

Maryland Association of Boards of Education



621 Ridgely Avenue • Suite 300 • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1112 • www.mabe.org
Phone (410) 841-5414 • (800) 841-8197 • Fax (410) 841-6580

January 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Cappe:

As the Chair of the Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date, you are aware that the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all twenty-four local boards of education in the state, opposes the adoption of a statewide prohibition on starting the school year before Labor Day.

MABE greatly appreciated the opportunity to present testimony on November 20, 2013, to emphasize that local boards of education support preserving local discretion when it comes to deciding when to start the school year. Adopting a school calendar involves local considerations which are significant, affecting thousands of school employees and families.

Through the testimony of school system personnel, the Task Force learned that each school system has a calendar committee consisting of a wide range of constituent groups that take national, state, and local variables into consideration prior to making the best recommendation for the school system. School systems annually negotiate teacher and employee contracts that reflect available resources and commitments to provide professional development and accommodate instructional planning and assessment preparation and grading. School system calendars also feature built-in flexibility to allow for adjustments resulting from inclement weather. Each school calendar also reflects local traditions and preferences regarding the length of breaks for Thanksgiving, winter holidays, religious holidays, and spring break.

The Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date was established by Senate Bill 963 enacted in 2013 (Chapter 336, 2013 Laws of Maryland), and is directed to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on or before June 30, 2014. MABE urges the Task Force to engage in further study of the impact of moving the start date of the school year to after Labor Day on "the education system, including the academic calendar, planning, administration, and facilities use; the economy; and summer tourism" in accordance with the mission stated in House Bill 963.

MABE urges the Task Force to reject any proposal to rush to endorse legislation for consideration in the 2014 legislative session as being premature. MABE encourages the Task Force to continue its work to study the consequences, intended and unintended, of proposing to

Mr. William Cappe


-2-

January 31, 2014

make the unprecedented shift to a statewide mandated start date for the school year. Again, we believe that the Task Force should continue its work in accordance with the timeline intended in the legislation.

Thank you for your leadership and facilitation of the work of the Task Force. MABE looks forward to additional opportunities to be engaged in this work in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Kathryn B. Groth
President

KBG:kwb

Enclosure

Copy to:
MABE Board of Directors



621 Ridgely Ave., Suite 300, Annapolis, MD 21401-2111

410-841-5414, 800-841-6580

www.mabe.org

**Testimony before the Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date
for Maryland Public Schools
November 12, 2013**

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all twenty-four local boards of education in the State, opposes the adoption of a statewide prohibition on starting the school year before Labor Day.

MABE supports preserving and protecting the rights of local communities and their respective boards of education to adopt school calendars; school calendars that reflect not only state testing schedules and mandated holidays, but also other important local considerations. Local boards serve a broad constituency of professional educators, parents, students, businesses and other community groups. MABE believes that imposing a statewide start date for the school year would impose unwarranted restrictions on the prerogative of local communities to consider and decide on their local school system calendar.

Adopting a school calendar involves local considerations which are significant, affecting thousands of school employees and families. School systems annually negotiate teacher and employee contracts that reflect available resources and commitments to providing professional development and accommodating instructional planning and assessment preparation and grading. School system calendars also feature built-in flexibility to allow for adjustments resulting from inclement weather. Each school calendar also reflects local traditions and preferences regarding the length of breaks for Thanksgiving, winter holidays, religious holidays, and spring break. In this light, MABE supports preserving local discretion when it comes to deciding when to start the school year.

MABE takes no position on whether any local board should choose to adopt a start date after Labor Day. Again, this and other policy decisions should continue to reside with each local board. Maryland's nationally recognized success in providing a high quality public education throughout the state is the direct result of the policies and priorities adopted by each of the twenty-four local boards. Maryland's local boards recognize and affirm that a basic premise of our nation's system of public education is that public schools should be governed locally. Most importantly, Maryland's twenty-four local boards have a proven record of succeeding in balancing community priorities and available resources in pursuit of the overarching goal of improving student learning.

Maryland's local boards of education oppose mandating a post-Labor Day start date because it would not adequately reflect local community considerations; considerations which local boards must always balance in favor of advancing student learning. MABE believes that if pre-Labor Day instruction is deemed by boards and educators to be in the best interests of some or all students in a local school system, Maryland's state officials should continue to respect and defer to these decisions.

For these reasons, MABE urges this Task Force to reject the proposal to adopt a statewide prohibition on starting the school year before Labor Day.