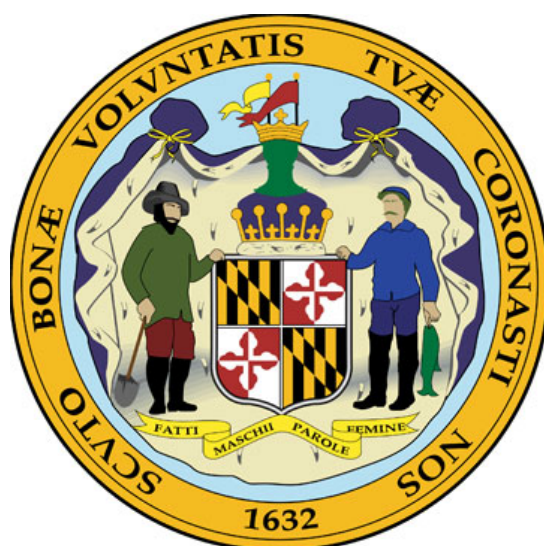


Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for Maryland Public Schools

Appendix VIII



June 2014

Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for MD Public Schools
Minutes
February 5, 2014

Welcome: William Cappe, Chairman of the Task Force called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM when a quorum was present. Mr. Cappe welcomed Task Force members and observers to the meeting.

Attendance: Eleven 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. One member questioned the wording of a statement on page 7 indicating it should have read that notification should be made to the members that a vote could be taken at the next meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes with the word change. Approved minutes will be posted on the MSDE website.

Speakers: Mr. Cappe introduced the first speaker for the meeting.

Ryan Burbey, President Harford County Education Association:

- Mr. Burbey shared that MSEA has concerns about the proposed change in start dates for public schools.
- He gave the Task Force members a teacher's perspective on the proposed start date change:
 - ✓ First, the 180 day requirement is a floor not a ceiling, and research has shown that more days of instruction are better for learning.
 - ✓ Teachers focus on the number of days of instruction available to them in order to instructionally prepare students for state assessments. Even the few days before Labor Day give teachers an opportunity to get students into the routine of school and to observe their progress.
 - ✓ Every day of instruction is important to determine what students are ahead or behind. Teachers believe this will be more challenging if the start date is later.
 - ✓ This year teachers are in the midst of educational reform and are faced with implementing the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), new teacher evaluation procedures and new state tests. All these reforms are being attempted at one time, and the calendar becomes critical as there are only a certain number of days for instruction and professional development with teachers having only so much time for collaboration with colleagues on teaching strategies, student progress, student behavior, and communication with parents.
- He discussed reports of the economic advantages of a later start date for schools, but he suggested it is important to also look at the vantage point of the concept of education as the engine. Schools are a social hub and have an impact on the local economy. This not only includes students but the private vendors and other school expenditures in the community.

- He noted a report published by Beacon Research, Salisbury University, which looked at the impact of education on the Eastern Shore. The report indicated that education is approximately a \$2.6 billion industry that supports 31,000 jobs on the Eastern Shore.
- He indicated that MSEA stands ready to work with the Task Force.
- Question: The Task Force is not asking schools to shorten days, hours or professional development, but to shift the calendar days and testing dates to later in the school year. Mr. Burbey indicated when a change is made to the school calendar, it changes the scope of the work. At the start of the school year teachers begin preliminary work to transition students into high, middle and elementary schools. This shift will affect those students who just entering those grades. It is also important to consider the impact on summer school and other school summer programs. Will the staff have ample time to prepare for the new school year and will students attending summer programs have a much needed break before regular classes begins?
- Question: How many days of instruction do teachers want to prepare for tests and what are the hurdles for teachers in preparing for tests? Can PARCC change dates? This year MSA has not changed but the HSAs have been moved back. The new PARCC assessments will be comprised of both pre and post tests and could include up to 4 separate tests making it more complicated for teachers and affecting the number of instructional days available between tests. At the beginning of the year, teachers assess students on their prior knowledge; teachers look at instructional blocks of time available to them which include: from the start of the school year to Thanksgiving; from Thanksgiving to Christmas; with the next large block of instruction occurring after Christmas. However, the continuity of instruction can be disrupted by snow days which can create many starts and stops.

New tests will not just involve Maryland state tests; there are 26 other states in the PARCC consortium. Our state can't ask those states to change testing dates just to accommodate our school calendar. In addition to PARCC tests there are other national tests students take that can't be changed such as AP and IB testing. It's not just a question of shifting days.

One member indicated that Garrett County, for example, is now 14 days behind in their calendar due to snow days which places students at a real disadvantage. These are days teachers can't reclaim as they are instructional days lost prior to testing. Teachers must now be concerned with PARCC, how these test scores will affect their individual evaluations, and that these scores will become part of teacher evaluations. It is difficult for teachers as they haven't even seen the tests yet. It will take a lot of work on Maryland's part to change testing dates.

