

Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for MD Public Schools
Minutes
January 7, 2014

Welcome: William Cappe, Chairman of the Task Force called the meeting to order at 1:09 PM when a quorum was present. Mr. Cappe welcomed Task Force members and observers to the meeting. The following members have indicated they cannot attend: Madeline Hanington, G. Hale Harrison, and Julie Marker.

Attendance: Nine of the nineteen members were present at the start of the meeting, with a total of twelve members being present by the end of the meeting.

Approval of Minutes: Mr. Cappe asked if there were any changes to the minutes as presented. Since there were no changes to the minutes, the chair asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2013 Task Force meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Mosner to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Mr. Haynie. The motion was approved by the members present.

Approved minutes will be posted on the MSDE website.

Mr. Cappe informed the members that three individuals are scheduled to address the Task Force today. Each speaker will be given 20 minutes: 10 minutes for their presentation and 10 minutes for questions and answers. Task Force members have been given index cards to write any further questions they may have for the speakers. Those questions will be forwarded to that individual for a response.

Speakers:

Dr. Lillian Lowery, State Superintendent of Schools:

- 83% of students statewide are reported as proficient ranking as the Maryland the second highest state; the state has an 85% graduation rate.
- Education Article Section 4-101 which states that educational matters affecting the counties are to be under the control of the county boards of education; Education Article Section 7-103(a) requires that school are open to students for at least 180 school days and a minimum of 1,080 hours in a 10-month period. COMAR 13A.03.02.12A requires public high schools to be open for at least 180 actual school days and a minimum of 1,170 hours during a 10-month period. State law also mandates the following holidays for school systems: Thanksgiving Day and the day after, Christmas Eve through January 1, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, the Friday before Easter through Monday after Easter, Memorial Day; and primary and election days.
- Thus, with the exception of holidays local boards of education and school systems have total responsibility for determining their school calendar. This includes beginning and ending dates, number of inclement weather days, and the number of days necessary for staff development. Schools systems need flexibility in determining their calendar. For example today, 1/3 of the school systems are open, 1/3 are closed, and 1/3 are starting late due to inclement weather conditions today.

- Local school systems reach out to their stakeholders to develop their school calendars which support the needs and preferences of each local community.
- The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has had discussions about calendar development and has agreed that it remain with the local school systems. In fact there has been a steady progression of schools opening before Labor Day since the 2000-2001 school year. For the past 5 years all 24 school systems have opened before Labor Day.
- Question: it was asked if online testing could alleviate teacher stress in addition to moving testing to May 1st, and that there are restrictions placed on the school calendar actual start date due to sports as an example. Dr. Lowery stated that online testing could give more flexibility to school systems. She reiterated that students lose a lot of instructional time when not in school especially since teachers are getting to know their students during the early part of the school year; however, she still believes that each individual school system should have the flexibility to set their own calendars.
- Question: if a post-Labor Day start becomes law what is the role of MSDE? MSDE approves local school system calendars. If this becomes law, MSDE will follow the law to make sure each jurisdiction has the required days and hours. The state does not prescribe calendar development as each local school system has unique needs and can make better decisions for its school system than the state.
- Question: could start dates be staggered for elementary, middle, and high school, and can the 180 day requirement be changed? The state is now transitioning to more rigorous standards, and to accompany this many states are moving toward more days of instruction. Staggering could be difficult with families having students in different school settings. Again, calendars are built on local school system and community needs by their own calendar committees.
- Question: Could the number of days be lessened if the hours in the day were increased? This will need more discussion as COMAR mandates the number of days per year.
- Question: What is your position on a post-Labor Day start date? Dr. Lowery indicated that she is in favor of school systems having the flexibility of local control in determining their school calendars.
- Several Task Force members assured Dr. Lowery that they were not advocating a reduction in instructional time but wanted to give more certainty to parents about school start dates to facilitate family planning and school hiring and planning schedules.

