

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1418
Ways and Means

(Delegate Miller)

Public Middle and High Schools – Start Time for Instruction – Requirement

This bill prohibits, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, a public middle school from beginning instruction earlier than 8:00 a.m. and a public high school from beginning instruction earlier than 8:30 a.m. A local board of education may grant a waiver to a school to begin instruction at an earlier time if the local board determines that the school has a compelling reason for requiring a different start time. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: For some local school systems, transportation expenditures may increase substantially, potentially by millions of dollars, to comply with the bill. Local school system revenues are not affected. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Local school systems have authority over opening and closing hours for public schools. Chapter 620 of 2014 required the Office of Public Health Services (OPHS) in the then-Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to conduct a study of safe and healthy school hours for Maryland public schools. In conducting the study, OPHS was required to (1) review the science on the sleep needs of children and adolescents, including the effects of sleep deprivation on academic performance and benefits of sufficient sleep; (2) review and study how other school systems have implemented alternative school day

starting times and how various activities in those school systems were impacted and scheduled around the changes; and (3) make recommendations regarding whether public schools should implement a starting time of no earlier than 8:00 a.m. The resulting report can be read [here](#).

Chapter 247 of 2016 established an Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours certification in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. Orange Ribbon certification is intended to recognize a local school system that creates, implements, and enforces school start times that are consistent with those recommended by MSDE, the Maryland Department of Health, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. To receive Orange Ribbon certification, a local school system may not have (1) an elementary school requiring a student to be in class before 8:00 a.m. and board a school bus before 7:00 a.m. and (2) a middle or high school requiring a student to be in class before 8:30 a.m. and board a school bus before 7:30 a.m.

Public School Transportation

All school systems are required to *arrange* transportation to and from school for all public school students and are *required* to provide transportation to and from school for all disabled students. The State provides aid for student transportation. The funding consists of two parts: a base grant that is adjusted annually; and a per pupil grant based on the number of students with special transportation needs. The State provides annual aid to public schools for the purpose of funding student transportation. The fiscal 2025 budget as introduced includes \$369.6 million in general fund public school student transportation aid.

Local Fiscal Effect: To the extent that local school start times do not already meet the requirements under the bill, and depending upon the extent of waivers provided under the bill, local school system transportation costs may increase significantly by fiscal 2027.

MSDE previously reviewed fiscal analyses of later school start times conducted by the public school systems in Anne Arundel, Howard, and Montgomery counties. Howard County had studied the option of shifting start times for high schools from 7:25 a.m. to 8:15 a.m., finding that this would increase by 299 the number of school buses required, and therefore, would result in additional costs of \$19.2 million. Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) both studied several options. While both systems found that some options would generate substantial additional costs (as much as \$8.4 million for AACPS and \$12.0 million for MCPS), both found that options that delay all school start times (including elementary schools) by an equal amount can result in little or no significant increase in school system transportation costs.

AACPS advises that its school start times presently meet the bill’s requirement, but given the results discussed above, it is assumed that, for some local school systems, transportation expenditures increase substantially, potentially on the order of millions of dollars to adjust start times to comply with the bill’s requirements. However, to the extent that local boards exercise the waiver option under the bill, or find alternative approaches that are less costly, these costs may be significantly mitigated.

Small Business Effect: Private providers of school buses and related school transportation services in Maryland, may need to purchase/provide more buses and hire more drivers to the extent that new start times generate demand for more buses. It is assumed that any associated costs are passed to local school systems that contract with these providers.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced with the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Prince George’s County Public Schools; St. Mary’s County Public Schools; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

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