- Question: Again, our number one priority is education so how much discomfort are we causing teachers and students? Can't teachers "take one for the team" in this situation? Mr. Burbey stated that teachers are always being asked to "take one for the team". Many school systems have not given teachers raises, necessary resources and much needed instructional materials. Teachers are continually told to "take it" even though they are being subject to all the new educational reforms.

Since the second speaker was not present at this point, Mr. Cappe asked if the Task Force wanted to continue the discussion. All were in agreement to continue.

Task Force members discussed that they had talked with teachers and other organizations concerning a post-Labor Day start date, and that the concept was thought to be a good idea. After Mr. Burbey's presentation, members indicated they could appreciate the teachers' points-of-view concerning what happens in classrooms. This is the first time anyone discussed the value of the instructional days in August for classroom teachers. Members discussed different types of families as some families do not return from vacation before school starts, and many families take vacations when it is convenient for them by withdrawing their students from school throughout the school year.

Another point Mr. Burbey brought forward was the idea of contiguous blocks of instructional time. The few days students are in school prior to Labor Day does give teachers the time to build classroom/school routines with students. A unified start date erodes local autonomy and could create a push back from stakeholders. Mr. Burbey suggested trying a pilot program for a post-Labor Day start date in a few key counties to determine if there are any economic effects.

It was suggested that elementary school parents complain more about school start dates than other parents. High school parents/students have August dates for the beginning of sports and other extracurricular activities.

Graduation date changes are another issue that may present a problem. Schools book outside facilities for graduation years in advance. These outside facilities' schedules are also determined years in advance, and a school start date change could place many schools in jeopardy of not being able to utilize these facilities for graduation.

One member indicated a concern that teachers are being painted as being unwilling to change or should "take one for the team", when Mr. Sparks, executive director of the Maryland Public Schools Sports Association, was not asked to do the same. Mr. Sparks had indicated at an earlier Task Force meeting that such a change would not be an easy shift for schools and their sports schedules. It was again reiterated that athletic championship dates and the venues have already established.

Mr. Cappe introduced the second speaker:

Randy Mickens, Organizational Specialist, Lobbyist, Maryland State Education Association:

- Mr. Mickens reiterated the fact that K – 12 public education has a significant impact on local and regional economies. On the Eastern Shore education is an economic driver and changes to the school calendar will affect local economies.
- Mr. Mickens also discussed the study done by Beacon, Salisbury University. He distributed information on the Beacon findings citing the benefits from expenditures by the school systems that support private sector vendors, the improvement of the

educational levels of graduates, and the ability to attract and retain families with skilled workers.

- Question: How can the shifting of 5 calendar days have a negative effect? Mr. Mickens said that in general this will not have as much of an impact but the truncation of the school year could be a factor.

Public Comment: Mr. Cappe announced the following:

- Joy Schaefer, President, Frederick County Board of Education, was to present today but due to weather conditions and other school obligations, she could not be present. She sent a letter to the Task Force which was read indicating Frederick County was not in favor of a post-Labor Day start date. (See attachment)
- Mr. Cappe said he has received 14 letters from local school systems and boards of education (copies provided to task force members) that mirrored Ms. Schaefer's comments. He read who had submitted letters: Ms. Tishia Edwards, Interim CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools; Dr. S. Dallas Dance, Superintendent and Mr. Lawrence E. Schmidt, President of the Board, Baltimore County Public Schools; Ms. Dawn K. Branch, President, Cecil County Board of Education; Dr. Kimberly A. Hill, Superintendent, Charles County Public Schools; Mr. Philip L. Bramble, President, and Dr. Henry V. Wagner, Jr., Superintendent, The Board of Education of Dorchester County; Mr. Thomas A. Carr, Rodney A. Reckart, Cynthia Downton, Charlotte A. Sebold and Matthew Paugh, Board Members, Garrett County Public Schools; Dr. Janet S. Wilson, Superintendent, Garrett County Public Schools; Ms. Kathryn B. Groth, President, Maryland Association of Boards of Education; Dr. Carol A. Williamson, Superintendent, Queen Anne's County Public Schools; Dr. Michael J. Martirano, Superintendent, St. Mary's County Public Schools; and Dr. John B. Gaddis, Interim Superintendent, Somerset County Public Schools.

Prior to this meeting a Task Force member had asked Mr. Cappe if Dr. Martirano could supply the Task Force with an example of St. Mary's school calendar with a post-Labor Day start date that Dr. Martirano alluded to in his January 7, 2014 presentation to the Task Force. Dr. Martirano, however, when asked for the document said he had not created such a sample post-Labor Day calendar. It was asked if all the letters from local school systems had been generate by this request to Dr. Martirano. Mr. Cappe indicated that these letters were submitted by these individuals as part of public comment and to his knowledge had nothing to do with the request to Dr. Martirano.