Dr. Michael , Superintendent, St. Mary's County Public Schools, and President, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland:

- Having spent his entire educational career in the state, he is well aware of the issues facing the state and this Task Force. In framing his remarks he referred to the term "mutually exclusive" meaning you cannot have one if you have the other. He does see a need to increase the economic engine of the state but is concerned with the academic needs and achievement of our students. He questioned whether this was the vehicle to better serve student achievement.
- He discussed the plight of disadvantaged students suggesting we encourage local schools systems to provide more services to these students. Elongating the school year and providing more student programs could be a better answer. He cited Baltimore City as a

system that needs flexibility to serve the diverse economic population it has. Changing the start date will not address the gap in education being experienced by these students, it just shifts the gap. By pushing the school start date until after Labor Day, schools may end up adding days onto the calendar if we experience a lot weather closures and having school in session until the end of June.

- He again stressed the opposition of the 24 school superintendents to a post-Labor Day start date as he indicated in his November 6, 2013 letter to the chair of this Task Force (refer to handouts from the November 17, 2013 meeting).
- He discussed the charter school in his district which is the only charter school in the southern Maryland area. This school operates on a quintessential schedule and begins on August 1. The students attend 7 weeks of school and then have 2 weeks off with no school during the month of July. This gives students and teachers time to recharge and prepare for the next school session. It eliminates a longer summer break and “summer regression” of students. This type of program provides opportunities as well as food programs to assist students in poverty which contributes to lessening the achievement gap. Thus, the engine of the school house never shuts down with this model. He suggested reading Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *Outliers*. This book discusses 2 studies – one being done in Baltimore City and the other with KIPP schools – illustrating that schools are moving to a year-long schedule.
- He again stressed the importance of local school system control over their calendars as the superintendents are more aware of the needs and nuances of their jurisdictions.
- Question: It was again stressed that the Task Force is not looking to change the number of days or hours for the schools, just a shift in the start date. Dr. Martirano indicated that when you make a shift in one thing something else has to change. He gave an example of Fairfax County, Virginia schools. Their end date for school was June 23rd due to weather related closures and this brought issues of attending school during warm weather. It is difficult to accommodate all the needs of the community, push back from parents to get on with vacation plans, and fitting in days off and professional development when developing a calendar.
- Question: Is there a correlation between poverty and truancy/dropout rates? The correlation between start dates and bad habits is not necessarily true. Martirano suggested that when students are not in school, they develop bad habits and become involved in bad situations. The gap widens over the summer months and this is a concern. Students need to focus on their education early in life. He also suggested we need to recognize what is happening in each community. It is important to understand the economy and instructional needs of the students. Local school systems understand the nuances of their jurisdictions. Schools are hubs and there is a delicate balance when tinkering with young people and success.
- Question: Were there any formal inquiries about what parents want? Martirano suggested that the charter school in his district was well received by parents. The county school system has studied a year-long calendar, but decided not to pursue it due to all organizations involved in such a change. Parents do like the charter school model.
- Question: At what level is the charter school? The school serves students in kindergarten through 8th grades. It is looking to expand into high school by adding one grade per year.

- Question: Would you support summer school for enrichment rather than just accommodating students who need the credits to pass? Martirano said he would support this concept and has worked with a variety of such programs during his career. He has worked with Parks and Recreation to continue programs to foster student progress and avoid summer regression as well as the federal government funds to provide lunch for these students.
- Question: The post-Labor Day start is an attempt to raise revenues to support schools as government has finite resources. Martirano agreed with the need to increase the economic base, but it is also important to maintain instructional integrity.
- Question: How do you accommodate teachers when the summer off has been engrained in their schedules? Martirano indicated that his county begins school on a Wednesday and the schools conduct an open house on the Monday and Tuesday before to give teachers time to address any issues that arise. This change in a start date could bring about an 8 day shift.
- Question: What would be the implementation process if a post-Labor Day start date goes into effect? Martirano said a staggered start for elementary, middle and high schools students as was suggested would be chaotic for families and busing of students. If the mandate is implemented each county will formulate its calendar to be in compliance with the law and to accommodate its needs as best it can. Schools systems may have to compress the “spring break” in order to meet the schools’ ultimate end date without going too far into June. At this time Dr. Martirano indicated St. Mary’s has not developed a post-Labor Day start calendar nor to the best of his knowledge have any other school systems.

