

**Informational Testimony regarding Senate Bill 321
Public Schools - Length of School Year and Innovative School Scheduling
Models - Revisions**

**Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland State Education Association offers this informational testimony regarding Senate Bill 321, which would alter the length of school year requirement for pupil attendance during the school year and authorize county boards of education to explore the use of innovative school scheduling models for public schools in the county, including extended year, year-round schooling, 4-day school week, or other models that do not allow for prolonged lapses in instructional time in public schools. Though we appreciate the intent of this legislation, we are concerned about its potential consequences for school personnel and students.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Some of the models permitted may result in inadequate support or resources for students and their families. Research on the social and academic impacts of a four-day school week is inconclusive, but significant questions about equity remain. One study from Oregon State University observed a temporary decline in students' academic performance after schools switched to a four-day week, "particularly among minority, low-income, and special needs students."¹ This approach could also result in the needless criminalization of youth: one study of Colorado school districts'

¹Effects of Four-Day School Weeks on Student Achievement: Evidence from Oregon (2019).
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3390191



four-day school week reported an increase in juvenile arrests for “minor offenses such as shoplifting and other petty theft.”² Even for high school students, a weekday without school could mean another day without school meals, disability accommodations, extracurricular activities, or other essential services that public schools provide.

Further, many districts adopt alternative scheduling models as a cost-cutting approach – but costs, in this case, often mean people. A Stanford University study on the fiscal impact of four-day school weeks in Oklahoma found that decreases in spending were “concentrated specifically in food services and transportation expenditures.”³ For essential education support professionals like bus drivers and food service staff, reducing the days in the school week or school year could result in fewer hours and lower wages. MSEA has serious concerns about how this bill’s implementation on the local level could impact compensation and staffing levels.

The school calendar is one of two illegal subjects of collective bargaining in Maryland, meaning that unions representing school employees would not be permitted to negotiate around many of the scheduling models permitted by this bill.⁴ Implementing alternative school scheduling models without the protection of collective bargaining presents serious concerns about financial and logistical impacts to educators and other school employees.

We urge the committee to consider these concerns around workforce and equity impacts while evaluating this legislation.

² Juvenile Crime and the Four-Day School Week (2016).

<https://www.cob.calpoly.edu/undergrad/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/07/paper1606.pdf>

³Effects of Four-Day School Weeks on School Finance and Achievement: Evidence from Oklahoma (2020).

<https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp20-02-v032020.pdf>

⁴Maryland Educ. § 6-510(c)(3).

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Laws/StatuteText?article=ged§ion=6-510&enactments=False&archived=False>