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Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Barbara L. Baker

February 15, 2021

Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 309
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Ways and Means Committee,

The purpose of this letter is to provide written testimonial support on behalf of the elected Board of Education of Garrett County and myself for HB 1128 introduced by Delegate Wendell Beitzel. This would allow the school system to be able to utilize our virtual learning platform not only for inclement weather closings but also for other unforeseen events that may cause disruption to the school calendar.

As you are well aware, Maryland experiences extreme variances in topography and climate, which create unique circumstances for each district. As the westernmost school system, Garrett County Public Schools' operating calendar is always impacted by the severe winter weather. Garrett County Public Schools, on average, experiences 10 inclement weather/snow closings a year. This does not include the significant number of delays and early dismissals. During the 2017-2018 school year, GCPS experienced eleven snow days, six 2-hour delays, and five early dismissals due to inclement weather. That year was not unusual. During the 2018-2019 school year, GCPS experienced nine snow days, eight 2-hour delays, and one early dismissal. Each of these disruptions can have a huge impact on necessary instructional time before final assessments and state testing. Studies have shown that in winters with high levels of snowfall, students tested less proficient than in winters with little snow.

There are also other unforeseen events that may cause disruption to the school calendar. Illness, such as an influenza outbreak, may trigger a closure, as could issues with building facilities and utilities. Furthermore, power outages are also common in Garrett County due to weather conditions such as snow and ice, high winds, and flooding.

If we were able to successfully implement virtual learning days when inclement weather or other unforeseen events result in school closures, continuity of instruction could continue without disruption. Not only would this have a positive impact on student performance, but it would also eliminate the need to create make-up days at the end of the school year. The bottom line is that any time there is an emergency closing, it takes a toll on the school calendar.

Thank you for your consideration in passing this important legislation. I intend to provide oral testimony as well to support how passage of this legislation will benefit the students of Garrett County.

Sincerely,

Barbara L. Baker
Superintendent