

September 1, 2020

## **Special Meeting of the State Board**

Board President Clarence Crawford convened the teleconference meeting and was joined by all members, including: Vice President Jean Halle, Warner Sumpter, Rose Li, Joan Mele-McCarthy, Gail Bates, Vermelle Greene, Charles Dashiell, Jr., Rachel McCusker, Lori Morrow, Shawn Bartley, Susan Getty, Holly Wilcox, and student board member Jason Wu.

### **Background**

The State Board met on the morning of Monday, August 24 to receive reports on the status of the department's review and evaluation of the education recovery and reopening plans received from local school systems by the August 14 deadline. The board discussed their interests and concerns regarding the local plans including requests for disaggregated data, based on race, gender, and income wherever possible. The Board also questioned whether the plans were detailed enough regarding class schedules including the schedules of synchronous instruction for all students as well as for small groups of students and tutoring. Dr. Salmon emphasized that the local plans must be comprehensive and clear to parents and other members of the public regarding each of the required plan elements, including class schedules. The board also discussed their interest in requiring a minimum of 3.5 hours of daily synchronous instruction, noting that several local plans did not appear to do so. Board President Crawford indicated that this issue would be taken up at the next day's regular meeting of the board.

On August 25, Board president Crawford began the State Board meeting by informing the board of the decision to defer further discussion and any decisions concerning the local recovery and reopening plans, including the issue of minimum hours of synchronous instruction, until a special meeting to be held on Tuesday, September 1.

The board heard public comments provided by Cheryl Bost, President of the Maryland State Education Association, who raised concerns and objections concerning the modification of the recovery plans to include the 3.5 hours of synchronous instruction and the pending teacher licensure and preparation regulations; and Theresa Mitchell Dudley, President of the Prince George's County Education Association, who raised concerns regarding the impact of the pending regulations on provisional teachers.

### **Published Agenda and Policy Recommendations for September 1 Meeting**

Over the weekend of August 29-30, the State Board provided the agenda and materials for the special meeting scheduled for the morning of September 1. The materials included one set of policy recommendations which referenced one table of proposed minimum daily and weekly amounts of synchronous and asynchronous instruction (see below).

## Recommendations

SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING						
	PREK		K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
	HALF DAY	FULL DAY				
HOURS PER DAY	1.5 HRS	3 HRS	3 HRS	4 HRS	4.5 HRS	5 HRS
DAYS PER WEEK	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS
ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING						
HOURS PER DAY	1.5 HRS	3 HRS	3 HRS	2 HRS	1.5 HRS	1 HR
DAYS PER WEEK	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 DAYS
COMBINED	3 HRS	6 HRS	6 HRS	6 HRS	6 HRS	6 HRS

## Recommendations

- ✓ Schools must be open for students at least 180 school days.
- ✓ All schools must include at least a total of six hours per day.
- ✓ A school day for each local school system must include the recommended minimum number of hours of synchronous instruction for each grade band per day, five days per week as indicated in the table.
- ✓ Half day pre-K school day for each local school system must include a minimum of 1.5 hours of synchronous instruction per day, five days per week.
- ✓ School systems that have indicated that they are not returning students in person until second semester should reevaluate their reopening plans by the end of the first quarter (after nine weeks).
- ✓ Recommended minimum hours need to be implemented by September 28.

In response to the recommended policy options provided above, several leading education organizations in the State, including the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) and the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), wrote letters to the State Board to raise objections and concerns. In addition, the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) conducted a statewide online advocacy campaign in opposition to the proposal.

## Deliberations and Outcomes of the September 1 Meeting of the State Board

The State Board received a brief report from Dr. Carol Williamson, MSDE's Chief Academic Officer, and Assistant Superintendent Mary Gable. They noted that since the August 24 meeting, several school systems had responded to requests to update their reports on total daily and weekly amounts of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, but that several school systems continued to appear to fall short of the required 6 hours per day of instruction. The State Board was then presented with 2 sets of policy recommendations as Option A and Option B. Option A reflected the published set of recommendations represented by the tables provided above. Option B included the following points:

### Recommendations - Option B

- ✓ Schools must be open for students at least 180 school days.
- ✓ All schools must include at least a total of six hours per day.
- ✓ Schools must have an average of 3.5 hours of synchronous instruction spread out over the course of the day.
- ✓ Half day preK school day for each local school system must include a minimum of 1.5 hours of synchronous instruction spread out over the course of the half-day.
- ✓ MSDE will collaborate with local school Superintendents and provide technical assistance as they work to implement the minimum hours of synchronous instruction and work with local school systems, in collaboration with their local health departments, to consider strategies to return students to in-person instruction by the end of the calendar year.

