



HB226 ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY – PUBLIC SCHOOLS – SCHOOL SCHEDULE OPTIONS

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WAYS AND MEANS

SUPPORT

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **HB226 – Anne Arundel County – Public Schools – School Schedule Options**. This bill creates a limited exemption to the State requirement for public schools to be open for student attendance for Anne Arundel County Public Schools only. Currently, State law mandates that schools be open each year for a minimum of 180 days and a certain number of hours (1,080 at the elementary and middle school levels, and 1,170 at the high school level) during a 10-month period each school year. These requirements are arbitrary and outdated and unnecessarily constrain local school system calendars, limiting programmatic creativity and resulting in headaches for families and employees.

In order to meet to meet the dual day and hour requirement for public schools to be open to students, AACPS utilizes early dismissal days. The school calendar for the 2024-2025 school year includes 12 early dismissal days, as did the calendar for the 2023-2024 school year. These days have proven to be disruptive to students, families, and employees. Parents and guardians struggle to find alternative childcare on days school close early for students, particularly staff members with students in the school system who are required to complete their normal duties after students are released early from school.

Moreover, early dismissal days have a negative impact on student attendance, which has a high impact on academic performance. AACPS attendance data from the last three years demonstrates that attendance rates on early dismissal days are consistently lower than average attendance on days schools are open for normal hours: in the 2021-2022 school year, attendance rates on early dismissal days ranged from 17.23% below average to 0.09% below average; in the 2022-2023 school year, attendance rates on early dismissal days ranged from 14.23% below average to 0.54% below average; and in the 2023-2024 school year, attendance rates on early dismissal days ranged from 14.09% below average to 0.59% above average.

This fall, AACPS established the Innovative School Scheduling Workgroup (Workgroup) to engage stakeholders in a robust conversation around school scheduling, including evaluating the current school schedule and making recommendations regarding alternative school scheduling models that should be considered by the Board and AACPS. One alternative model considered by the Workgroup was the elimination of early dismissal days from the school calendar. The Workgroup noted that early dismissal days are a source of frustration for families, caretakers, and employees with their own students in the system who may have to find alternative childcare on days when schools close early. Additionally, the Workgroup recognized that eliminating the use of early dismissal days would provide consistent and quality childcare for families with young students, and consistent scheduling for all students, families, and employees. The Workgroup recommended the removal of early dismissal days from the AACPS school calendar as soon as possible because of the potential benefits to key stakeholders.

This legislation will allow the Board and AACPS to implement the Workgroup's recommendations and to engage key stakeholders, including students, families, employees, partner organizations, and employee bargaining units regarding the reduction or elimination of early dismissal days from future school calendar. Such a change would allow the Board and AACPS to adjust our school calendar to better meet the needs of our school community by providing more consistent instruction and childcare.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on HB226.