



**Board of Education  
of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
March 5, 2025**

**SB0468: UNFAVORABLE**

**Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction** as a mandate on local school system operations that has extensive fiscal impacts without dedicated funding.

SB0468 requires all Maryland middle schools to begin instruction after 8 a.m. and all Maryland high schools to begin after 8:30 a.m. starting with the 2027-2028 school year. In instances where a school has a compelling reason to require a different start time, the bill authorizes the Maryland State Board of Education to grant a waiver to the school to begin instruction earlier. A school cannot, however, use a lack of available funding as a compelling reason.

In Howard County, school start times are staggered in order to utilize a smaller pool of buses that make school runs multiple times throughout the morning hours in order to have all students in the classroom by 9:25 a.m. HCPSS' [earliest school start time](#) is currently 7:50 a.m. for all high schools and some middle schools. The remaining middle schools currently start at 8:30 a.m.

Many school systems throughout the state and nation are working to address the core issue of early school start times. Research by organizations such as the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recognize "insufficient sleep in adolescents as an important public health issue that significantly affects the health and safety, as well as the academic success, of our nation's middle and high school students." The Board supports healthy school start times and continues to move towards that goal. Maintaining local control over the exact school start times, however, is imperative for operational and financial flexibility of school systems.

SB0468 would become an unfunded mandate for additional buses as the requirements of the bill would significantly compress the schedule. More buses will be needed to service our students since the current buses will not be able to make as many separate runs in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, bus contractor availability doesn't support the volume of buses that would be needed. The nationwide shortage of available buses and bus drivers would further complicate the issue and drive up contract prices. The average cost of new buses is rising and currently stands at \$150,000-170,000 with a 12-18 month lag time for delivery for a diesel bus. Last year, the average cost for an electric bus was around \$345,000, not including the fueling infrastructure needed.

Alternatives to compressing schedules including moving elementary start times earlier and middle or high schools after 9 a.m. These options have been previously discussed by the Board on multiple occasions, dating back to 2015, with community input largely against moving high schools later than middle or elementary schools. Considerations for later high school start times include the availability of older siblings to provide childcare, high schoolers working in after school day care facilities, as well as the impact on athletics and extracurricular activities.

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As a legislative platform, the Board opposes legislative measures such as SB0468 that diminish its ability to respond to its constituency on issues currently under its authority, as local boards must be accountable directly to their citizenry.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB0468 from this Committee.