



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Ways and Means Committee
March 31, 2022**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**SB0717: FAVORABLE W/AMENDMENT
Public Schools – Virtual Education Days – Authorization**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **SB0717 Public Schools – Virtual Education Days – Authorization** as an opportunity for local school systems to provide continuity of learning to students in the case of inclement weather. With the implementation of a fully-virtual solution following the pandemic and expanded access to internet and technology for our students in Howard County, the time is ripe to begin to reimagine school closures.

SB0717 would allow county boards the flexibility to authorize the county superintendent to hold virtual education days in the case of extreme weather. Virtual education days may only be used if all school closure days incorporated in a calendar have been used. Principals must notify teachers and students as soon as a superintendent authorizes, and schools must make accommodations for students who do not have access to the internet. County boards must also design the virtual day model before implementation of a virtual day.

As a legislative platform, the Board supports flexibility in the school system calendar to meet required days for student education. The Board has also made the value of being able to transition between in-person and virtual or other instruction to provide continuity of learning during emergencies and adverse weather conditions a legislative priority for the past several years.

The most influential factor in using an alternative day such as virtual instruction on snow days is continuity of learning. When instruction is interrupted, students often regress in their learning progress. One study/report from 2010 found that “the percentage of students passing math assessments fall by about one-third to one-half a percentage point for each day school is closed” when studying the impact of winter weather closings on schools from Maryland and Colorado (Marcotte & Hansen in [Education Next, Time for School?](#), 2010). Tacking those days on to the end of the school year does nothing more than check a box on the 180-day statutory requirement. It is also disruptive to family and staff planning when we must remove spring break days or add days in the summer.

While the Board and HCPSS have advocated for a more extensive local alternative educational model policy development in partnership with our local stakeholders under [HB1306](#), which would include closures for other limited emergencies such as a

water-main break in an individual school, we similarly support the intent and usefulness of SB0717. An amendment is recommended to insert a new section after line 27 on page 3 of the amended bill:

(G) A VIRTUAL EDUCATION DAY MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION CAN BE COUNTED UNDER § 7-103(1)(i) OF THIS TITLE.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0717 from this Committee.