

Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for Maryland Public Schools
Minutes
November 12, 2013 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by William Cappe, Chairman, at 1:01 PM.

Attendance: 16 Task Force members (See attendance log), William Cappe, Chair, Sarah Spross, Co-Chair, and Kris Angelis, Administrator, were present. There were 16 observers at the meeting (See sign-in sheet).

Approval of Minutes: The chair asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 17, 2013 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Meagher and seconded by Mr. Haynie to approve the minutes as sent out to members on Friday, November 8, 2013. The motion was approved.

Approved minutes will be posted on the MSDE website as will future meetings of the Task Force. The next meeting, January 7, 2014, will include public comment. Directions for signing up to speak will be posted on the website as well.

Mr. Cappe explained to the members that eight speakers are scheduled to address the Task Force. Each speaker will be given 15 minutes - 8 minutes for their presentation and the remainder for questions. If time does not permit members to ask all their questions, questions can be submitted to either Mr. Cappe or Ms. Spross. The questions will be forwarded to the appropriate speaker for further comment. This additional information will be shared with the entire task force at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Speakers:

Ms. Teresa Tudor, Senior Manager, Office of Schools and Family Partnerships, Anne Arundel County:

- Ms. Tudor explained that she chairs the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Calendar Committee established through School Board policy. This committee represents all stakeholders which includes community members, business leaders, parents, teachers, the special education advisory board, and students in the county. The school calendar contains 181 instructional days plus 4 snow days built in that can be backed out at the end of the year if appropriate. Calendars are done 2 years in advance as parents plan vacations early. The committee reports their recommendation to the School Board.
- Every 2 years the committee surveys its constituents with a variety of questions. Data collected indicates that 64% of respondents are happy with the calendar as is. Also, parents indicated they do not want schools to be in session late in June.
- Additionally, calendar preparation must also take into consideration the 4 bargaining units in the county and their contract negotiations.
- Questions: Questions were asked regarding the online survey and a robust discussion ensured. Some Task Force members expressed concern about the validity of the survey and whether it was inclusive of all community members. Ms. Tudor provided additional information regarding the survey and its history. Prior to using the online survey the

committee would go to the schools and meet with parents and other interested parties. Now, the committee uses an online survey, and this past survey had an approximate 10% return rate. A Task Force member commented that the impression is that the last 2 weeks of school does not involve rigorous educational work. Ms. Tudor, however, assured the Task Force that in the Anne Arundel County Public School system the last 2 weeks of school are dedicated to exams, students are working.

Mr. Edward Sparks, Executive Director, Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association:

- Mr. Sparks summarized the COMAR regulations on Interscholastic Athletics in the State and highlighted the recent changes affecting fall sports. A copy of the regulations is in member packets. Mr. Sparks stressed that interscholastic athletics are one of the most visible aspects of schools and athletics make a significant impact on schools both in student participation and revenues generated. There are approximately 198 schools, 119,000 students, and numerous support groups involved in athletics across the state.
- It is difficult to change the sports calendar without experiencing consequences. For example if contracts with coaches are moved forward three days, it is estimated that it will cost an additional \$450,000 in per diem costs over and above the negotiated contracts. School games would be played before the first day of school and this will affect attendance which also impacts revenues.
- Mr. Sparks further indicated that the last state championship ends on Memorial Day Weekend. Once seniors graduate they do not return to participate in the remaining athletic games.
- Questions: Has the lack of uniformity of school starts across the state been a problem? Mr. Sparks indicated that at the end of the season everything washes out especially with the new rules on heat acclimation and the number of days allowed for practices. Another question was asked about the complex way the fall practice and season date is determined. Mr. Sparks said that three weeks are allotted for practice before the start of the season which is the first weekend in September. The new heat regulations have also contributed to reduced practice time.

Mr. Ray Leone, President Maryland Parent Teacher Association (PTA):

- Mr. Leone indicated that when parents are asked about school start dates, there will be a myriad of different opinions as to when school should start, so it is difficult for his organization to support one side or the other without a scientific survey.
- He indicated that the PTA loses a lot of parental support to sports booster organizations when students enter high school and play interscholastic sports even though athletics represents 1/6 of the parent population.
- Questions: Are there concerns between elementary school v. middle school v. high school parents? Mr. Leone indicated that concerns are similar as parents often schedule family vacations well in advance. Do you see different parental attitudes across the state? Mr. Leone said it is too hard to get a definitive answer on start dates, but it probably is a 60/40 split in favor of starting before Labor Day. Parents are looking for consistency in their district.

Mr. David Reel, President and CEO, Maryland Hotel and Lodging Association:

- Mr. Reel indicated that his association and other similar organizations strongly support the post-Labor Day school start as long as it is not at the expense of the educational program as this is very important.
- Mr. Reel discussed empirical findings from the State of Virginia as Virginia does require a post-Labor Day start for their districts. Findings indicates that counties starting post-Labor Day had higher English/language arts and mathematics test scores than counties starting pre-Labor Day.
- He is not advocating less than 180 instruction days in the school calendar but wants adjustments to be made to accommodate a post-Labor Day start.
- There are approximately 35.4 million out-of-state tourists that visit Maryland, and it is important to encourage leisure travel for the state. Without this type of tourism in the state, Mr. Reels foresees that Maryland could face a \$400 million structural deficit which could lead to lesser spending for education.
- Questions: It was asked if the Virginia statistics could be shared. Mr. Reel will provide the information to the administrative staff and it will be available to members at the next scheduled meeting.

