



**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates  
Ways and Means Committee  
March 10, 2026**

**Board of Education  
of Howard County**

Jennifer Swickard Mallo, *Chair*

Meg Ricks., *Vice Chair*

Andrea Chamblee, Esq.

Linfeng Chen, Ph.D.

Jacky McCoy

Jolene Mosley

Antonia Watts

Erin Alistar  
*Student Member*

William J. Barnes  
*Superintendent,  
Secretary/Treasurer*

**HB1174: UNFAVORABLE**

**Howard County - Board of Education - Mandatory School Holidays  
Ho. Co. 11-26**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Howard County - Board of Education - Mandatory School Holidays Ho. Co. 11-26** as a mandate on the operation of the local school system that fails to take into consideration flexibility and local decision making.

HB1174 requires both Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) to close schools for students in observance of the following holidays:

- Diwali (observed every fall between October and November)
- Eid Al-Adha (observance varies based on the lunar calendar)
- Eid Al-Fitr (observance varies based on the lunar calendar)
- Lunar New Year (observed every winter between late January and mid-February)
- Rosh Hashanah (observed every fall between September and October)
- Yom Kippur (observed every fall between September and October)
- Juneteenth (observed every June on the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month)

The bill calls for observance on the first day only of each holiday.

HCPSS uses recommendations from an Academic Calendar Planning Committee as the foundation for making a calendar proposal each year to the Board. Considerations for the calendar include continuity of HCPSS instructional programs, adequate time for teachers to engage in professional work and growth activities, acknowledgement of religious observances, while also recognizing the desire for students, staff, and families to have a traditional break from school work during the spring and winter. Furthermore, the academic calendar adheres to Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), the HCEA Negotiated Agreement, and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) requirements.

Beyond the current holidays mandated by Education Article §7-103(c), the Board may determine that schools should be closed at other times if it is determined that an educational or operational need exists. To recommend the closing of schools or schools and offices, the Academic Calendar Planning Committee considers the operational need to be closed on a particular day. Additionally, when considering



school closures for educational needs, the committee references the HCEA Negotiated Agreement, which currently requires teachers to work a total 193 days. This means that teachers need to work 13 additional days beyond the 180 days that students attend.

For reference, the adopted HCPSS calendar for the current school year 2025-2026 incorporates either system closures or professional learning days on or around these holidays as follows:

- Diwali – Schools and offices closed 10/20
- Eid Al-Adha – Schools and offices closed 5/27
- Eid Al-Fitr – Schools closed 3/20 for students (professional learning day for staff)
- Lunar New Year – Schools and offices closed 2/17
- Rosh Hashanah – Schools and offices closed 9/23
- Yom Kippur – Schools and offices closed 10/2
- Juneteenth – Schools and offices closed (falls after the end of the school year)

In years the proposed holidays may be more than included through the calendar process, potential fiscal impacts of school closures for each position type within HCPSS would ultimately be dependent on that year's calendar needs, overall length of the school year, as well as negotiations with representative bargaining units. Where additional days are needed to meet the 180 day requirement for students, requiring closure may limit local school system options for make-up inclement weather days during the year. Extensions beyond the planned last day of school in June have been known to be unproductive in terms of classroom learning. In certain calendar years, extension of the school year could also mean pushing beyond the 10-month window required by statute.

By requiring closures in law as opposed to allowing local flexibility to set and adjust the calendar to meet operational needs, HB1174 presents significant logistical challenges.

The SY27-28 calendar is currently [under consideration](#) by the Board, with final action expected at the March 26, 2026, meeting. One difference in the Calendar Committee's recommendation from HB1174 would be the inclusion of Holi. The sponsor of HB1174 has indicated the bill codifies existing practice, however this illustrates a key necessity in maintaining local discretion so that the Board has the ability to deliberate this and inclusion of other religious or cultural observations based on educational and operational impact. Otherwise, the Delegation may end up in a never-ending cycle of statutory changes.



Current holidays mandated under Education Article § 7-103(c) are also statewide and thus have set dates well into the future. Holidays proposed under HB1174, particularly those that are based on the sighting of the moon, [are often not set until the weeks or days leading up to the event.](#) Under current practice, the HCPSS Calendar Committee includes representation of local religious groups and readily available resources to guide planning and any recommendations around impacts of the school calendar in relation to holidays. Planning typically starts two years in advance of a school year, and the Committee's best efforts are used to make recommendations around the potential fluctuation in dates. Without State guidance on the particular day of closure, however, HCPSS could very easily end up being out of compliance last minute without a practical way to shift dates should HB1174 pass.

To be clear, the Board does not oppose the inclusion of these dates in the local calendar. As illustrated above, they have been incorporated for the current year in Howard County. The passage of this bill would set precedent for the legislature to dictate hyper-localized constraints on the school calendar usurping the statutory authority of the Board and educational and operational expertise of those running the school system.

As a legislative platform, the Board opposes legislative initiatives that have the effect of reducing or circumscribing the authority of an elected local board of education by diminishing 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 HB1174 from this Committee.