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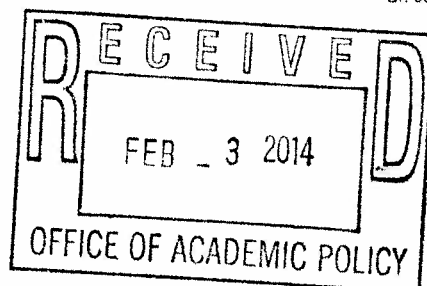
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**Superintendent of Schools**

Dr. Janet S. Wilson

February 3, 2014

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



Dear Mr. Cappe,

As the Superintendent of Garrett County Public Schools, this correspondence serves to express my views regarding the question as to whether there should be a required uniform post-Labor Day start for all Maryland school districts in general and in Garrett County specifically. The needs of the children attending Maryland Public Schools, the uniqueness of each school district, and the ability to provide a thorough, efficient, and adequate delivery of education should guide the answer to the post-Labor Day start question.

While I acknowledge and respect the importance of the myriad of concerns that have been and continue to be expressed by business and tourism representatives regarding this question over recent months and years, I continue to believe that local governance must prevail in setting school system operational calendars. It is critical that the Maryland General Assembly be guided by input that is without negligence or omission of all of the facts. Garrett County cannot, and should not be viewed through the same lens as other counties in deliberating the determination to dictate a uniform start to the operating calendar of school systems in Maryland. No two districts should be viewed as the same in making most determinations related to the actual delivery of education.

The Maryland General Assembly has a long standing record of recognizing unique variables among districts as it establishes laws throughout the state that ensure "a thorough and efficient system of free public schools" (*Maryland Constitution, Article VIII, Section 1*). The Wealth Formula, whereby the State of Maryland requires that the local governments in Maryland's wealthiest jurisdictions provide more local education funding allowing the State to divert more resources to adequately support its poorest districts, provides one example where the differences among jurisdictions are considered essential in creating laws and rules that affect education.

Consideration for a required post-Labor Day start is no different. Maryland, characterized as America in Miniature, experiences extreme variances in topography and climate, which create unique circumstances for each district. As the westernmost school system, Garrett County Public Schools' operating calendar is always impacted by the severe weather. As of February 3, 2014, the 2013-2014 the school system operating calendar has been impacted by thirteen (13) inclement weather days. This necessitates the use of five (5) built-in make-up days (formerly spring break) and adds eight (8) days to the end of the school year, now tentatively scheduled for June 13, 2014. With most of February and all

of March ahead, there is a high degree of likelihood that additional days will be added to the end of the calendar (See attachment).

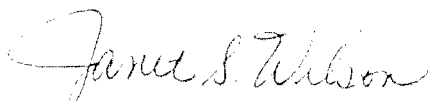
If a required post-Labor Day start were in effect this school year and the current number of days lost due to inclement weather were added, students attending Garrett County Schools would have lost nearly the equivalent of one (1) month of instruction prior to the administration of Maryland School Assessments (MSA), Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and Advanced Placement (AP) assessments. Citing another example of impact to Garrett County Public School students is the requirement to fulfill clinical and work experience hours to "complete" various Career and Technical Programs. A post-Labor Day start requirement will further jeopardize a senior's ability to acquire the necessary hours prior to graduation.

It is certain that a required post-Labor Day start will, at minimum, require the use of most of June to meet the 180-day instructional mandate in Garrett County and will further disadvantage the students attending Garrett County Schools in terms of preparation for assessments viewed by the public as a principal measure of the quality of a school system. One solution might be to eliminate calendar days dedicated to professional training, local festivals and cultural observances, and the extended winter break in December in exchange for a post-Labor Day start. Like all other counties, Garrett County Public Schools convenes a committee of parents, business partners, teachers and administrators to propose school calendar options to the school board. Days dedicated to teacher training at a time of great change in education, local traditions, and national holidays must continue to be a consideration in the development of school system operating calendars at the local level.

Given that the intended purpose of a school calendar is to provide for the function of delivering a thorough, efficient, and adequate system of education to the students in each district, a one-size-fits-all approach as the answer to this question limits the flexibility districts now have to reduce the impact certain circumstances have on the operating calendar and the delivery of educational services. The task of developing the school calendar should be preserved as a local governance issue allowing each district to answer the question of whether a post-Labor Day start is in the best interest of providing the highest quality system of education to the students residing and attending schools in that district.

Thank you for allowing me to express my views on this extremely important matter.

Sincerely,



Janet S. Wilson, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Schools

cc: Dr. Mike Martirano, President of PSSAM  
Western Maryland Delegation  
Garrett County Board of Education