Mr. Thomas Noonan, CEO, Visit Baltimore

- Mr. Noonan stressed that a 3 month tourist season is stronger than a 2 1/2 month tourist season; therefore, there is an advantage to a post-Labor Day start. He did stress support for a strong educational program.
- He indicated that several states, Wisconsin, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Minnesota and Virginia, which have a pre-Labor Day start, had a drop in tourism. Many Baltimore City students who work summer jobs must leave their positions in order to return to school pre-Labor Day. This is difficult for city business. Also there is a drop in airline ticket sales, hotel reservations, AMTRAK reservations, etc. post August 15 for Baltimore City businesses.
- He indicated that a post-Labor Day start is good for revenue, tourism and jobs. There are surveys showing parents want a post-Labor Day start. He provided those surveys to the Task Force chairman to share with members. Those surveys included:
 - An Economic Analysis of the Changing School Start Date in Texas, December 2000;
 - South Carolina Early School Start Dates and the South Carolina Travel and Tourism Industries: An Analysis of Economic & Tax Revenue Impacts, August 2002;
 - Post Labor Day School Start Dates in Tennessee: An Analysis of the Economic and Tax Revenue Impacts on Tennessee Travel and Tourism Industry, January 2008; and
 - Do families vacation more in the summer when school starts after Labor Day? July 23, 2012.
- Questions: Are there any statistics on how shifting school closing date to later in June affects tourism and revenue? Mr. Noonan indicated that tourism receives a bump due to Memorial Day. June is strong in Baltimore due to conventions, but it is not strong in August.

Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education

- His organization is responsive to local boards of education who are engaged with their local communities, and in increasing student achievement.
- In formulating school calendars, employees who are not only employees but may also be parents bring pressure to bear on calendar creation.
- There have been bills introduced to increase the 180 instructional days for schools, which has a fiscal impact of one billion dollars.
- It is important to remember that schools cannot cut a week from the beginning of their calendar without adding that time to the end of the calendar.
- Questions: Is a longer day possible? Regulations already require a certain number of days and hours of instruction. A school could institute a longer day and still meet regulations; however, some schools are looking at a later start time to the day for high school students. Will there be any impact on summer school? Schools would have to review summer school especially with students utilizing the Bridge Plan to demonstrate proficiency during the summer months in various counties.

Dr. Bernard Sadusky, Executive Director, Maryland Association of Community Colleges

- Dr. Sadusky indicated that each school district has a different set of values, and what is right for one district may not be right for another. He questioned whether the State should be in the business of dictating calendar policy to local school districts. Rather the State should be looking to compromise rather than prescribing to the local school districts.
- He also discussed the 180 day requirement for schools in that 180 days may not be sufficient for students with differing needs. Poverty is a common denominator. He also stressed that how and when employees schedule vacations is employer driven.
- He also pointed out that teacher professional development is critical. This training needs to occur at a reasonable time for teachers, which usually occurs during school hours.
- Local school systems have to have the authority to set flexible calendars as part of their contract negotiation efforts to deal with employment issues such as the absence of pay increases and/or other issues affecting employees.
- Questions: Is dual enrollment for students an issue? Community colleges generally start before Labor Day and usually are 12-month programs. So students wishing to participate in college courses will be affected by a post-Labor Day start. Community colleges generally register students in spring for the fall semester in dual enrollment programs.

Dr. Carl Roberts, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM)

- Dr. Roberts reiterated what Dr. Michael J. Martirano, President, PSSAM, indicated in his letter to the task force that "all 24 of the public school superintendents are opposed to any legislation to remove local decision making regarding the school calendar from the local boards of education."
- He stressed it is important to look at year-round learning concept for students so they can take advantage of learning opportunities especially digital opportunities that meet their

needs and goals. It is important to study the calendar and school day structure in order to meet the needs of students across the state.

- Questions: Do we need to change state law for days and hours? The discussion stressed looking at the system globally – look at partnership between the State and the local school systems in order to make students successful. Theoretically, the calendar should never end. A question was asked about teacher training in regard to the calendar. It was emphasized that teacher training is different now than it was 20 years ago. Dr. Roberts reiterated what Dr. Sadusky had said about the importance of teacher professional development. It is important for schools to provide supports and training during the school day and not after work as effective staff development is important to student achievement.

Future Meetings: Sarah Spross indicated a concern that there were not enough meetings scheduled to complete the work. Additional meetings have been added on January 7, February 5, March 5, April 23, and May 19, 2014.

Questions/Concerns:

- Sarah reported that an error had been made on the materials of interest handed out. Mr. Wollums title was incorrect and it will be corrected and posted.
- Two calendar books for the 24 school districts are available for review.
- A question was asked about whether the report format had been finalized and how it will be vetted by the task force. Mr. Cappe indicated the report will be formulated from the 3 task force committee reports and the final report will be presented to the full task force for a vote.
- It was asked if the members felt the speakers were helpful. Everyone agreed it was helpful to understand the different perspectives of various organizations. The main concern was not having enough time to ask all the members questions before time was called.

Work Groups: The Task Force committees met in their respective groups beginning at 3:25 PM which ended the formal meeting. Groups met for approximately 25- 30 minutes. The meeting concluded at 4:00 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Angelis, Ph.D.
Administrator