

Informational Testimony regarding Senate Bill 662  
Education—Commission on Multicultural Education—  
Establishment

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony on Senate Bill 662, legislation that would establish the Commission on Multicultural Education.

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).

The history of both our state and our country is far more diverse than is generally reflected in the content and courses currently taught in public schools. As such, many members of the United States and Maryland body politic can progress through their formal primary and secondary education and rarely, if ever, see themselves reflected in the content they are learning or hear about themselves in the stories they read and are told. This lack of inclusivity negatively impacts not only the agency our students perceive in their learning, but it also adversely impacts overall student engagement in their learning. This disconnect is further exacerbated by the dearth of a more diverse field of educators in our schools and by the disproportionate (and sometime inaccurate) representations seen in society and in our culture that ultimately reinforces a sense of "otherness" for the people, communities, and cultures who have been rendered less relevant and less valuable.

MSEA unequivocally believes that our diversity makes us stronger. We recognize the importance of ensuring that all of our students see themselves in the lessons they learn and experiences they enjoy while under our tutelage. There is no doubt that the current history, civics, and cultural standards



required by our state could be more reflective of the myriad people and communities that live in our state and in our country. To that end, MSEA has thrown our support behind a similar effort called for in HB 140—legislation introduced this session by Del. Gabriel Acevero—that calls for the creation of a commission to study the state’s current standards and make recommendations aimed at amending these standards so that they better reflect not only the history of the African American community in Maryland but of other affinity group communities within our state. And while ensuring the diversity of voices is brought forth in our social studies standards, we would be falling short if we did not consider ways in which the myriad of historically underrepresented voices are incorporated into all of the subject areas our students are learning, including those deemed to be core content areas—math, science, English language arts, and social studies—as well as those outside of the core areas, such as the arts, health education, career and technology education, etc.

Finally, MSEA believes unequivocally that educators need to play a significant role in any and all efforts to review learning standards and to suggest curriculum resources and instructional best practices best suited to meet said standards. These educators should come from both the ranks currently serving in our PreK-12 schools and from higher education, particularly those who are responsible for preparing future educators in content-specific instructional methodology. This will ensure that those most keenly aware of the current instructional landscape in our classrooms and the particular learning needs of our students and aspiring educators are positioned to influence and recommend that which is most needed in our schools and communities. We thank the sponsor for bringing this legislation forward and for setting the table for this very important conversation.