

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 676

(Senator Edwards)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Garrett County - Public Schools - Virtual Education Days Pilot Program

This bill establishes the Garrett County Virtual Education Days Pilot Program. The Garrett County Superintendent of Schools is authorized to order a virtual education day instead of closing a public school in the event of inclement weather. The superintendent must notify the principals of public schools in the county of the decision to order a virtual education day as soon as possible after making the decision, and a principal who receives such notice must immediately notify the students, parents, and school staff.

The Garrett County Board of Education must adopt a policy to implement virtual education days. By September 1, 2023, the board must submit a report to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Committee on Ways and Means on the number, frequency, and effectiveness of virtual education days. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2021 and terminates September 30, 2023.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Garrett County Public Schools (GCPS) can handle the bill's requirements with existing resources as discussed below. The county school board can prepare and submit the required report with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Virtual education must consist of education services, delivered remotely, that are as close as practicable to in-person education services. A school implementing virtual education must make accommodations for students and staff without easy access to the Internet and establish a method for sending and receiving assignments from students without Internet access. If a school is ordered to implement virtual education for multiple consecutive school days, the county superintendent must arrange for the continued provision of all normal services required by law, including meal services.

Virtual education days must count against the number of days incorporated in the school's calendar for school closures due to severe weather or other emergencies in the school year. If there are not remaining days in a school's calendar for school closures due to severe weather or other emergencies, the superintendent may not order a virtual education day. The superintendent is encouraged only to order virtual education days when there is a likelihood of consecutive school closures.

Current Law: Public schools must be open for at least 180 days and 1,080 school hours at elementary and middle schools or 1,170 hours at high schools during a 10-month period. However, a local board of education may apply to the State Board of Education for a waiver from these provisions of State law; the application must describe a demonstrated effort by the local board to comply with State law and that the school system calendar included from 3 to 10 days to be used to make up days lost. In response, the State board may permit:

- increases or decreases in the length of the school year;
- exceptions from the 10-month period requirement;
- adjustments in the length of the school day; and
- schools to be open on holidays.

These adjustments may be granted only if normal school attendance is prevented because of natural disaster, civil disaster, or severe weather conditions. After any school system closure, the local school system must notify the State board, within 10 days of reopening, of its plan to make up the missed school days, including the dates of the make-up days. Education funding from the State or local sources may not be reduced if there are fewer than 180 school days in any year because of an approved application to the State Board of Education for a decrease in the length of the school year.

Chapter 13 of 2019 requires each local board of education to set start and end dates each year for public schools in the county, effectively repealing any law prohibiting a local board from beginning or ending its school year before or after a certain date.

Local Fiscal Effect:

Technology and Internet Access

GCPS advises that there may be an expense to meet student and staff technology needs. However, any additional costs resulting from the bill would be minimal because the school system is already working within their operating budget to maintain the necessary abilities to learn virtually on inclement weather or emergency days. GCPS has already allocated about \$300,000 per year for both student and staff technology updates.

Remote Assignment Delivery and Receipt

GCPS already has a method in place for sending and receiving assignments from students without Internet access when remote learning must occur. GCPS further advises the school system will work to refine the process it has already developed, but that such work should not require additional cost.

Meal Delivery

GCPS advises that meal delivery during a severe weather event may be difficult. However, by delivering multiple days of meals in advance of a severe weather event, GCPS may be able to account for the days of in-person learning missed. Meal delivery services therefore may require a change in operations, but no change in costs above normal in-person meal provision.

Report

GCPS advises that the board can produce and submit a report to the appropriate committees on the number, frequency, and effectiveness of virtual education days with existing resources.

Per Pupil Funding

In fiscal 2021, Garrett County received \$16,601 in total funding per pupil, which was below the statewide average of \$17,314. Information on [per pupil funding](#) for public schools and [student enrollment](#) for each local school system can be found in the *Local Government Overview* report. A copy of the 2021 report is available on the Department of Legislative Services [website](#).

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 1128 (Delegate Beitzel) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Garrett County Public Schools, Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

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