

RE: HB 743 Universal School Start Act of 2020 - House Ways & Means

Position: Support

February 19, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing as a parent in the Frederick County Public School System and voicing my concern over the possible calendars for the 2020-21 school year.

I am frustrated that both options have school starting way too early, much earlier than any other school system in the state. One option has us going back as early as mid-August. While option 2 has us ending school early, my concern is that it will not actually end on the proposed date of May 27th. Option 2 does not allow for any snow days. While I am in full support of a longer summer, I do not see how this is a realistic option. This creates inequities in the county as not all students have access to the internet or computers at home. While the idea of virtual school on a snow day sounds amazing, I do not believe that it is truly possible. I believe this is a way to tease parents and staff into supporting option 2, when the reality is we will not actually get out of school that early because snow days will be added.

It is very evident that families and citizens in our county and state as a whole, support a longer summer. It has been widely accepted. While I understand that Labor Day is later in 2020 and starting after Labor Day might not be a possibility (even though many other counties are doing just that~including neighboring Carroll County), I do not understand why it has to be two (or even worse three) weeks before Labor Day. Why can't the county make a calendar that starts at a reasonable date of one week before Labor Day?

I do not understand FCPS's justification of summer slump and the desire for continuity of instruction when they implicate a semester block schedule for the high school. The county cannot simultaneously state they want continuity and then have students take anywhere from 9 months to 1 year, depending how a student's schedule plays out, in high school. Some students who have math in the fall semester of one year and the spring the following year will

go 12 months without any math instruction. Yet, the county is concerned about students having one extra week of summer vacation?

There is a long list of why students enjoy the extra week or two weeks of summer. Some students use the time to visit colleges, earn extra money by working, attend camps, and have some much needed rest and time with their family. With so many discussions about students' mental health, we should not discount the importance of rest and rejuvenation. Again, while having breaks in the year is nice, we unfortunately live in a state that does not allow much outdoor activity in the winter months. I do not see the benefit in having a week off at Thanksgiving. Most families cannot afford to take a trip to a tropical climate to enjoy the break; however, most students can enjoy a sprinkler, pool, an Orioles game, or a local vacation spot in the summer. I would much rather have my kids have a week off that would allow the children to run around outside in the summer, than cooped up inside in the winter.

Lastly, as I have followed the news via social media, the FNP, and the local PTA, I have not found any parent that supports either calendar. I find this very frustrating that our elected officials are not taking into account their constituents and what the citizens of Frederick County want. I strongly urge you to go back and scrap both calendars and come up with an option that does NOT have students starting in mid-August.

Sincerely,

Juliet Savage

Former Howard County Teacher

Parent in Frederick County