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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1421  
Education—Advanced Courses—Automatic Enrollment**

**Ways and Means Committee  
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1:00 PM**

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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1421, legislation that would require the automatic enrollment of a student identified as gifted and talented; college-and career-ready; or exceeding grade level standards on the Maryland State Assessment into advanced courses. It also calls for universal screening to identify students who are gifted and talented so that they may be automatically enrolled in advanced courses.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

One of the most important jobs an educator has is identifying the strengths and potential in our students so that we can assist them in fully developing those assets in the service of building a bright future themselves. For some of our students, identifying their potential and their strengths is relatively easy. When they see it for themselves or when they come to us fully aware of their potential based on their previous academic and extracurricular achievements, helping to further guide them toward more challenging courses and experiences is easy to do. However, far too often, we miss the strengths and potential in some of our students, particularly those who may have struggled academically in their past or who have not proactively sought out more challenging classes and activities. This under-identification can contribute to the opportunity and achievement gaps seen among our student groups.

This is not a problem that is unique to Maryland’s educators. In fact, Maryland is not the first state to consider policies or legislation aimed at increasing the number of students from historically underrepresented groups who are enrolled in advanced classes. With the approval of their school board, Federal Way Public Schools in Washington State pioneered their Accelerated Academics program<sup>1</sup>, a program whose goal was to ensure equitable opportunities for access to advanced coursework, during the 2010-2011 school year. Within three years, 70 percent of Federal Way high school students were enrolled in advanced classes.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the fifth

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/advanced-students-federal-way\\_n\\_869487](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/advanced-students-federal-way_n_869487) (Accessed March 3, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kuow.org/stories/proposed-law-would-require-wash-schools-enroll-students-ap-classes/> (Accessed March 3, 2020)



year, the course pass rate for all high school student groups was 89 percent or higher.<sup>3</sup> According to 2019 data these pass rates remain largely the same.<sup>4</sup> Last year, Washington State passed a law that allows for automatic eligibility into advanced math, English, and science courses for all high school students.<sup>5</sup> Similar efforts have also been undertaken in North Carolina and Colorado.

Bringing an effort such as this to Maryland holds a great deal of promise. It also aligns to the stated goal of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to ensure that all of our state's students receive a world class education. In order to ensure that this legislation is successful, it is important to note that simply providing access to more academically rigorous classes alone is not enough. In order to truly close opportunity and achievement gaps among those who are enrolled in more rigorous courses, students will need strong relationships with their teachers and structural supports within their school community to ensure that those who struggle in these course have a means by which to get the assistance they need in order to be successful in the end.

That said, MSEA enthusiastically endorses the overall goals of this legislation because we believe that it will ultimately have an exponentially positive impact on our historically underserved students and will set our state on a path toward closing opportunity gaps between all of our student groups in the go forward. **We strongly and unequivocally urge a favorable report on House Bill 1260.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/education/lab/gifted-programs-across-washington-leave-out-black-and-latino-students-except-in-federal-way/> (Accessed March 3, 2020)

<sup>4</sup> <http://stand.org/washington/blog/washington-adopts-first-nation-law> (Accessed March 3, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1599-S2.PL.pdf> (Accessed March 3, 2020)