



July 8, 2014

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor of Maryland
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Michael E. Busch
Speaker of the House
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor O'Malley, President Miller and Speaker Busch:

As representatives of our respective organizations, we are writing to express our opposition to the recommendation of the Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for Maryland Public Schools. The committee recommends mandating that all public school systems begin the school year after the Labor Day holiday. While we appreciate the recommendation, it appears to be based on purely economic reasons. We strongly believe school-related decisions, should be determined locally and based on meeting the academic needs of our students, providing professional development for our faculties, and honoring the wishes of our communities..

For the past five years, Maryland's public schools consistently have been ranked among the best in the nation. While this recognition is appreciated, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Instead, we know important work remains to be done and significant challenges must be met. This critical work can be accomplished only by working collaboratively with our local community, investing wisely, and initiating and supporting reforms that will help our students and school systems achieve at even higher levels.

Successful teaching and learning requires adequate and robust professional development for school employees. While supporters of a post-Labor Day start champion a later onset of school, they also reject extending the school year to accommodate this delay. The result is that crucial professional development days will be squeezed out of the calendar and eliminated. The underlying assumption—that professional development is somehow not valuable or necessary—is simply untrue. Rather, it is incredibly important and supports our priorities as a state: successfully implementing Maryland's Common Core Curriculum Framework, developing effective strategies to narrow achievement gaps, establishing safe schools for students and staff, and more.

Another significant consideration is Maryland's testing calendar. Testing dates for the new PARCC test, as well as testing dates for AP, IB, and other high-stakes tests, are fixed. Clearly, reducing the number of instructional days that students have prior to sitting for these tests will challenge their ability to be successful and will add further stress to already stressful testing windows.

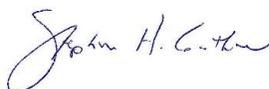
Finally, it is important to emphasize that, under current law, school systems have the authority to begin the school year after Labor Day, if they so choose. The school calendar is a very complicated and important matter in every school community. Maryland's twenty-four school systems each convene calendar committees that include all interested school and community stakeholders to ensure they have input into the process before a final calendar is approved by the local school board. Development of the school calendar also must consider athletic programs, federal and state-mandated testing programs, administrative and professional development days for educators, collective bargaining agreements, parent-teacher conference dates, religious and community holidays and events, forecasting inclement weather days, and much more. Mandating a post-Labor Day start date would prevent school boards, parents and community stakeholders from developing a school calendar that meets the myriad and unique needs of each community.

We find this recommendation of the Labor Day Task Force to be not only counterproductive and counterintuitive to the needs of our students, educators, and school systems, but also it has the potential to undermine the academic progress that we have made and must continue to make. Please stand with us and the prioritization of our world-class schools and reject any executive or legislative action that would adopt the recommendation of the Labor Day Task Force.

Sincerely,



Betty Weller
Maryland State Education Association



Stephen H. Guthrie
Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland



Kathryn B. Groth
Maryland Association of Boards of Education

CC: Dr. Lillian Lowery
Lt. Governor Anthony Brown
Comptroller Peter Franchot
Senator Joan Carter Conway
Senator Paul Pinsky
Senator Jim Mathias

Senator John Astle
Delegate Sheila Hixson
Delegate Anne Kaiser
Delegate Anne Healy
Delegate LeRoy Myers
Mr. William Cappe