

# **Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 676.pdf**

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*Superintendent of Schools*  
Ms. Barbara L. Baker

To: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Distinguished Members of the Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Ms. Barbara L. Baker, Superintendent of Garrett County Public Schools

Re: Testimony In Favor of Senate Bill 676

Date: March 1, 2021

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Please accept this written testimonial support on behalf of the elected Board of Education of Garrett County and myself for SB 676 introduced by Senator George Edwards. This would allow the school system the ability to utilize our virtual learning platform not only for inclement weather closings but also for other unforeseen events that may cause disruption to the school calendar.

Maryland experiences extreme variances in topography and climate, which create unique circumstances for each district. As the westernmost school system, the Garrett County Public Schools' operating calendar is always impacted by the severe winter weather. Garrett County Public Schools, on average, experiences 10 inclement weather/snow closings a year. This does not include the significant number of delays and early dismissals. During the 2017-2018 school year, GCPS experienced eleven snow days, six 2-hour delays, and five early dismissals due to inclement weather. That year was not unusual. During the 2018-2019 school year, GCPS experienced nine snow days, eight 2-hour delays, and one early dismissal. Each of these disruptions can have a huge impact on necessary instructional time before final assessments and state testing. Studies have shown that in winters with high levels of snowfall, students tested less proficient than in winters with little snow.

If we were able to successfully implement virtual learning days when inclement weather or other unforeseen events result in school closures, instruction could continue without disruption. Virtual learning does not replace the traditional model of in-person attendance with a certified teacher. However, it is a good option to ensure students continue to learn on a consistent basis. Not only would this have a positive impact on student performance, but it would also lessen the need to create make-up days at the end of the school year. Garrett County Public Schools spent the summer training staff and implementing a virtual platform called *Schoology*. In my professional opinion, learning with Schoology and the flexibility to use the program on a limited basis, is much preferred over adding days to the calendar in June.

Thank you for your consideration in passing this important legislation. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions or concerns. I would be more than happy to discuss how passage of this legislation will benefit the students and families of Garrett County.

# **SB 676 - Garrett County – Public Schools – Virtual**

Uploaded by: Zwerling, Samantha

Position: UNF



**Testimony Submitted on Behalf of the Garrett County Education Association**

**On**

**Garrett County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days**

**Senate Bill 676**

**March 3, 2021**

Senators:

The Garrett County Education Association (GCEA) views Senate Bill 676 unfavorably. Though GCEA leadership understands the intent of this bill, it is problematic on multiple levels. It would not be advantageous for educators or students.

Garrett County Education Association is a member driven organization of education employees from a wide variety of career classifications. We are the teachers, instructional assistants, secretaries, building service workers, cafeteria workers and maintenance staff that make Garrett County Public Schools function for our students and communities on a day to day basis. GCEA is an affiliate of the Maryland State Education Association and the National Education Association.

GCEA urges an unfavorable report on SB 676. First, as the pandemic has demonstrated, there is no substitute for the in-person expertise of our members. To the greatest extent possible, students must have the benefit of that expertise and the replacement of it with virtual instruction must be reserved for the most serious of circumstances. Periodic inclement weather does not meet that standard.

Next, the elimination of “snow days” during this pandemic has been a blow to staff and student morale. It has become clearer now than ever that the brief respite from school can be a gift. As important as learning in a school setting is for students, so is the chance to build a snowman, have a cup of hot chocolate, warm up by a fire or just snuggle under a blanket with the dog (or cat) without having to think about school. As a West Virginia Superintendent put it sometimes we should, “Let snow days be snow days.”

Finally, there is a danger in delegating this much authority to any Superintendent. It makes hazier the legal requirement that that person would have to consult with the exclusive bargaining agent over possible effects on working conditions. The bill does not require consultation with the locally elected Board of Education to impose a potentially prolonged closure of schools. It also does not require any input from the public relative to such a decision.

**GCEA appreciates your consideration of this testimony and urges an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 676.**