



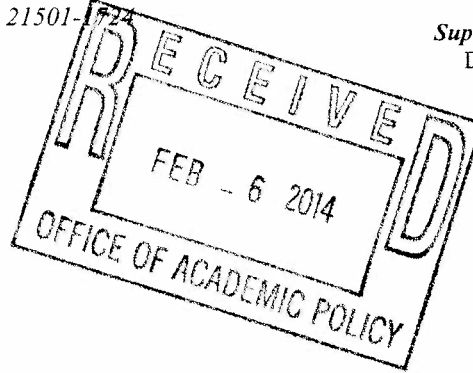
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February 5, 2014

Mr. William Cappe, Chairman,
Post Labor Day School Start Taskforce
Maryland Department of Education
200 West Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Mr. Cappe:

With regard to the charge your committee was given by legislation enacted by Senate Bill 963 in 2013, **we are** compelled and encouraged to provide you perspectives on this matter that are extremely important to Allegheny County Public Schools. It is **our** most sincere hope that you will receive these thoughts as **we** intend, and that is the impact on the school year calendar on our core mission and duty – to educate our children to increasingly high standards to the best of our ability. Certainly time is one of the most important resources necessary when delivering a program of instruction to a diverse population of learners. A school year calendar represents the most comprehensive management of our instructional time resource.

As you and your committee are acutely aware, Maryland is currently embracing and effecting more simultaneous change in our instructional program than at any other time within the past fifty (50) or more years. Transitioning to the Common Core Curriculum Framework, new PARCC Assessments, and a new Teacher and Principal Evaluation System are important and monumental efforts that require much planning, care, and excellent stewardship of our precious time resources.

Maryland has a lot to be proud of with its traditions of excellence in public education. Part of that tradition has included a historically good balance of Executive, Legislative and Departmental Leadership with that of the Local leadership of duly elected and/or appointed Boards of Educations and local school system leadership. **We are** proud to be part of, and local contributors to that well known and celebrated tradition of excellence that makes up Maryland's Public Schools.

In response to the concern and prospect of upsetting the current demonstrated effective balance of state versus local control of our precious instructional time resource as we deliver our program of

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instruction, The Allegany County Board of Education included in its 2014 Legislative Priorities a strong statement that asks The Western Maryland Delegation to the General Assembly to: *“Support locally elected Boards of Education by preserving their ability to set their own school calendars, school start times, and all other areas that impact the local delivery of the instructional program, and oppose any legislation that would undermine this local control”*.

Locally elected/appointed Boards of Education, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents and students are all working harder than ever so that our children are better ready for College and Careers. This work is in response to the appropriate action and leadership of the Governor, The Maryland General Assembly, The State Board of Education, and our State Superintendent. We believe that we must be allowed to continue to meet those challenges with the flexibility to organize our school year time resources in a way that has proven effective over the course of many years.

In Western Maryland and in Allegany County we have challenges and factors that we consider locally as we set our school year calendar. We seek and consider input from our community, teachers, principals, and other instructional leaders. Among our broad local constituency, it is generally agreed that instructional days are of far greater value earlier in the academic year than later.

There are several reasons for this conclusion, which has dissuaded us from adopting a post Labor Day start. First, we have worked hard to partner with Frostburg State University and most especially Allegany College of Maryland, years before Senate Bill 740 was enacted, to provide for and encourage our high school student to take college courses during the school year. Unless both partner institutions would also start after Labor Day (which they currently do not) our students would be at a distinct disadvantage by missing valuable instruction time in their college courses. Secondly, we have lots of winter weather that greatly impacts and disrupts our school year schedule. In many years, including this current year, we are very likely to miss as many as 10 days or more due to inclement weather. In such years, starting after Labor Day easily would extend the school year to July 1. Not all of our schools are yet air conditioned, even though we have made it a priority and have made much progress toward that goal.

A third, and highly important consideration is the time resource needed – especially now – to provide high quality professional development thorough out the school year to our teachers and principals to meet the demanding changes to our programs of instructional delivery and accountability to get our students better ready for college and careers. Having this time during the school year provides time for reflection, refinement and practice. Starting school after Labor Day would force a compressed school year calendar and would inhibit our ability to deliver professional development during the school year.

There are many other reasons that we could share, but in summary, **we** have been asked to meet increasingly higher academic standards for all of our children and not rest on the fact that Maryland has been the highest performing state in K-12 public education for five years running. We are working hard every day in every classroom to meet higher standards and higher challenges. We have demonstrated time after time that we can meet those challenges with appropriate local control of our instructional time resource.

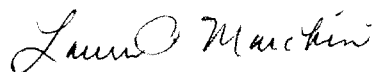
We urge a comprehensive consideration of all the factors and inputs from all of Maryland, and not to hastily conclude your work in deference to deliver an expedited report so that legislation can be considered during the 2014 Session of the General Assembly. Senate Bill 963 was passed with the important caveat that your Task Force would have an appropriate time resource until June 14, 2014 to thoughtfully consider and complete your work. **We** expect that many members of the General Assembly voted for this legislation because of that caveat.

Thank you for your consideration of our inputs as you give consideration to your recommendations. If **we** can provide further information or clarification on our position, please contact **us**.

Sincerely,



Dr. David A. Cox



Mrs. Laurie Marchini

DAC/LM/ram