



Jack R. Smith, Ph.D.  
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education

**FROM:** Jack R. Smith, Ph.D. *JRS/clw*

**DATE:** March 22, 2016

**SUBJECT:** School System Modifications Due to Severe Weather Conditions

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**PURPOSE:**

- 1) To consider the request made by Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer, Prince George's County Public Schools, for a two (2) day waiver of the 180-day school year requirement due to inclement weather conditions in January;
- 2) To request the State Board to grant authorization to the Interim State Superintendent of Schools to consider requests from local school superintendents to make adjustments to the 180-day school year requirement for days missed due to inclement weather;
- 3) To request the State Board to grant authorization to the Interim State Superintendent of Schools to consider requests from local superintendents to open schools on holidays, and/or to waive the final day needed to complete the 180-day requirement if that day falls on a Monday.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

For the last several years, the State of Maryland has experienced weather conditions that have forced school systems to make decisions about closing schools. In past years, the State Superintendent has requested approval from the State Board to grant waivers for up to five (5) days. Last year, due to the weather conditions, the State Superintendent requested approval for up to three (3) days.

The State Board approved these requests after considerable discussion and with the understanding that school systems would demonstrate the efforts taken to incorporate the identified inclement weather days in its calendar, the modifications made to the calendar to increase instructional time, and the addition of days to the calendar as needed.

Requests have also been made by local superintendents to open schools on holidays, modifying their calendar to make up lost instructional time. Finally, requests have been made to waive the last day of school if it falls on a Monday.

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:**

The State of Maryland was impacted by inclement weather during the time between January 25, 2016 and January 29, 2016. As a result, school systems were impacted and forced to close.

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By letter dated March 15, 2016, the Chief Executive Officer for Prince George's County Public Schools requested a two (2) day waiver of the 180-day school year requirement. Prince Georges County had four inclement weather days identified in their calendar. Due to the weather, schools were closed for a total of seven (7) days. The calendar was modified by opening schools on February 12, 2016, previously scheduled as a professional day for teachers, making up five of the seven days lost due to inclement weather.

**ACTION:**

I am requesting approval to waive two (2) days of student attendance for Prince George's County schools.

I am requesting the State Board of Education grant me the authority to approve future written requests from local superintendents for a waiver of the 180-day school year requirement. In the request for the waiver, the local superintendent will explain the efforts the school system has taken to use the inclement weather days identified within their calendar, to modify the calendar where possible to make-up instructional time, and to add days to the end of the school year where necessary. Each request will be evaluated based on these factors.

I am requesting the State Board of Education grant me the authority to approve written requests made by local superintendents to open schools on holidays and/or to waive the last day of student attendance if it falls on a Monday.

JRS:WC

Attachment



**Kevin M. Maxwell, Ph.D.**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

March 15, 2016

Dr. Jack R. Smith  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

Dear Dr. Smith:

Pursuant to COMAR 13A.02.01.04, I respectfully request that the State Board of Education grant a two-day waiver from the 180-day requirement for the students of Prince George's County Public Schools. I am compelled to do so in view of the extraordinary inclement weather that we experienced, resulting in school having to be canceled on seven school days to ensure that our students were safe and secure.

I need not tell you how difficult a winter this was, even amidst stretches of warmth. The "Blizzard of 2016," which Governor Hogan described as an "historic storm," led to his declaring a State of Emergency on January 22, 2016 by Executive Order, which was not lifted until January 29, 2016. That one storm led to six days of school closures. Not only did our support staff prepare our parking lots, our sidewalks, our bus lanes, and our entrances to receive students when the inclement weather dissipated, but our educators and administrators rose to the occasion to adjust lesson plans, field trips, class projects, homework assignments, and exam schedules to ensure the continuity of instruction.

With the support of our teachers' union, our Board of Education proactively upon my recommendation approved a revision of this year's school calendar to hold school for students on February 12, 2016, which had been previously scheduled as a professional development day for teachers (see enclosed press release). Moreover, our Board of Education had the foresight to have planned four "inclement weather make-up days" at the end of the school calendar (see enclosed calendar).

Unfortunately, even with the restoration of the February 12 instructional day and the four inclement weather make-up days, they are not sufficient to account for all seven snow days used. Accordingly, to preclude our students from attending school beyond June 20, 2016, I am hereby respectfully requesting a waiver of two days.

Dr. Jack R. Smith

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I make this request not only predicated upon the Governor's declared State of Emergency, but in recognition that requiring our students to attend later would have an adverse impact on many of our families who have previously planned for the advent of summer activities, and many of our neediest students who benefit greatly from summer employment opportunities. Our seniors will have graduated and AP, IB, and system-wide exams will have been administered by then. This waiver also would serve the interests of those teachers who deserve a break before embarking upon summer courses.

For all the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask you to consider our waiver request. Please also be advised that this waiver request permits our school district to comply with the requisite number of hours for elementary, middle, and high school students as set forth in State law and regulation.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Maxwell, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer

KMM:gr

Enclosures

c: Members, Board of Education  
Executive Cabinet  
Mr. William Cappe