

House Bill 1084 – Emergency Bill
Montgomery County – County Board of Education – School Operation
Requirements

Written Testimony (Unfavorable)

Submitted by: Betsy Tao

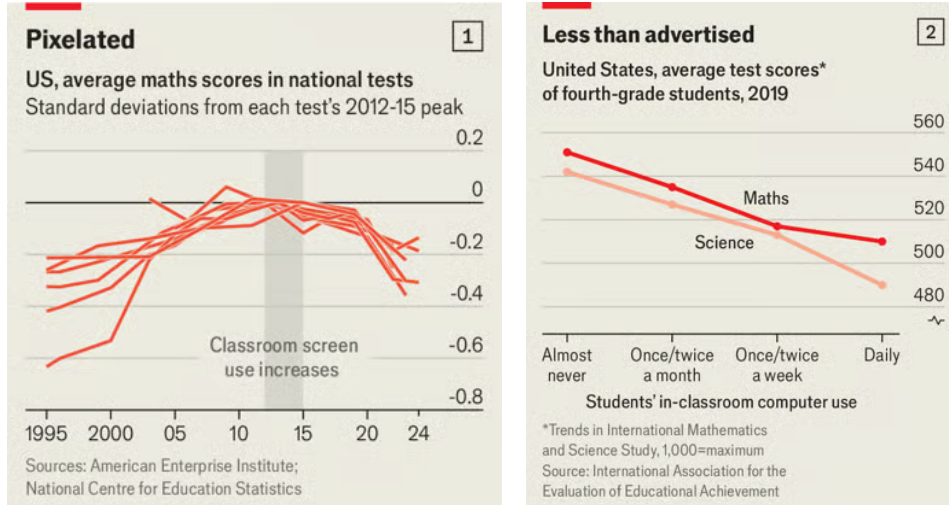
Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Betsy Tao, I live in Rockville, and I am a parent with two children in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). I currently serve as the President of the Beall Elementary School PTA, a delegate to the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) for Julius West Middle School PTSA, and I am the Chair of the Technology Committee of the MCCPTA. I am submitting this testimony on my own behalf, and I ask that you issue an unfavorable report for this bill.

House Bill 1084 seeks legislative relief from the need to add additional school days at the end of June due to the number of severe weather closures this year. On its face this looks like a good bill to support, because it's hard to argue with the fact that "snowcrete" caused a significant challenge for school districts, especially one as large as MCPS that needs to ensure that bus routes are safe and school parking lots are cleared. Most families I know are not happy about those additional days in June, two of which are half days. They know that very little will occur on those days, many students will be absent, and vacation and camp plans have already been made.

However, when I myself looked up the original text of the bill, I was surprised to see that MCPS was not seeking emergency relief, it was in fact seeking a permanent exception to Maryland's requirement that schools must be open for a minimum number of days *and* hours, and in fact this permanent exception to the minimum day requirement was in the Superintendent and the Board of Education's [2026 Legislative Platform](#) as a "priority issue".

I was concerned about MCPS seeking an exception to the minimum days requirement because, as a parent who is very involved in county-wide PTA issues, especially relating to the ways that the distraction of personal mobile devices and over-use and abuse of school-issued devices have harmed student learning, I am always keenly aware of the fact that our students are not doing well.

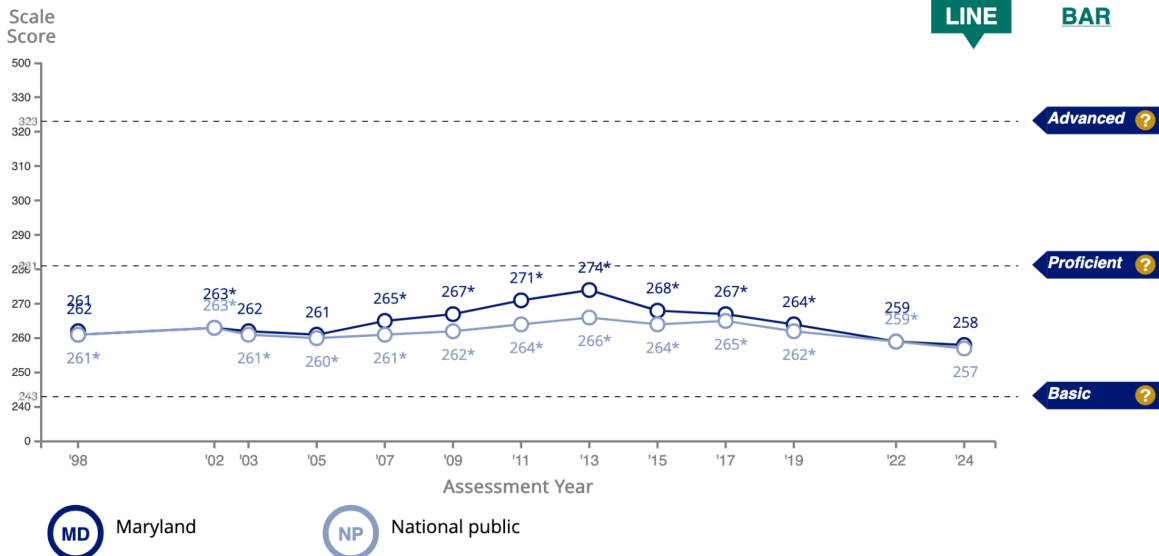


From The Economist: [Ed tech is profitable. It's also mostly useless.](#)

