

State Superintendent of Schools

BILL:	Senate Bill 848	DATE:	March 2, 2022
SUBJECT:	Garrett County and Allegany County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days Pilot Program	COMMITTEE:	Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
POSITION:	Oppose		
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EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully opposes **Senate Bill 848 - Garrett County and Allegany County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days Pilot Program**, which would allow the local school superintendents of Garrett and Allegany counties to declare virtual education days in the event of inclement weather.

If done well, MSDE supports virtual education days for their ability to provide alternate educational options when severe weather conditions are likely to prevent normal attendance at the public school. However, it is critical that definitions and requirements be consistent across all of Maryland's local school systems and that those definitions and requirements preserve quality learning opportunities for all students. This bill creates different requirements for just two of the 24 school systems in the State, and does not include sufficient quality guardrails.

Further, local school systems already have the necessary flexibility to declare virtual education days in the event of inclement weather. MSDE has established a process with clear standards to ensure meaningful and equitable virtual instruction during inclement days. Local school systems must submit a Public School Virtual Inclement Weather Day Plan that includes:

- an assurance that students will be able to make up assigned work missed during virtual days when they return to in-person school;
- how students and staff will have access to devices and Wi-Fi;
- the continued implementation of IEPs during virtual instruction (including specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aides and services, and accommodations);
- public presentation and discussion at a local school board meeting;
- the establishment of a communication plan to students, teachers, parents/guardians, etc., that the inclement weather day will or will not be virtual and the plan for instruction; and
- any other factors that are unique to their local school system.

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Sixteen local school systems (Allegany, <u>Anne Arundel</u>, <u>Baltimore County</u>, <u>Carroll</u>, Cecil, Dorchester, <u>Garrett, Kent</u>, <u>Montgomery</u>, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, <u>Somerset</u>, <u>Talbot</u>, Washington, <u>Wicomico</u>, and <u>Worcester</u>) submitted plans to MSDE. This statewide approach will protect high quality learning opportunities for students.

Research from across the country has made it clear that for the vast majority of students virtual learning is not an effective form of instruction. Ensuring that consistent and comprehensive guardrails are in place for virtual education days is crucial to ensure the virtual days during inclement weather does not adversely affect the learning of the majority of students.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **Senate Bill 848.** Please contact Ary Amerikaner, at 410-767-0090, or <u>ary.amerikaner@maryland.gov</u>, for any additional information.