



Queen Anne's County Public Schools

Preparing World-Class Students Through Everyday Excellence

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January 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Cappe,

I would like to take this opportunity to weigh in on the discussion regarding an after Labor Day start to the school year as is to be recommended by the Labor Day Task Force. As you are aware, the economic impact of when school starts is not equally distributed across our State. Local considerations such as weather, recreational opportunities and family and community needs can be different and varied from the snowy western counties to the Baltimore-Washington Corridor to the upper reaches of the Chesapeake Bay. Even in our small state no one size fits all.

Each year, Queen Anne's County Public Schools establishes a calendar committee consisting of parents, community members, school board members, teachers and administrators. The committee takes into consideration professional development requirements, holidays important to our community and family time in order to craft a calendar that is vetted by the school board with input from the county as a whole. An after Labor Day start coupled with ending early in June will erode the ability for Queen Anne's County to train its teachers, adapt to the unpredictable weather that sometimes hits as it did this year, and provide quality down time for families.

The Queen Anne's County Public School 2014-2015 school system calendar begins August 25, 2014, five days before Labor Day, and concludes on June 12, 2015. The calendar includes five days built in for inclement weather. To date, Queen Anne's County Public Schools has had to close six days this school year because of inclement weather. If the school system had to shift the five days we are open prior to Labor Day to the end of the school year, our closing date would be June 12, 2015; given the inclement weather this current year and assuming there are no additional inclement weather days, we would be closing June 22, 2015.

The introduction of PARCC testing has increased the inflexibility of our calendar process. Presently, our school board and many members of the community are concerned by the limited flexibility afforded us because of state and federal testing requirements. With PARCC being a national assessment and the predetermined testing dates of the Performance Base Assessment (PBA) at 75% of the way through the course and End of Year assessments (EOY) being at 90%, starting school after Labor Day will cause Maryland students to lose 5 days of instruction. That would mean that for first semester classes at the Problem Base Assessment (PBA) test, Maryland students would have had 7.5% less instruction than if they started before Labor Day and 6.2% less instruction at the End of Year (EOY) assessment. This deficit has the potential to put Maryland behind the rest of the nation in PARCC test results.

Forcing a post Labor Day start will either push the end of the school year further into June or compress the school year by forcing the removal of professional development days or vacation time. In a period with so many new standards being introduced we cannot afford for our staff to lose any professional development days. Both parents and staff members have expressed to our calendar committee and the board that they do not want to lose vacation days at Christmas and Easter breaks. Our families want these breaks intact for travel and rejuvenation.

I stress that local school systems need flexibility to adapt to outside pressures in sculpting their calendars to address professional development, weather occurrences, and family needs. An additional layer constraining when our school systems can start and end the school year will severely limit how nimble we can be in responding to these varied needs.

Finally, I am concerned about what may be considered State overreach into local areas of control. Setting the calendar is the responsibility of the local school board

For these reasons I respectfully request that the school calendar remains under local control.

Sincerely,



Carol A. Williamson, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools