



Dr. Deborah Rapoport
Head of School

Mr. David Reidy
President

February 7, 2024
SB 426
Maryland STEM Program
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Position: Support

I am Dr. Deborah Lourie Rapoport, Head of School at Ohr Chadash Academy (OCA), an Orthodox Jewish day school in Baltimore serving boys and girls in preschool through middle school. To give you some of my background, I have been in education for 25 years as a biology and neuroscience teacher, learning specialist, high school administrator, and now head of school. I am a graduate of the public schools of suburban Philadelphia. I have a bachelor's degree in Molecular Neurobiology from Wellesley College, a master's degree in Neuroscience from the University of Rochester, and a doctorate of education in Mind, Brain, and Teaching from Johns Hopkins University.

In my 15 years of teaching high school neuroscience, I was privileged to see numerous students of mine enter the fields of medicine and nursing, speech-language pathology, psychology, behavior analysis, even leadership and management, informed by an understanding of the neuroscience of learning and behavior, all because they were inspired by the science that inspired me.

But, this is not about me. This is about the power of a science teacher to change how students understand the world and themselves. Science taught well teaches students how to be keen observers and to notice patterns. To make connections between ideas, and to understand how things work. To set up an experiment and watch with wide eyes when a colorful reaction takes place before you. Or to design a structure and see it fail. Then, trying it a different way that leads to the thrill of success! Learning how to use failure as a sign not to give up, but to rethink your assumptions and your approach is a critical life skill. No matter what field our students choose to pursue as adults, our goal is to provide them with a core foundation of scientific literacy and the self-regulatory skills to overcome challenge that will help them make well-informed decisions about their health and their environment and so much more.

Our challenge as schools is in finding enough qualified STEM teachers to provide this essential education to our students. At OCA, we are grateful to have a science teacher we love, who excites our students through experiential hands-on learning. However, one teacher for our school is not sufficient and finding qualified candidates is extremely challenging. I don't want to limit this discussion to science teachers, because math, engineering, and computer science teachers are equally in short supply.

We are experiencing a deeply troubling trend in across Maryland and the US, in fewer and fewer young people going into education, particularly in the STEM fields. We simply don't have enough teachers to prepare and inspire the students of today to become tomorrow's physicians and scientists, voters and policy makers, mothers and fathers.

As legislators, you have the ability to find novel approaches to filling this gap. HB 213 would offer qualified public school STEM teachers an opportunity to teach at schools like mine. Our school day is longer than public schools' and these teachers could supplement their work, doing what they love. We would be thrilled to access experienced teachers, learn from them, and send even stronger thinkers and decision makers out into the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah L. Rapoport".

Dr. Deborah L. Rapoport