

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Shanaysha M. Sauls, Ph.D.
*Chair, Baltimore City Board of
School Commissioners*

Tisha Edwards
Interim Chief Executive Officer

January 31, 2014

William Cappe
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Mr. Cappe:

I am writing in my capacity as Interim Chief Executive Officer of Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools), to express my opposition to the proposal to delay the start of the school year until after Labor Day. This opposition is based on several factors related to our district and the school community, as follows:

- **Local Autonomy:**

It is critically important that local autonomy to establish and recommend the school system operational calendar remains intact, and that the preferences of our parents, students and community members continue to be given respectful consideration. City Schools' operational calendar for SY2014-2015 was developed through collaboration between the District Office Steering Committee and a Stakeholders Committee comprised of District Office staff, school principals, external community partners and unions (BTU/PSASA) throughout November and December of 2013.

Family and community engagement with our schools has been a cornerstone of the successful education reform program in Baltimore City; as such, imposition of a state-mandated change in the school year calendar that arbitrarily preempts local community input would seriously undermine the significant progress our district has achieved in encouraging the engagement of our school community.

- **Weather-related impact:**

As currently configured, the district's 2014-2015 school year begins on August 25, 2014 and ends on June 15, 2015. The proposed change would add five days of school attendance, to June 22nd. The calendar includes five days built in for inclement weather closings; additional inclement weather days would need to be added to the June 22nd closing date. It is important to note that City Schools has already incurred five inclement weather days so far this year, so the likelihood that our schools could be open until nearly the end of June is strong. Given the fact that nearly half of our school buildings lack air conditioning, such a late closing date could adversely affect the wellbeing of our staff and students, and would certainly impact the maintenance of a comfortable learning environment.



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- **Ongoing professional development and training needs:**

City Schools' operational calendar for SY 2014-2015 currently includes six days of professional development during the school year (plus four days of professional development prior to the August 25th school opening). Any change to this schedule would violate the district's commitment to enhanced professional development that formed an essential element in our landmark contracts with teachers, principals and para-professionals.

- **Quarterly Parent-Teacher Conferences:**

On the recommendation of staff and external partners, City Schools has scheduled quarterly parent-teacher conferences in SY 2014-2015. This recommendation was based on the strong feedback of schools and the community; consequently, any change in this schedule for purposes of making up days from the late start would seriously jeopardize the trust that the district has worked long and hard to establish with our family and community members.

- **State and local testing windows/mandates:**

Starting school five days later than currently scheduled would place an additional burden on our staff and students in preparing for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing, as well as HSA testing and MSA science testing. Preparation for the PARCC Assessments already represents a challenge for the district, particularly in combination with the changes inherent in implementing the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards in the classroom.

In summary, City Schools believes that a post-Labor Day start would be detrimental to our mission of providing a high quality education that will prepare our students for success in college and their careers. The proposal represents an unnecessary impediment to the efficient operation of the district and places an additional burden on our students, staff and families. It also threatens the environment of mutual respect and school family empowerment that is one of the guiding principles driving the success of the transformation program in Baltimore City Schools.

Sincerely,



(Seal)

By: Tisha S. Edwards
Interim Chief Executive Officer

C: Carl D. Roberts, Ed.D.
Dawana Sterrette

