

## **A short history of the longer summer campaign.**

In recent years, a bipartisan movement in support of a sensible change to Maryland's public school calendars – one in which students would begin their classes after the Labor Day holiday, as opposed to late August – has gathered considerable momentum.

In 2013, a study that was conducted by Maryland's Bureau of Revenue Estimates determined that a post-Labor Day school start could generate an additional \$74.3 million in direct economic activity, including \$3.7 million in new wages, and \$7.7 million in state and local tax revenue.

In Spring 2014, a legislative task force that was chaired by a representative of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and included teachers, administrators, parents of students in Maryland public schools, and small business owners, voted overwhelmingly to endorse a post-Labor Day start.

The latest independent poll conducted by Goucher College found that 72 percent of Marylanders from across the state support a post-Labor Day start. In January 2015, Comptroller Peter Franchot announced that his petition drive to garner 10,000 signatures in support of a post-Labor Day start far exceeded expectations, having attracted 13,244 signatures, including that of Governor Larry Hogan.

For 2016, a new group has formed to educate Marylanders about this important issue. Marylanders for a Longer Summer is supported by members of the business community, educators, political leaders and ordinary citizens who believe that starting school after Labor Day just makes sense.

Now, as the General Assembly prepares to consider bipartisan legislation that would establish a statewide post-Labor Day start date for Maryland's public schools, opponents of this initiative have cited erroneous information to support their case. In the spirit of providing Marylanders with the facts needed to make an informed decision on an issue of importance to our state's economy and quality of life, the information provided below should clarify some of the more misleading statements on this issue.

### **Myths versus facts.**

**MYTH:** "Since state law requires Maryland public school students to complete 180 days, it would be impossible to start school after Labor Day without ending in late June or even early July."

**FACT:** Under our initiative, students would begin classes after Labor Day, complete the 180 days that are required by law and adjourn by mid-June, as schools throughout Maryland did for years. School systems would simply be required to make reasonable and modest adjustments to their existing calendars to accommodate the new start date.

The Worcester County public school system has proven that it can be done without difficulty. Under its 2014-15 public school calendar, students began classes the Tuesday after Labor Day,

completed 180 days and still adjourned on June 16. Even with an unusually late 2015 Labor Day holiday, students began this past fall after Labor Day and will still be out by June 17!

Just another reminder that with common sense and thoughtful planning, the proper balance can be struck.

**MYTH:** “It will take away our holidays. Kids will have to go to school the day before Thanksgiving and on Christmas Eve, and there will be no spring break.”

**FACT:** Again, Worcester County proved that a post-Labor Day start date can be accommodated without eliminating any of its traditional holidays and breaks. To be sure, each school system has its unique scheduling distinctions, and the specific strategies that were adopted in Worcester County might not be the ideal solution somewhere else. But there is no doubt that it can be done.

**MYTH:** “We need those days in August to adequately prepare our students for those high-stakes, standardized tests that are given later in the school year. Students who don’t have those extra days will be at a disadvantage with those who do.”

**FACT:** There is no evidence that a handful of school days in mid- to late August, when students are sitting in sweltering classrooms that are housed primarily in aging brick buildings, has transformed the learning capabilities of public school students. Dr. James McMillan, a respected professor of education at Virginia Commonwealth University, recently undertook an exhaustive study to determine whether Virginia public school students who returned to school before Labor Day outperformed those who didn’t. Dr. McMillan found that, “the preponderance of evidence suggests that there is no relationship between school division start date (before or after Labor Day) and student achievement.”

**MYTH:** “What if we have snow days? Then we’ll be stuck in school until the middle of July!”

**FACT:** Snow days are a fact of life, and local school systems already build their academic calendars with the expectation of weather-related delays and cancellations. In those instances where unusually harsh winters threaten to extend the existing school year beyond acceptable boundaries, each school system will retain the option of submitting a waiver request to the State Department of Education.

**MYTH:** “Instead of worrying about starting school after Labor Day, we should be looking at year-round schools, like they do in some European and Asian countries.”

**FACT:** That isn’t a myth as much as it is a well-intentioned but ill-advised policy suggestion. While year-round schools may work in some places, they would prove devastating to our state’s economy, prohibitively expensive to Maryland’s taxpayers and extraordinarily burdensome to our working families. Rather than focus on the illusory benefits of year-round schooling, we strongly encourage an end to the current obsession with standardized tests, which has made it impossible for both teachers and students to maximize the value of the 180 days we already have.

