

Washington Post Editorial -- May 25, 2014

Local school priorities, not nostalgia, should set Maryland's academic calendar

Local School districts in Maryland weigh many factors in determining when to start their school years. What's the window for state, local and advanced placement testing? When is the best time to conduct professional staff development? Essentially, school officials want to create an optimal learning environment. One thing they don't and shouldn't have to consider is maximizing tax revenue from Ocean City.

A [task force](#) convened by the Maryland General Assembly has recommended that the state's public schools not be allowed to open until after Labor Day. The driving motivation behind the change, which would require legislation or an executive order, is to boost the state's tourism industry. Maryland Comptroller Peter Franchot (D), [a strong supporter](#) of extending summer vacation into September, said the change could result in more than \$7.7 million in additional tax revenue and \$74.3 million in new economic activity. His main concern, [Mr. Franchot told The Post's Donna St. George](#), is the quality of interaction between family and their kids, which is jeopardized by this creep of starting school earlier and earlier. If we keep going in that direction, it will be July when we start school.

Actually, that doesn't strike us as necessarily a bad idea, considering the educational advantages to be gained from increased instruction time and the success some school districts have had with year-round schooling, particularly in helping at-risk students. But we wouldn't impose that view, either. The school calendar should be shaped by educators in conjunction with their communities rather than politicians in Annapolis with nostalgic notions of summer. Requiring all local educational agencies to conform to the same schedule would not be conducive to the diverse needs of the twenty-four (24) districts in the state of Maryland, [Prince George's school chief Kevin M. Maxwell wrote](#) to the head of the state task force.

Maryland, which likes to trumpet its success in student achievement, would be taking a step back if it allowed business interests, not children's needs, to dictate school decisions. We urge Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) to make short shrift of this ill-advised proposal.

MARYLAND HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION **RESPONSE**

The May 25 editorial on a post Labor Day school start in Maryland maintains that the slight revision to the current school calendars is based on maximizing tax revenue in Ocean City. That conclusion is flat out wrong. This change will generate significant tax revenues for the state government and for local governments across Maryland. These increased revenues could be used to help increase funding for public schools and programs for at risk students across Maryland.

A uniform statewide post Labor Day school start in Maryland is far from a requirement for all districts to conform to the same schedule. This relatively minor schedule revision would still result in local School Boards setting their own individual calendars for the state mandated 180 days of instruction so long as they start after Labor Day.

The editorial fails to note that one Maryland School Board, a body elected by and accountable to the public, has already approved a post Labor Day school start for the 2014 - 2015 school year.

The editorial also fails to note that despite lobbying efforts of the state's school superintendents at State Task Force meetings on this issue, a super majority of Task Force members approved a recommendation for a post Labor Day school start in Maryland.

Last, but certainly not least, the editorial provides no evidence to back up a claim that "Maryland, which likes to trumpet its success in student achievement, would be taking a step back if it allowed business interests, not children's needs, to dictate school decisions."

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts."

The facts are that data from Virginia indicate post Labor Day school starts in Virginia have NOT resulted in negative impacts on student performance or school performance.

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