



Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D. *Lillian M. Lowery*
DATE: March 25, 2014
SUBJECT: School System Modifications Due to Severe Weather Conditions

PURPOSE:

- 1) To consider up to a five-day (5) waiver of the 180-day school year requirement for all Maryland school systems due to the extraordinary inclement weather that affected the State of Maryland from December, 2013 through March, 2014;
- 2) To request that the State Board grant authorization to the State Superintendent of Schools to approve individual requests from local school superintendents to make adjustments in the school calendar due to emergency closings due to severe weather conditions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

In calendar year 2009-2010, the State of Maryland experienced unprecedented weather conditions. Never before had the State been impacted by two historic snow/ice storms in one school year. School systems were forced to make decisions about closing schools due to near blizzard conditions from December 19, 2009 through December 21, 2009 and again from February 5, 2010 through February 16, 2010. Due to these extraordinary and severe weather conditions, local school systems exceeded the number of days included in their calendars. In February, 2010, the State Superintendent asked the State Board of Education to consider a waiver from one day up to five days depending upon the review of each local superintendent's request. The request had to include the efforts the school made to make up instructional time; how the school calendars were modified; and the efforts to extend the school year. The State Board approved the State Superintendent's request after considerable discussion.

Similar weather circumstances occurred this school year. The amount of time schools systems were closed this school year is similar to the amount of time systems were closed in 2009-2010.

Education Article §7-103(a) requires that schools be open for student attendance 180 actual days. Section §7-103(b) of the Education Article gives the State Board of Education the authority to make adjustments to the length of the school year. Such adjustments may be granted if normal school attendance is prevented because of natural disaster; civil disaster; or severe weather conditions.

The conditions for granting waivers of the 180-day school year requirement are specified in COMAR 13A.02.01.04 and include the following:

1. The school system demonstrates they have made sufficient effort in providing instruction through calendar planning and modifications; and
2. Natural or civil disasters or severe weather conditions are sufficiently significant to warrant a waiver of days.

The conditions required for the application for a waiver are specified in COMAR 13A.02.01.04 (C) and includes the following:

1. The local school system developed a calendar which included days to be used to make up days lost. Depending upon past experience, this number could range from 3 to 10 days throughout the State. The local school system shall have identified those potential make-up days which could have been used as student days when calendar modification becomes necessary, that is, make-up days, student vacations days, etc.; and
2. The local school system has modified its calendar by scheduling school on make-up days provided in the original calendar and by extending the school year 5 days beyond the previously scheduled closing date.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Weather conditions this school year have been continuous. The State of Maryland has been impacted by snow, ice and extremely frigid temperatures. At this point in the school year, all local school systems have exceeded the inclement weather days in their calendar.

Local school superintendents are sensitive to the amount of instructional time that has been lost due to these weather challenges and have agreed to provide calendar modifications to enhance instructional time for the students. Merely extending the school year into late June, however, without calendar modifications, will likely create other hardships for students and staff.

At the February 25, 2014 State Board of Education meeting, you granted me the authority to approve requests from individual school systems to be open on State holidays. Seven school systems made the request to be open on Presidents' Day, Monday, February 17, 2014. Six of these school systems were successful in opening their schools. Five school systems have requested permission to be open for student attendance on Monday, April 21, 2014 (Easter Monday). These requests have been approved.

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ACTION:

I am requesting the State Board of Education to approve up to a five-day waiver for school systems making a written request for this waiver;

I am requesting the State Board of Education to grant me the authority to approve written requests from local school superintendents for a waiver from one to five school days for students. In the request for a waiver, the local superintendent or CEO will explain the efforts the school system will be making to use the inclement weather days in their calendar, modifying their school calendars where possible to make up as much instructional time as possible, and adding days to the end of the school year where necessary. Each school system's request will be evaluated individually based upon all of the factors outlined.

LML/BC