

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 848
(Senator Edwards)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**Garrett County and Allegany County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days
Pilot Program**

This bill establishes Virtual Education Days Pilot Programs in Allegany and Garrett counties. The Superintendent of Schools for the respective counties may order a virtual education day instead of closing a public school in the event of inclement weather only if there are days remaining in the school calendar for school closures due to severe weather or other emergencies. The superintendent must notify the principals of public schools in the county of the decision to order a virtual education day as soon as possible after making the decision, and a principal who receives such notice must immediately notify the students, parents, and school staff of a virtual education day. The local board of education must adopt a policy to implement virtual education days. By September 1, 2024, the board must submit a report to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Committee on Ways and Means on the number, duration, and effectiveness of virtual education days. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2022, and terminates September 30, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: The bill authorizes, but does not require, the respective local superintendents to order virtual education days. Though Allegany County was unable to provide a response in time for this fiscal and policy note, it is assumed that Allegany County Public Schools and Garrett County Public Schools can handle the bill's requirements with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Virtual education days must count against the number of days incorporated in the school's calendar for school closures due to severe weather or other emergencies in the school year. If there are not remaining days in a school's calendar for such closures, the county superintendent may not order a virtual education day. The county superintendent is encouraged only to order virtual education days when there is a likelihood of consecutive school closures.

Virtual education must consist of education services, delivered remotely, that are as close as practicable to in-person education services. A school implementing virtual education must make accommodations for students and staff without easy access to the Internet and establish a method for sending and receiving assignments from students without Internet access. If a school is ordered to implement virtual education for multiple consecutive school days, the county superintendent must arrange, to the extent practicable, for the continued provision of all normal services required by law, including meal services.

Current Law: Public schools must be open for at least 180 days and 1,080 school hours at elementary and middle schools or 1,170 hours at high schools during a 10-month period. However, a local board of education may apply to the State Board of Education for a waiver from these provisions of State law; the application must describe a demonstrated effort by the local board to comply with State law and that the school system calendar included from 3 to 10 days to be used to make up days lost. In response, the State board may permit:

- increases or decreases in the length of the school year;
- exceptions from the 10-month period requirement;
- adjustments in the length of the school day; and
- schools to be open on holidays.

These adjustments may be granted only if normal school attendance is prevented because of natural disaster, civil disaster, or severe weather conditions. After any school system closure, the local school system must notify the State board, within 10 days of reopening, of its plan to make up the missed school days, including the dates of the make-up days. Education funding from the State or local sources may not be reduced if there are fewer than 180 school days in any year because of an approved application to the State Board of Education for a decrease in the length of the school year.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 1129 (Garrett County Delegation and Allegany County Delegation) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Garrett County; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 28, 2022
fnu2/mcr

Analysis by: Scott P. Gates

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510