

BILL: House Bill 417
TITLE: Education - Required Number of School Days or Hours
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: January 21, 2021
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, supports House Bill 417 to provide flexibility for local school systems in setting school calendars.

Local boards serve a broad constituency of professional educators, parents, students, businesses and other community groups. MABE supports preserving and protecting the rights of local communities and their respective boards of education to adopt school calendars which must reflect not only state testing schedules and currently mandated holidays, but also other important local considerations. Therefore, MABE supports preserving and expanding the flexibility available to local boards of education to adopt school calendars.

On August 31, 2016 and October 11, 2016 Governor Hogan signed Executive Orders mandating a post-Labor Day start date and end date on no later than June 15 for all of Maryland's public schools beginning in 2017. The second Executive Order established more limited waiver criteria for the State Board of Education. For local school systems, the strict limitation of beginning school after Labor Day and ending school by June 15th has required significant changes to school calendars, and will continue to do so in future school years. In this context, the flexibility provided by this bill is much needed.

On April 24, 2018 the State Board voted to deny several school calendar waivers requested by local school systems to allow them to end school on June 15 (in accordance with their adopted school calendars and the Governor's Executive Order). These school systems had exceeded the required number of hours. The State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Salmon, requested the denials based on the passage of the 5-day extension bill passed in 2018. The denial of these waiver requests also highlighted the incongruity between the requisite number of days and hours when end-of-year adjustments would be able to be accommodated if the law was more flexible.

In 2019, MABE secured passage of legislation to ensure that local school calendar decision making authority resides at the local level. MABE greatly appreciated the broad support in the General Assembly to grant local boards this fundamental decision-making authority.

Again, MABE supports this legislation in order to reasonably expand local school system discretion to adopt school calendars in accordance with the required number of hours of instruction all Maryland students should receive in a school year. Importantly, this bill in no way constrains a local school system's prerogative to adopt a school calendar with 180 or more school days.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 417.