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