Review of Materials: Ms. Spross discussed the packet of information given to each Task Force member and that the materials included address members requests for further information. The packets are set up in sections:

- The first section includes local newspaper articles addressing the January 7, 2014 Task Force meeting, Howard County school calendar, and weather related issues for schools in Maryland.
- The second section highlights inclement weather days used by school systems between December 2013 and January 2014.

- The third section provides research on state laws and school start dates across the country.
- The fourth section provides further information on states that had been discussed by Mr. Tom Noonan, President/CEO, Visit Baltimore, and includes articles concerning Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.
- The fifth section is information on the increase in Maryland hotel occupancy rates for 2012.

Group Reports:

Group 1:

- Not all members are in agreement
- Approximately 89% of school facilities across the state have air conditioning. The group reviewed Baltimore City which has the lowest number of air conditioned facilities at 53%. The group is not sure if this is a “fix issue” for the City or that the schools are not air conditioned. The group discussed giving that jurisdiction an opt out of any mandate; they would give Baltimore City until 2017 to have 75% of facilities air conditioned. It was discussed if other districts should be able to opt out also.
- The subgroup liked summer school enrichment opportunities available.
- Mocked out a calendar to see how a post-Labor Day start would look. It is doable with everyone getting out at a reasonable time. The fiscal year ends June 30th; therefore, everyone needs to have the school year completed before June 30th.
- Local school districts and unions have different professional development times for teachers, and this will be provided through calendar autonomy.

Group 2:

- Struggled with concept of economy and tourism and how to separate the two.
- Looking at other states as well as Maryland in relation to sales tax and income tax.
- Economic importance comes back to tourism across the state: for example state and county fairs, state parks, battlefields, summer jobs, farming, 4H, and the horse industry.
- Asking for input from this group – what have we missed? For example Montgomery County is a bedroom community for Washington, D. C, but what about agrarian interests in western Maryland and the eastern shore. The group will talk with the Farm Bureau, wine industry and micro-breweries.
- A member asked if the group considered the fiscal impact of the comptroller’s study. The group is requesting more information from the comptroller’s office that wasn’t included in the report.

Group 3:

- The group is using the comptroller’s report and is reaching out to other tourist attractions like 6 Flags, Orioles, and the Aquarium. They are asking the comptroller’s office for additional information also. It appears tourism numbers do go down in August.

- Gaming does affect education but this has not been fully realized as all casinos are not fully operational. Until there is routine data for all casinos it is difficult to determine what is seasonal. There have been declines at Arundel Mills, Ocean Downs, and Perryville.
- Group is looking at King's Dominion and the King's Dominion rule in regard to opting out for weather concerns.
- Question was asked – what are the top 10 tourist attractions in Maryland. Discussion on defining “top” when looking at attractions or destinations – how do you measure the top 10 attractions?

Further discussion:

- Question was asked if we could reduce down to 5 - 8 hurdles or objections from the different groups the Task Force has heard from concerning a post-Labor Day Start date? For example – test dates, so that the Task Force could give recommendations to address such hurdles. Mr. Cappe suggested that members send him their list of hurdles and he would disseminate to the group for their consideration. It was asked if the members could share information via the Internet. Mr. Cappe and Elizabeth Kameen, Esq., Principal Counsel, MSDE, said that the Opening Meetings Act requires that all business needs to be open to the public, and online discussions would not facilitate that.
- Motion made (Harrison) and seconded (Benda): the Task Force recommends a school start date no earlier than August 25, a school end date no later than June 10, with the establishment of a waiver process if there is an exceptional number of weather related days.

Discussion:

- This is a compromise that allows for flexibility but concern was voiced about a stop date and what the waiver process would be.
- A waiver process should allow all districts to factor in the weather to maintain the required 180 days.
- By establishing August 25 as a start date, tourism receives an extra week, and school districts will not feel that a later start date is being forced on them. August 25 is a reasonable date.
- Some members are uncomfortable with an end date due to the need for flexibility by all local school systems. This could put school districts in a bind as some things are not within their control. We should be more forgiving at the end of the school year. We do not want to undermine the 180 day school requirement and this should be reflected in the motion. We don't want to make it too strict for school districts. A waiver process may not be fair to all local school systems. We need a reasonable approach that takes everything into consideration. The sponsor of the motion indicated that the 180 day requirement was implied in the original motion and that he would amend his motion to include the requirement.
- The waiver process and end date were discussed in terms of how it would affect charter schools because those schools may have different calendars. Also, there is a state process for waiving school days.

