



DR. MICHAEL J. MARTIRANO
Superintendent of Schools

St. Mary's County Public Schools

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January 30, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Cappe:

It is critically important that local autonomy to establish and recommend the school system operational calendar for the subsequent school year remain intact. St. Mary's County Public Schools has a calendar committee with representatives from many constituent groups who consider various factors when making the most educationally effective recommendation for our school community.

The school system operational calendar committee met last fall and put forth a calendar for my consideration and the Board of Education of St. Mary's County's approval. The calendar committee included both central office and school-based representation, but more importantly parents and representatives from the County Council of PTAs, Collective Education Association of St. Mary's County, Education Association of St. Mary's County, and the St. Mary's Association of Supervisors and Administrators. The school system operational calendar for 2014-2015 has already been presented to the Board of Education.

It is important to remember, St. Mary's County Public Schools includes the Chesapeake Public Charter School. The governing board for the Charter School develops their calendar separate from the school system operational calendar. The 2014-2015 calendar for the Chesapeake Public Charter School has also been developed and presented to the Board of Education.

Last year, I convened a special exploratory work group comprised of students, parents, community agencies, teachers, and administrators, as well as representatives from the County Council of PTAs and our local associations to study the operational calendar. The focus of the work group was to determine if we needed to make changes to more effectively meet the family and educational needs of our students. After a five month study, the work group concluded the current school system operational calendar was the most effective model for our families.

The 2014-2015 school system operational calendar begins school eight days before Labor Day, August 20, 2014, and concludes on June 16, 2015. The calendar includes five days built in for inclement weather. To date, St. Mary's County Public Schools has had to close seven days this school year because of inclement weather. If the school system had to shift the eight days we are open prior to Labor Day to the end of the school year, our closing date would be June 19, 2015; given the inclement weather this current year and assuming there are no additional inclement weather days, we will be closing June 30, 2015. The Chesapeake Public Charter School would close on July 15, 2015, conflicting with the June 30 end day for the fiscal year.

An option would be to eliminate all four professional development days. Given the focus on the implementation of the Common Core/College and Career Ready Standards and the new assessments developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), the professional days are critical to staff learning and classroom implementation for student success. In addition, the eight school days prior to Labor Day actually give our students a head start on learning, instead of adding the days at the end of the school year after the assessments are administered. A change in the calendar would mean eight days of learning for students prior to the state assessments would be lost, having a potential negative impact on their learning. A change would also force us to disregard the negotiated agreements with our professional associations, where the Board of Education and all three associations have agreed upon the professional days to ensure time for staff to complete the professional responsibilities necessary for the instructional shifts.

An option would be to eliminate the parent/guardian conference day. Students do not have school on Monday, October 13, 2014 to allow parents/guardians to arrange conferences with teachers. Since Monday, October 13, 2014 is Columbus Day when many parents are off from work, we have found this opportunity to be very parent friendly. A shift in the start for schools would impact this opportunity for students and families.

Another impact would be Friday, September 19, 2014. Schools are closed for students to attend the St. Mary's County Fair. This has been a long standing tradition in our community. The Friday is designated as "Schools and 4-H Activities Day". Numerous students participate in performances at the fair, as well as the annual secondary speech contest among the schools. A shift in the start for schools would also impact this opportunity for students and families.

The school system operational calendar does include both a winter and spring break. Both are ideal family opportunities for travel without students missing days from school. Our community includes Patuxent River Naval Air Station, which employs 23,000 military, civilian, and defense contractors and has 6,059 military-connected students. The military-connected students represent 35% of the total official school system enrollment. The Military Child Education Coalition identified St. Mary's County as one of the school districts in the nation with the largest number of military-connected student populations.

Mr. William Cappe
Page 3

While not directly impacting the school start day, the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), allows athletics to begin by mid-August. Schools belonging to the Maryland Public School Secondary Athletic Association begin athletic practices and contests several weeks before Labor Day. A successful athletic program requires students to be present for practices and games

The eight days of instruction prior to Labor Day are critical for our students for the reasons shared in this letter. Shifting the days of the calendar would have a great impact on student learning, professional development, local events, and families. Please remember as noted in a previous paragraph, St. Mary's County Public Schools convened an exploratory committee of 41 people last year to consider what was most effective for students and families. The committee concluded starting school eight days before Labor Day was in the best interests of students, families, and the community.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools