

BILL: Senate Bill 321
TITLE: Public Schools - Length of School Year and Innovative School Scheduling Models - Revisions
DATE: February 22, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 321 because it would provide much needed flexibility for local school systems to adopt annual school calendars determined to be in the best interests of student learning.

MABE always places a high priority on advocating for continued governance autonomy for local boards of education to set education policy and school budgets which provide educational benefits for all students; and opposition to unfunded mandates. Local boards support the enhanced local school calendar flexibility that Senate Bill 321 would provide to allow each of Maryland's 24 local school systems to consider options beyond the 180-day strictures of the current law.

On August 31, 2016 Governor Hogan signed an Executive Order mandating a post-Labor Day start for all of Maryland's public schools beginning in 2017. The Order further mandated that that school year end by June 15th. MABE objected to this initiative as contrary to the principle of local governance, and the traditional role of boards of education and their communities in setting school calendars. The State Board of Education responded to the first Executive Order by indicating its willingness to favorably consider waiver requests.

Then, on October 11, 2016, Governor Hogan issued a second, amended Executive Order to forestall the intention of the State Board of Education to consider and grant waivers from the post-Labor Day through June 15 school year based on a local board of education's showing that commencing their academic calendar before Labor Day would provide educational benefit to students. The second Executive Order repealed the previous waiver language and insisted that the State Board follow formal regulatory procedures in adopting waiver criteria. In addition, the Order requires that local boards establish a "compelling justification" for any requested waiver by satisfying all elements stipulated in the Order.

Fortunately, the legislature acted to alleviate these barriers to local decision making on school calendars by authorizing a local board of education to adopt their own start and end dates to the school year. Senate Bill 321 would further expand the options available to local boards by allowing them to consider innovative scheduling strategies. Such strategies may be designed not only to meet minimum educational requirements but also to facilitate efforts to avoid long gaps in instruction and to align with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future expansions of career and technical education and dual enrollment programs. In these ways, this bill would greatly assist local boards in determining whether and how to adjust their respective local school calendars.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 321.