

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 468 (Senator Benson)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction

This bill requires, beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, all middle schools in the State to begin instruction no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and all high schools in the State to begin instruction no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The State Board of Education (SBE), by request, may grant waivers from these requirements if SBE determines that there is a compelling reason for a school to require a different start time. However, lack of funding to implement the new start times is not a compelling reason for a waiver. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, each local board of education and public charter school must implement a public information campaign to raise awareness of the later start times for middle and high schools, as specified. If requested, SBE must assist with these campaigns. The bill makes additional technical and conforming changes. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill pertains only to local school systems.

Local Effect: No fiscal effect in some local school systems, but expenditures increase, in some cases significantly, in some local school systems for transportation costs. No effect on revenues. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: State statute and regulations do not address the start times of public schools, which are under the purview of local school boards.

Each public school under the jurisdiction of a local school board must be open for students for at least 180 actual school days and a minimum of 1,080 hours during a 10-month period each school year. Within these guidelines, each local school board must set the start and end dates of the school year for its county. If normal attendance is prevented because of specified conditions (*e.g.*, severe weather), schools must be open for at least 1,080 hours during a 10-month period. Schools must be open for at least 3 hours every school day. Publicly funded prekindergarten programs are not subject to these requirements.

By written request, SBE may allow adjustments to these requirements if a local school board describes a demonstrated effort to comply with the above requirements. Authorized adjustments include an increase or decrease in the length of the school year, adjustments to the length of the school day, and allowing schools to be open on holidays.

Local Expenditures: The bill's effects on local school system expenditures vary extensively among local school systems, with some indicating no effect and some indicating significant fiscal and/or operational effects. For instance, Anne Arundel County Public Schools advises that the bill has no effect because all of its middle and high schools already comply with the bill's requirements. Although St. Mary's County Public Schools advises that it has to adjust multiple start times to comply with the bill, it does not anticipate any financial costs to do so. Baltimore City Public Schools advises that, after already completing a significant restructuring of school start times to maximize limited transportation resources, it has to adjust the start times of 52 schools under the bill.

By contrast, Frederick County Public Schools estimates first year costs exceeding \$30 million to purchase more buses, hire more bus drivers and support personnel (*e.g.*, mechanics), and more storage facilities for the buses. Annual costs to increase and then maintain the size of the bus fleet exceed \$10 million alone. Baltimore County Public Schools similarly advises that it needs to purchase more buses but does not specify a number or cost.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1418 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: HB 1015 (Delegate Miller, *et al.*) - Ways and Means.

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

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