

TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 189 – Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction

DATE: February 5, 2026

POSITION: Oppose

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and State Department of Education (MSDE) provides this Letter of Opposition regarding House Bill (HB) 189 – Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction. HB 189 requires that middle schools and high schools may not start the school day earlier than 8 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., respectively.

Local education agencies (LEAs) must consider many variables when determining the start and end times for the school day. These include school location, geographic dispersion of the school population, coordination of school buses for general education and special education students, and plans for school activities that may occur before or after the regular school day.

While research supports later start times for adolescents and highlights potential benefits for student health and learning, the fiscal and operational impacts of implementing a uniform statewide change are substantial. MSDE is open to continued collaboration with LEAs to explore locally driven approaches to later start times for middle and high schools, where feasible. The Department welcomes continued discussion with legislators regarding the research base, fiscal considerations, and practical implications of school start times. However, decisions regarding school start times are most effective when informed by meaningful community input and local circumstances, rather than imposed through a uniform statewide mandate. The Department recognizes that LEAs are best equipped to gather input from their stakeholders and develop a schedule for start times that will best meet the needs of schools, families, students, and instructional programs. The imposition of a statewide mandated start time will disrupt locally tailored systems currently responsive to local conditions.

Additionally, it should be noted that the impact of limiting the start time of middle and high schools will increase the costs of transportation provided by the LEA directly or through contracts. Most LEAs use a staggered time system to maximize fleet efficiency. If middle and high schools start later, their routes may overlap with elementary runs, requiring more buses and drivers or longer route times. By moving the start of these grades to a later time, the activities that students attend after school such as clubs, sports, or other extracurricular activities will now be pushed later into the evening hours. This may require additional late buses or interfere with afternoon transportation for elementary schools.

The State Board and MSDE respectfully request consideration of these comments as HB 189 is discussed and deliberated.

For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 443-571-5461, or laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.