Franklin Chaney, Chief of Recreational Services, Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks:

- Mr. Chaney described how Recreation and Parks works with the Anne Arundel County Board of Education to utilize each others’ facilities and resources.
- He shared the Department’s Joint Use Agreement and Guidelines and Reference Manual with the Task Force. These documents outlined how school facilities are used, planning of programs, and the organizations that can use the facilities.
- Recreation and Parks pays the Anne Arundel County Public Schools to use the facilities both before and after school as well as the weekends.
- Recreation and Parks services approximately 3,000 children in their programs which include summer camps, before and after school care, and sports programs.
- If a post-Labor Day start date is implemented the Department will make the necessary changes such as extending summer camp programs and child care programs. There could be a staffing issue for the camp programs when employing college students who would return to college before the camp programs are completed. The Department would make adjustments in scheduling of camp program to meet the date change.
- Anne Arundel County does not have recreation centers. The schools serve as the recreation facilities.
- Question: Do most Recreation and Parks Departments have similar structures as Anne Arundel County? Mr. Chaney indicated that his department takes a more active role in the schools than other counties; however, each county is different.

- Question: Describe some of the programs. Recreation and Parks operates 33 child care centers in elementary schools beginning at 7 AM (ending when school starts), and continue in the afternoon when school ends to 6 PM. The Department works with the school system to feed students breakfast/lunch or lunch/dinner depending on the program and school.
- Question: Is there a fee schedule? Recreation and Parks pays the school system approximately \$350,000 and in addition pays school custodians for weekend services. Program participants are charged a fee for participating in their programs. Programs in Title I schools are lowered so parents can afford the programs.

The committee had indicated it wanted to have speakers from unions come and present. Mr. Cappe indicated that he had reached out to 4 such organizations but they either could not come or did not respond to the invitation. He asked if the Task Force still wanted to have someone from the unions come to the meeting to speak. A show of hands indicated that the members would like to have such speakers at the next meeting.

Public Comment: No one participated in the time allotted for public comment.

Review of Materials: Task Force members were given a packet of materials that the staff had gathered since the last meeting in November. Mr. Noonan, CEO, Visit Baltimore, provided the staff with copies of the studies he referred to in his presentation at the November meeting. Those studies are also included in the folder.

A reference was made to the studies presented by Mr. Noonan, especially the advantages and disadvantages of changing the start dates in Texas as it applied to this situation.

It was asked if it was possible to survey a member's individual district on different ideas related to a post-Labor Day start date. It was discussed that if one county is surveyed it would be critical to survey all counties but time is limited. Since all superintendents would have to be contacted for such a survey, Mr. Cappe asked to have the questions developed for the survey sent to him.

Final Report Framework: Sarah presented a draft Final Report framework to the Task Force which is designed to provide a template for the Task Force that was modeled after past task force reports. The template will provide:

- uniformity in reporting findings and recommendations,
- highlight statewide data collection and analysis, and
- opportunities to include additional issues discussed.

Included in the report is a letter addressed to the Governor O'Malley, Senator Thomas "Mike" Miller, and Delegate Michael Busch. This is basically an executive summary of the Task Force findings and recommendations. Each work group is given a section in the report to provide their data collection, data analysis, issues considered, and recommendations.

A question was asked by a member to the senators and delegates present regarding the status of the Task Force report when submitted by the June 30, 2014 deadline. At this time the legislative

session will be ended and Governor O'Malley's term will be ending. Perhaps the report should be completed before the 2014 legislative session ends so that Task Force recommendations can be considered. Discussion ensued with some members indicating their preference that the Task Force expedite its work in order to submit its findings during the 2014 legislative session.

Another member expressed concern about the data needed in order to make a statewide recommendation during this legislative session, and does the Task Force have enough information to present to the public illustrating how they made a recommendation before the end of the legislative session.