- Members were concerned about the compromise for an August 25 start date. This compromise of moving the start date to August 25 one week prior to Labor Day could result in the legislature enacting legislation with a different outcome than what the Task Force suggests. Some members thought the motion should be amended to have no waiver or end date, and it was asked if the motion could be amended to remove the end date of June 10 and the waiver process.
- It was discussed that recommendations or a vote should not be taken at this time since not all members were present due to today's weather conditions. One member reiterated that a vote was discussed at the last meeting, and there has not been 100% attendance at all meetings.
- It was suggested that it is better not to have a vote today and come back with a very strong recommendation. It is important to have a high quality product that addresses all hurdles – education, tourism, and economy – and that the product be as strong as possible.
- The Task Force report will reflect the opinion of the members and their votes, and it will take work to develop a good report. It was discussed that there could be a possible problem in years when Labor Day is later than the first weekend in September. It is important to have the full force of the Task Force behind any recommendations and vote.
- We need to make a recommendation that is the best we can produce. The legislature will do with it what it wants. Our best interest is to go with the August 25 date. We have until June 30 to complete the report.
- The question was asked who could vote on the Task Force; Mr. Cappe indicated only he could vote as chairman and not Ms. Spross or Dr. Angelis.
- Is it a moot point to wait until March to vote? If we don't vote sooner than later, the legislature will not be able to act until the 2015 session. The legislature ends April 7, 2014. It was suggested that a good report would be more favorable for the next sponsor of legislation to move forward with the recommendations of the Task Force.
- The Task Force can either vote on the motion with amendments or we can table the motion for further discussion. The sponsor withdrew the motion.
- A question was asked about absenteeism and Task Force members voting by proxy. Ms. Kameen, said there is nothing in the statute or bi-laws about such a procedure; therefore, it is not allowed. The Task Force needs a quorum of members to vote on a motion.
- The March agenda will reflect a time for motions and everyone is encouraged to attend.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 3:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Kristine Angelis, Ph.D.
Administrator

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY

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February 5, 2014

Mr. William Cappe, Chair
Ms. Sarah Spross, Co-Chair
TASK FORCE TO STUDY A POST-LABOR DAY START DATE
FOR MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
c/o State Department of Education
Division of Educator Effectiveness
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595

Dear Mr. Cappe and Ms. Spross,

Thank you for your service and work on this issue. I had hoped to attend your February 5th meeting to give public comment. Unfortunately, I have to attend a meeting in Annapolis at the last minute and am unable to attend. Instead, on behalf of the Board of Education of Frederick County, I would like to take the opportunity to submit written comment regarding your work.

We feel strongly that dictating the start date for school systems statewide would pose a host of challenges for many school systems in providing adequate instruction in the face of more rigorous and complex learning standards. We also contend that setting a statewide start date would eliminate the flexibility for local schools to meet the unique needs of the communities they serve, and encroach on local autonomy and local governance.

The School Calendar as an Instructional Tool

Traditionally, developing the academic calendar is one of the most difficult tasks we take on each year as a school board. We have a good deal of limitations and requirements that we must first take into consideration, including the required 180 days of instruction, mandated federal and state holidays, as well as the dates designated for the administration of required performance assessments and exams that fulfill graduation requirements.

Currently, with the adoption of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), our students face increased rigor in the classroom. Our teachers juggle meeting individual learners' needs while mastering new content and developing new curriculum. Teachers and school system staff must acquire an understanding of the new state assessments and how to use the resulting data to drive instruction.

In order to meet the expanding needs of our students, educators must take a hard look at our traditional calendar. Now more than ever, the calendar plays a critical role in promoting student growth and achievement, supporting our teachers in helping students reach their full potential, and in providing the time needed for effective and meaningful teaching and learning.

Local Governance and Accountability

Our Board feels strongly that local control and decision-making authority is the best way to monitor and improve student performance, allocate and marshal resources effectively and efficiently, and ensure accountability. As the local authority, we are accountable for our students' performance and progress. As such, we must have the flexibility to address each student's unique learning needs.

Our communities have unique needs as well. The local authority is the best entity to conduct public engagement that is best able to protect local tradition, values and priorities. Frederick County is an agricultural county and is culturally and economically different from many of Maryland's diverse counties across the state. Our school calendar reflects our county's singular identity.

Taking into consideration these issues, we respectfully ask that the task force keep in mind the importance of allowing local school districts to retain their ability to determine what is best for their students, families and communities by allowing us to make the most basic decision regarding the school calendar – what day will be our students' first day of school.

Sincerely,

Signed by Joy Schaefer

Joy Schaefer
President

c: Members, Board of Education
Dr. Theresa Alban, Superintendent
Members, Frederick County Delegation to the General Assembly
Frederick County Board of County Commissioners