

# THE POLICY SCIENCES CENTER, INC.

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Acting Superintendent Hon. Jack R. Smith  
Maryland Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Acting Superintendent Smith:

Congratulations on your selection as the next Superintendent for Montgomery County schools! I write, in your current joint capacities as Superintendent-designate and as Acting State Superintendent, to ask if you will give your blessing to a **LearnStorm Challenge** initiative for mathematics, grades 3-12, for nine weeks this fall? The current package ([www.learnstorm2016.org](http://www.learnstorm2016.org)) was designed by Khan Academy and partners; it launched last week in two urban areas (Bay Area, the Chicago area), a state (Idaho), and the first nation (Ireland).

The design of **LearnStorm Challenge** is described in the enclosed material. It is a multi-level package that includes changes in mindsets (“Anybody Can Learn Anything”) and other research discoveries supported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the Gates Foundation, and nonprofit providers of online educational resources. It is an exciting, high-visibility, initiative to help students who have fallen behind in math to catch up, and to help students at all levels of mastery to improve. It celebrates both mastery and “grit.” It is designed to be fun. Achievements can be assessed against national standards using the Khan Academy’s problem sets.

**LearnStorm Challenge** for math is the kind of initiative and fresh thinking that the Board of Education in Montgomery County has been looking for. It adds a new dimension of resources and community partnerships for math education across the State. The Khan Academy’s extensive resources are online and free to students. The costs of **LearnStorm Challenge** are paid by corporate and foundation sponsors – in the SF Bay Area, by Google, Comcast, and others; in Chicago, by the Hyatt Hotels; in Idaho by the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation; and by a coalition of private and public partners for Ireland. There are no permanent budget implications for Montgomery County or Maryland.

[To celebrate Oakland’s success in a 2015 **LearnStorm Challenge** pilot project, Comcast has awarded six months of free high speed home Internet service for all qualifying families with students registered in the **LearnStorm Challenge** 2016 initiative. This includes the Oakland Unified

School District plus families with participating students attending charter, parochial, private, and cyber schools, as well as those who are being home schooled. Comcast also added a time-limited offer of a free laptop, plus an initial six months of free home Internet, for eligible participating families.]<sup>1</sup>

May I suggest that you, in your capacity as Acting State Superintendent in Maryland, quickly appoint a planning group to launch **LearnStorm Challenge 2016** for nine weeks this fall, with participation by Montgomery County, other interested jurisdictions and groups and potential sponsors? They could visit Khan Academy (Mountain View, CA) in April for briefings and to scope-out what will be required for a Maryland initiative. Comcast is a national corporate sponsor of Khan Academy and, also as a civic leader in Maryland, might help to open doors. If you decide to get behind this, in your new official capacity in Montgomery County that begins this summer, your leadership can build momentum for the entire state.

I would be grateful to know your decision.

Yours truly,

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge, Montgomery County  
Public School Graduate (1964); Director – In-  
ternational Scientific Networks

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<sup>1</sup> “Khan Academy and Comcast Partner to Honor Oakland Students: Khan Academy Awards East Bay Students Top ‘Hustle’ Honor for LearnStorm 2015.” August 19, 2015. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/khan-academy-and-comcast-partner-to-honor-oakland-students-300130228.html>