Discussion then centered on conducting statewide surveys with school superintendents and the general public in order to ascertain data on a post-Labor Day start. Concern was expressed about the ability to accomplish both surveys in a short amount of time as the Task Force needs data to base their recommendations rather than just anecdotal information. During the January Task Force meeting time was allotted for public comment; however, no one participated. It was suggested the general public needs to respond to this change; however, no one has been present to present public comment. It was suggested that since people work, it is difficult for them to come to Task Force meetings. Public comment time has been allotted at the February 2014 Task Force meeting and this has been noted on the website.

Several Task Force members again reiterated the need to expedite the Task Force process in order to submit recommendations to the legislature before their adjournment on April 7, 2014. Once submitted it will take time for the legislative process – which includes drafting a bill, dropping it in the hopper, assigning it to a committee, scheduling hearings, etc. Once passed in one chamber it encounters a similar process in the other chamber.

A question was asked if such a bill would have an opportunity to be heard and voted on this session, and if the legislature could vote on a bill without the Task Force report. The elected officials indicated that it could be difficult without the Task Force's recommendations. It was suggested that if a favorable Task Force vote on a post-Labor Day start date for schools was completed, that favorable vote could be forwarded to the Governor and legislature with the Task Force indicating a report would follow. This would give legislators time to draft a bill while the Task Force worked on the report. It was also suggested the Task Force chairman report this concept with the Governor.

It was pointed out to the Task Force members that 6 individuals were absent who would not have an opportunity to share their concerns or cast their vote on this expedited process at this meeting. The chairman said he would have to consult counsel about an expedited vote and complete disclosure of committee actions. It was agreed that all members of the Task Force should be present when a final vote to recommend/not recommend is taken. Another member suggested that if the work groups could complete their report by the March 5 meeting it could be expedited.

The chairman indicated that there had been no previous discussion of an early vote, and the idea of an early vote was not anticipated. He is concerned that there are issues that have not been

considered and that the work groups have not met or shared data collection and analysis. He will contact counsel about legal issues surrounding an expedited vote.

It was reiterated again that if a vote is to be taken all members should be notified to be present. Each member was appointed to the Task Force to represent a certain constituency, and each member should have the opportunity to vote if the committee wants to expedite the vote and recommendation of the Task Force. It was suggested that the possibility of a vote be communicated to the Task Force members for the February meeting. One member indicated that everyone knew where they stood on the issue before they walked into the first meeting of the Task Force and nothing has changed; therefore, there is no need to delay such a vote, as this issue could continue on forever. A Task Force member implied that even our two speakers today support a move to a post-Labor Day start date.

Again, it was said that although many are looking for a favorable recommendation, they do not want to do anything impetuous that could mar the outcome or have it nullified by attorneys. Therefore, all members should be present at the table and their vote documented.

The committee staff again asked if the members believed they had enough information to make an informed recommendation. Was their decision going to be data driven, anecdotal or personal preference. The staff has provided the members with an abundance of information to cull through. The staff will develop the Task Force report as directed with the data provided by the members on which their decisions are based.

The chair asked the members if they still wanted to have union representatives come and talk to the group. The response was positive. Mr. Cappe indicated he reached out to 4 different unions but had no response to the invitations or union individuals could not attend. Also, another member asked if the members wanted someone to speak about AP testing and how it could be affected with a post-Labor Day start. It was determined that this was not necessary.

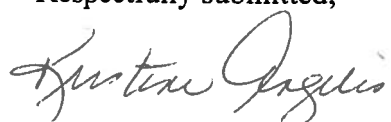
One member was concerned that the Task Force was moving to a vote to recommend rather than presenting a list of recommendations to the Governor. One Task Force member indicated that sometimes there is an opportunity for a minority report to be attached to the final Task Force report which will give everyone an opportunity to have their point-of-view heard.

The next meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for February 5, 2014. The chair asked the membership if they wanted another meeting prior to this date for the work groups to meet. A question was asked if it could be done via email; however, this would not be acceptable under the Open Meetings Act. The chair said he would investigate setting up a meeting later in January for the work groups to meet. He will advise the membership as soon as a date and time is established.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 4:07 PM.

January 7, 2014 Minutes

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kristine Angelis". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Kristine Angelis, Ph.D.