

Opinion

## Opinion: Why are MCPS and the school board advocating for less school for our kids?



Bethesda Today photo

As Education Committee chairs for the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, we are concerned that Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and the Board of Education are seeking legislation to permanently decrease required days of instruction, rather than for a one-year reprieve.

[Bethesda Today](#) reported that “state lawmakers are considering emergency legislation that would provide [MCPS] with a way to end the 2025-2026 school year earlier.” But [as introduced](#), HB1084 was far broader; it would have permanently exempted MCPS from the state’s 180-day minimum requirement, eliminating an important guardrail that ensures sufficient instructional time. Since the bill’s introduction, the House of Delegates has [narrowed](#) the legislation to expire after next year

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current bill) was introduced. This proposal is also in the annual legislative priorities of Superintendent Thomas Taylor, the school board, and the Montgomery County Education Association.

The MCPS proposal would change state law solely for MCPS, which would be exempt from Maryland law requiring schools to provide both at least 180 “school days” and a minimum number of “school hours,” or otherwise seek a waiver. Instead, MCPS would only need to meet the school hours requirement, which is especially concerning because unlike many other states, Maryland counts all time in school—including lunch and transitions—toward school hours. MCPS and the school board have not explained whether they considered the impact on student learning before advocating to reduce required school days.

Through HB1084, MCPS would bypass oversight by the Maryland State Department of Education. For two years in a row, the state education department has denied MCPS requests to waive the minimum school days requirement because the district has not adjusted its calendar. Unlike other school districts, MCPS did not use all of its scheduled spring makeup days, secure waivers of otherwise mandatory state holidays, or have the school board approve a virtual learning plan as a last resort for multi-day closures.

We recognize the challenge of balancing cost, staffing needs, teacher planning and grading time, and stakeholder preferences. Nevertheless, calendar planning must be grounded in student learning. Without sufficient instructional time, MCPS cannot fulfill its core mission of ensuring all students are college and career ready. Teachers and students need adequate classroom time to complete curriculum content before spring testing.

Since 2016, MCPS has reduced scheduled school days from 184 to 181. This year, only half of the 18 weeks before January were full five-day weeks. At the same time, MCPS scheduled nearly all contingency days in the fall and early winter—when they are unlikely to be used—or in late June, after testing ends and attendance declines. And they scheduled two spring contingency days they initially decided not to use. These choices do not serve MCPS’s educational priorities and raise the risk that inclement weather will extend the year further into June.

Although MCPS argues that reduced instructional days will lower costs, MCPS students cannot afford to lose time in school:

- Only about half of third graders overall—and about one-third of those receiving free and reduced-price meals (FARMs)—are meeting Maryland’s literacy benchmarks, especially concerning because a new state policy requires students to receive intensive intervention and even repeat third grade if they do not meet milestones (both of which have high costs).
- Fewer than 30% of students overall—and under 10% of FARMs students—pass the state algebra exam.
- Fewer than half of MCPS students taking the SAT—and under 18% of FARMs students—meet college and career readiness standards in both literacy and math.

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If MCPS—whose mission is to educate our children—is effectively advocating for less school, then we are facing a breach in the social contract and a true crisis of confidence. MCPS and the Board of Education must reset and prioritize the needs of our students.

*MCPS parents Evelyn Chung (ESOL), Michael Cordell (Special Education), Regan Kelly (Curriculum), Susanna Montezemolo (Gifted Education) and Betsy Tao (Technology) are chairs of the MCCPTA education committees. This letter reflects the opinions of the committees and not MCCPTA.*

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