

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 743  
Universal School Start Act of 2020**

**House Ways and Means Committee  
February 21, 2020  
1:00 PM**

**Sean Johnson  
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association opposes this legislation, which would mandate that county boards of education set the school year start date no earlier than the first Tuesday after the Labor Day holiday. This legislation not only defies the 2019 legislation (SB 128/Ch. 13)—approved by the Maryland General Assembly, over a gubernatorial veto—that reinstated local control over school calendars, but it also seeks to disempower local school districts to account for their own unique needs in creating their school calendars.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for career and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Start and end dates on a school calendar should not be decided by gubernatorial edict, by the profit margins of the tourism industry, or by gauzy personal nostalgia; rather it should be decided by local calendar committees and boards of education that must account for a myriad of factors, but primarily rooted in what it takes to improve academic achievement for students and implement the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

Developing the school calendar is more than simply counting 180 days between when school opens and closes. Most local school systems have developed an inclusive process involving calendar committees that reach out to the broader community for input because what goes on in those communities impacts the school calendar. The deliberations of these calendar committees consider myriad factors, including sports programs, community events, religious holidays and observances, inclement weather, unique student population needs, and facility concerns, to name a few. There can be considerable variation in any of these factors from one jurisdiction to another. This is why we believe it is so important to maintain local autonomy on this issue.

From the perspective of teachers and school personnel, there are also factors such as issues associated with concentrated poverty, food insecurity, and “summer slide”; professional development days; school grading and in-service days; parent-teacher conference days; and instructional days lost to state and federal mandated assessment testing.



MSEA believes the General Assembly got it correct when they took power over the school calendar out of the hands of the Governor and placed it back into the hands of local educators and community stakeholders. These issues should be solely in the purview of local boards of education as they can more adequately account for the unique needs of a local community and the students they are charged to educate. **Therefore, we urge an unfavorable report for House Bill 743.**