

# BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY

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President

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February 5, 2014

Mr. William Cappe, Chair  
Ms. Sarah Spross, Co-Chair  
TASK FORCE TO STUDY A POST-LABOR DAY START DATE  
FOR MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
c/o State Department of Education  
Division of Educator Effectiveness  
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595

Dear Mr. Cappe and Ms. Spross,

Thank you for your service and work on this issue. I had hoped to attend your February 5<sup>th</sup> meeting to give public comment. Unfortunately, I have to attend a meeting in Annapolis at the last minute and am unable to attend. Instead, on behalf of the Board of Education of Frederick County, I would like to take the opportunity to submit written comment regarding your work.

We feel strongly that dictating the start date for school systems statewide would pose a host of challenges for many school systems in providing adequate instruction in the face of more rigorous and complex learning standards. We also contend that setting a statewide start date would eliminate the flexibility for local schools to meet the unique needs of the communities they serve, and encroach on local autonomy and local governance.

## **The School Calendar as an Instructional Tool**

Traditionally, developing the academic calendar is one of the most difficult tasks we take on each year as a school board. We have a good deal of limitations and requirements that we must first take into consideration, including the required 180 days of instruction, mandated federal and state holidays, as well as the dates designated for the administration of required performance assessments and exams that fulfill graduation requirements.

Currently, with the adoption of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), our students face increased rigor in the classroom. Our teachers juggle meeting individual learners' needs while mastering new content and developing new curriculum. Teachers and school system staff must acquire an understanding of the new state assessments and how to use the resulting data to drive instruction.

In order to meet the expanding needs of our students, educators must take a hard look at our traditional calendar. Now more than ever, the calendar plays a critical role in promoting student growth and achievement, supporting our teachers in helping students

reach their full potential, and in providing the time needed for effective and meaningful teaching and learning.

**Local Governance and Accountability**

Our Board feels strongly that local control and decision-making authority is the best way to monitor and improve student performance, allocate and marshal resources effectively and efficiently, and ensure accountability. As the local authority, we are accountable for our students' performance and progress. As such, we must have the flexibility to address each student's unique learning needs.

Our communities have unique needs as well. The local authority is the best entity to conduct public engagement that is best able to protect local tradition, values and priorities. Frederick County is an agricultural county and is culturally and economically different from many of Maryland's diverse counties across the state. Our school calendar reflects our county's singular identity.

Taking into consideration these issues, we respectfully ask that the task force keep in mind the importance of allowing local school districts to retain their ability to determine what is best for their students, families and communities by allowing us to make the most basic decision regarding the school calendar – what day will be our students' first day of school.

Sincerely,

*Signed by Joy Schaefer*

Joy Schaefer  
President

c: Members, Board of Education  
Dr. Theresa Alban, Superintendent  
Members, Frederick County Delegation to the General Assembly  
Frederick County Board of County Commissioners