Members of the State Board engaged in lengthy discussion, questioning of Dr. Salmon and staff, and deliberations on amendments to the Option B set of recommendations. Board member Rachel McCusker objected the board's consideration of Option B since she had not seen it until this meeting and therefore there had been no opportunity for public comment. Board members Gail Bates and Joan Mele-McCarthy responded that Option B is intended to represent revisions to Option A reflecting the public comment received on Option A. Dr. Salmon agreed and noted that this is a typical approach to presenting policy options for the board's consideration.

Board member Rose Li sought further clarification on how the 3.5 hour standard was arrived at, noting her support for state standards but concerns with the timing of adopting them now. Dr. Salmon responded that Option B is intended to reflect the most equitable outcomes for students as well as providing school systems more time to reach the standard of 6 hours per day of instruction.

Board Vice President Jean Halle expressed her interest in more data on instructional models for students receiving special education services. She also asked staff for any clarification on why there was such diversity among local plans in the amount of synchronous instruction. Staff responded that they had not spoken to local school systems on this point.

Board member Shawn Bartley shared that he believes Governor Hogan and Dr. Salmon intended to balance the interests of parents returning to work and students who benefit most from in-person instruction. He stressed that it is unfair to be overly critical of Dr. Salmon or Governor Hogan given the fluidity of the circumstances in responding to the pandemic.

Board member Lori Morrow made a motion to postpone any further action until the regularly scheduled meeting of the board on September 22. This motion was amended to provide time for information gathering before reconvening in 2 weeks. The board voted 7 to 6 in favor of this approach, but since by law 8 votes are required to affirm board decisions, the discussion continued on amendments to Option B.

Board member McCusker requested clarification on whether the 4-day models of synchronous instruction would be acceptable under the proposal. Dr. Salmon responded that they would not be given the difficulty in doing so and meeting the law's requirements for total hours of yearly instruction (1,080 hours for elementary schools and 1,170 hours for secondary schools).

Board member Vermelle Greene expressed her concerns with inadequate amounts of synchronous instruction and the inequities arising from some systems providing so much more than others. Student Board member Jason Wu also raised this concern, referring to data provided to the board.

All Board members then engaged in the process of amending Option B to reflect a key element of Option A, which was the provision requiring reevaluations of local plans regarding in-person instruction:

- School systems that have indicated that they are not returning students in person until second semester should reevaluate their reopening plans by the end of the first quarter (after nine weeks).

Board President Crawford concluded the deliberations and agreement on language by stating that he believes collaboration between MSDE and local school systems is the key to this kind of effort. He looks forward to the sharing of information and experiences among local school systems and with MSDE as to how some systems are providing more synchronous hours of instruction and, as students come back, how systems are returning students to school.

The State Board ultimately adopted the following version of Option B, which reflects restatements of existing law as well as new requirements arising from the board's interest in assuring a statewide minimum number of hours of synchronous instruction on a daily and weekly basis, and that school systems engage in reevaluating plans and reporting on the status of plans to return to offering in-person instruction (but with more time than provided under Option A).

The State Board unanimously approved the following (precisely as worded below):

- Schools must be open for students at least 180 school days.
- All schools must include at least a total of six hours per day.
- Schools must have an average of 3.5 hours across the grades (K through 12) of synchronous instruction spread out over the course of the day.

- Half day preK school day for each local school system must include a minimum of 1.5 hours of synchronous instruction spread out over the course of the half-day.
- MSDE will collaborate with local school Superintendents and provide technical assistance as they work to implement the minimum hours of synchronous instruction by the end of the calendar year.
- School systems that have indicated that they are not returning students in person until second semester should reevaluate their reopening plans by the end of the first quarter (after nine weeks) and submit to MSDE by the third week of November.

[Meeting Agenda and Presentation](#)