



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Ways and Means Committee
March 10, 2022

Board of Education
of Howard County

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HB1306: FAVORABLE

Howard County - Public Schools - Alternative Instruction Model Policy Ho. Co. 09-22

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **HB1306 Howard County - Public Schools - Alternative Instruction Model Policy Ho. Co. 09-22** as a measure to provide statutory flexibility to maximize instructional time by having the option to think outside the confines of in-seat instruction.

Long overdue in Maryland is the recognition that innovations in teaching reach far beyond the traditional brick and mortar classroom. In our ever-changing educational landscape, local school systems need the option to reimagine instructional time in a manner that does more than check a box on students in seats for 180 days. Instead, instructional time could be more effectively measured based on the days, or hours, that students take part in instruction, regardless of where, or how, instruction is delivered.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this issue to the forefront in a way that can benefit students. As we have now implemented a fully-virtual educational environment and have expanded access to internet and one to one devices in Howard County, we are able to reimagine ways in which the school system can provide useful, quality instruction when schools are closed. Amending the age-old restrictions under Education Article §7-103 to allow Howard County the flexibility to use alternative instructional models is ripe for adoption this Session. Whether through virtual lessons on snow days, hard-copy materials sent home for extended closures, or other synchronous and asynchronous solutions when in-person learning is not feasible or suitable, our goal in requesting this bill is allowing for continuity of learning.

This is an initiative the Board and Howard County Public School System Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Martirano, who oversaw a similar effort during his time as State Superintendent of Schools in West Virginia, have presented multiple years in a row as the concept of reimagined time. Traditionally used for weather-related events, other districts in states such as Kentucky,

Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina¹, along with West Virginia, have noted the benefits of pre-empting closures by permitting at-home learning. In developing alternative instructional models, an emphasis would be placed on predictability and quality of instruction through pre-planning – as opposed to tacking days on to the end of the school year – even when students cannot physically attend school. The bill includes a requirement to adopt a local policy to set the parameters for the use of such models, allowing for stakeholder input, and necessitates equitable access when using technology as well as negotiations to develop expectations in collaboration with our bargaining units.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of HB1306 from this Committee. The Board and HCPSS look forward to the opportunity afforded by this bill to use alternative instructional days to advance continuity of learning. We thank both the Howard County Delegation and Sponsor Delegate Courtney Watson for their support.

¹ “Snow Day No Longer Day off for Some South Carolina Students,” *U.S. News and World Report*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/south-carolina/articles/2018-07-26/snow-day-no-longer-day-off-for-some-south-carolina-students>.