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Franchot continues push for post-Labor Day school start [by Jesse Yeatman](#) Staff writer

Comptroller Peter Franchot (D) is gathering support to push back the start of school years to after Labor Day.

County school superintendents have come out against the idea, however, saying that a shorter summer break is academically beneficial to students, especially those from low-income families, who have limited opportunities for academic enrichment over the summer.

"It's just not a sound instructional decision," Superintendent Michael Martirano said.

Martirano last year set up a committee to study an even earlier start time for St. Mary's public schools, which now begin in the last part of August. That idea was not moved forward, Martirano said, adding that "the timing wasn't right." However, he still supports the move, pointing toward a model used by the Chesapeake Public Charter School, which opens two weeks before other public schools in St. Mary's and builds in week-long breaks in October and February.

Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), however, has shown some support for moving school start times to after Labor Day, and the state legislature has put together a task force to study the change. The group, which includes business leaders from the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland who have an interest in summer tourism, has met several times.

The task force is expected to submit a report to the governor next summer.

Martirano said he has sent a letter to the committee advising against the change to school start times. He said student learning can regress during a long summer break, particularly those from families without resources or abilities to find summer activities for children like camps or visits to museums.

The assumption of an economic boon by people taking more than one vacation to areas like Ocean City doesn't take into account people who can't afford even one vacation, let alone two, Martirano said.

"Obviously, the education bureaucracy will put up a lot of resistance," Franchot said last week during a visit to St. Mary's County.

His plan includes keeping the overall number of school days at 180, but condensing the school year between Labor Day and Memorial Day. He said that could mean shorter breaks and fewer professional days.

"It's a great idea," Franchot said. "It's ultimately going to happen."

He said he believes the idea of pushing back the start of school to after Labor Day is “very popular with parents.”

He also said it will benefit businesses in Maryland, including those in Ocean City and Deep Creek Lake in Western Maryland, which rely on summer tourism.

He pointed to the idyllic scenes of artist Norman Rockwell as his inspiration for longer summer breaks. “That’s what resonates with me,” he said.

He said there will be a need for more summer programs, and that it would be less expensive for schools to fund summer programs than bringing back all teachers in August.

Franchot was in St. Mary’s County last week to promote his art initiative.

He presented his Maryland Masters Award to St. Mary’s school students Avery Kent, Taylor Bahen and Jessica Burroughs, whose works of art will hang in the comptrollers office for two months.

Franchot said the arts and creative spirit are needed by businesses, including technology jobs.

“The future of the state’s economy is going to require a marriage of technology ... and creativity,” Franchot said.

Martirano said the arts continue to thrive in St. Mary’s public schools, pointing to his proposal to add a high school arts and dance academy at Chopticon High School next year.

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Task force to study post-Labor Day school year start

Information on the task force looking at pushing the start of the school year to after Labor Day can be found at www.msde.maryland.gov/taskforce/postlabordaystart.

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