Most parents don't know that the average MCPS student is not on track to be college and career ready, struggles with reaching literacy targets, and will not be proficient in math. Student performance has been in a decade-long decline. From the Maryland state profile of the [Nation's Report Card](#):

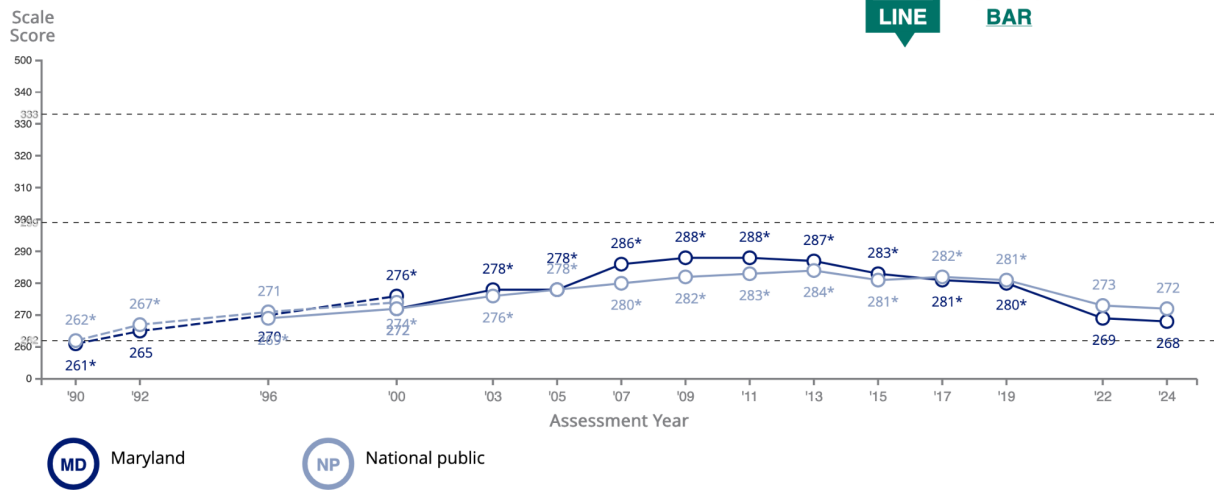
GRADE 8 | READING

Average scale scores for grade 8 reading, by All students [TOTAL] and jurisdiction: 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022, and 2024



GRADE 8 | MATHEMATICS

Average scale scores for grade 8 mathematics, by All students [TOTAL] and jurisdiction: 1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022, and 2024



From all of the research and reading I have done, I am firmly of the belief that one of the main culprits of the alarming decline in student achievement is the over-use of technology. Our students ages 5-8 are on screens for entertainment an average of 3 hours 38 minutes a year, ages 8-12 are on screens 5 and a half hours a day, and ages 13-18 are on screens an average of *8 hours and 39 minutes a day* (American Academy of Pediatrics, [Average Amount of Screen Time for Children and Young Adults](#)). These stats are significantly higher for kids from lower-income, black, and Hispanic backgrounds. **The school day is the only space where many kids have the opportunity to develop cognitive, social and emotional skills outside of screen time.**

Well-resourced families will not be affected by a loss of five school days a year. They spend \$50,000-\$200,000 and beyond on outside enrichment for their children. But most MCPS students depend greatly on every school day we can provide for them.

MCPS claims that other states have hours *or* days requirement. That is true, but it is not an apples-to-apples comparison. Other states’ statutes and regulations have additional requirements that Maryland’s do not have. For example, Massachusetts’s regulations require school committees to “schedule a school year which includes at least 185 school days at each elementary, middle, and secondary school within the school district,” “operate the schools within its district at least 180 school days in a school year,” and states that “[s]chool committees are encouraged to exceed the minimum number of school days wherever possible, and to offer extended day and extended year programs that expand student learning opportunities.” This language signals that Massachusetts

understands the importance and value of school days and encourages school districts to create calendars that reflect its core mission: student learning.

Maryland's statute and regulations is relatively lean compared to other states, but by requiring school districts to adhere to minimum days *and* minimum hours requirements, it provides flexibility to school districts while also signaling the importance and value of school days.

By comparison, MCPS's attempt to seek the flexibility to provide fewer than 180 school days – citing consistently to factors unrelated to student learning – causes me to question where student learning falls in MCPS's calculus, both when it designs and approves its calendar, and in choosing its legislative priorities. In all of its messaging about the calendar, and in its own Legislative Platform document, it does not say one word about how its calendar choices will impact student learning, or whether it has even looked into the issue and factored it in.

Instead, our calendar is filled with non-instructional days for numerous religious and cultural holidays, without an analysis of whether those closures are needed for secular, operational reasons, as Board Policy requires. MCPS and the Board of Education – not the community — plans and approves the calendar. It cannot plan a calendar that prioritizes other factors over student learning, and then shift responsibility to the community for those decisions, or seek legislative solutions as a pass for its failure to adhere to state law.

For all of these reasons, I urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report for House Bill 1084 to send a strong message to MCPS and the Board of Education that student learning must always be the school district's first, second, and third priority.

Thank you for your consideration.

Betsy Tao
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