



Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

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TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D. *Lillian M. Lowery*
DATE: March 24, 2015
SUBJECT: School System Modifications Due to Severe Weather Conditions

PURPOSE:

- 1) To consider up to a three-day (3) waiver of the 180-day school year requirement for all Maryland school systems due to the continuous inclement weather that affected the State of Maryland from January, 2015 through March, 2015. In the written request, the school system must demonstrate the efforts taken to incorporate the identified inclement weather days in its calendar, the modifications made to the calendar to increase instructional time, and the addition of days to its calendar as needed.
- 2) To request that the State Board grant authorization to the State Superintendent of Schools to approve individual requests from local school superintendents to make adjustments in the school calendar due to emergency closings due to severe weather conditions based upon the conditions set forth above.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

For the last several years, the State of Maryland has experienced weather conditions that have forced school systems to make decisions about closing schools. In past years, we have experienced near blizzard conditions, back to back snow storms and frigid temperatures. In February, 2010, the State Superintendent asked the State Board of Education to consider a waiver from one day up to five days depending upon the review of each local superintendent's request. The request had to include the efforts the school system made to make-up instructional time; how the school calendar was modified; and the efforts made to extend the school year.

In March 2014, the State Superintendent requested approval from the State Board to review and consider requests from local superintendents to grant waivers for up to five (5) days. The State Board approved the State Superintendent's request after considerable discussion and with the understanding that the review and approval would be on a case-by-case basis. Each school system made a waiver request; many were approved, however, several requests were not approved and had to be modified.



The weather conditions for this school year are similar in some ways to last year. However, twenty-two out of twenty-four school systems missed fewer days this year; in several systems, the difference between last year's missed time and this year's missed time is six days.

Education Article §7-103(a) requires that schools be open for student attendance 180 actual days. Section §7-103(b) of the Education Article gives the State Board of Education the authority to make adjustments to the length of the school year. Such adjustments may be granted if normal school attendance is prevented because of natural disaster; civil disaster; or severe weather conditions.

The conditions for granting waivers of the 180-day school year requirement are specified in COMAR 13A.02.01.04 and include the following:

1. The school system demonstrates they have made sufficient effort in providing instruction through calendar planning and modifications; and
2. Natural or civil disasters or severe weather conditions are sufficiently significant to warrant a waiver of days.

The conditions required for the application for a waiver are specified in COMAR 13A.02.01.04 (C) and includes the following:

1. The local school system developed a calendar which included days to be used to make up days lost. Depending upon past experience, this number could range from 3 to 10 days throughout the State. The local school system shall have identified those potential make-up days which could have been used as student days when calendar modification becomes necessary, that is, make-up days, student vacations days, etc.; and
2. The local school system has modified its calendar by scheduling school on make-up days provided in the original calendar and by extending the school year 5 days beyond the previously scheduled closing date.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Inclement weather conditions this school year have been continuous. The State of Maryland has been impacted by snow, ice and extremely frigid temperatures.

Local school superintendents are sensitive to the amount of instructional time that has been lost due to these weather challenges. Merely extending the school year into late

Members of the State Board of Education
March 24, 2015
Page 3

June, however, without calendar modifications, will likely create other hardships for students and staff.

At the January 27, 2015 State Board of Education meeting, you granted me the authority to approve requests from individual school systems to be open on State holidays. Four school systems have requested permission to be open for student attendance on Monday, April 6, 2015 (Easter Monday). These requests have been approved.

ACTION:

I am requesting the State Board of Education to approve up to a three-day waiver for the school systems that have made a written request for a waiver.

I am requesting the State Board of Education grant me the authority to approve future written requests from local school superintendents for a waiver from one to three school days for students after demonstrating the modifications made to their existing calendar. In the request for a waiver, the superintendent will explain the efforts the school system has taken and will be making to incorporate the inclement weather days in its calendar, to modify its school calendar where possible to make-up instructional time, and to add days to the end of the school year where necessary. Each school system's request will be evaluated individually based upon all of the factors outlined above.

LML/BC