September 24, 2014

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Chair
and Members of the Montgomery County Delegation
James Senate Office Building, Room 122
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

The Honorable Anne Kaiser, Chair
and Members of the Montgomery County Delegation
Lowe House Office Building, Room 151
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Dear Senator Raskin, Delegate Kaiser, and
Members of the Montgomery County Delegation:

I am writing to express the strong opposition of the Montgomery County Board of Education to the recommendation of the Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for Maryland Public Schools mandating all public school systems begin the school year after the Labor Day holiday. While the recommendation asserts that it is in the economic interest of the state to start school after Labor Day, it ignores the critical issues faced by schools across the state that would be impacted by such a mandate.

Maryland school systems are fully authorized to start schools after Labor Day. We agree with education and community leaders across the state who strongly support maintaining local control over school calendars. Determining the school calendar is complicated and requires balancing numerous and unique community interests. Mandating a post-Labor Day start to school ignores this fact.

We concur with the attached July 8, 2014 letter from the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), the Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM), and the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) to Governor O’Malley, President Miller, and Speaker Busch that successfully identifies key issues that must be taken into consideration. Among those issues are ensuring sufficient number of days for professional development and collaborative planning, which are essential to successful implementation of Maryland’s Common Core Curriculum Framework; ensuring sufficient days of instruction to prepare students for high stakes tests, including PARCC, AP and IB; and ensuring that the needs and priorities long identified by communities can still be met.

Montgomery County Public Schools’ (MCPS) calendar has a longstanding history of being developed through a collaborative review by key stakeholders. Staff solicits input when drafting the proposed school calendar from representatives of the Montgomery County Council of Parent
Teacher Associations (MCCPTA), the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), the Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals (MCAAP), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 500, the Maryland Association of Student Councils—Montgomery County Region, and other community and school system leadership.

Many years ago, MCPS did start school after Labor Day. However, based on our collaborative input process, our community has consistently determined that it is in the best interest of all students for school to begin in late August. For example, next year Labor Day falls as late as possible, that being September 7, 2015. If the 2015-2016 school year was required to begin after Labor Day, the first day of school would be Tuesday, September 8, 2015, and the last day of classes for students would be June 24, 2016. Should we need to use our four contingency days for inclement weather, as we did this past school year, then the final day for students could be as late as June 30; for teachers it would be July 1, 2016. Extending the school year this late is hardly conducive to teaching and learning, let alone the challenge of keeping schools properly cooled.

In addition, students, staff and parents have come to appreciate that beginning school prior to Labor Day allows the first week of school to be a five-day week that builds good momentum for teaching and learning at the outset of the school year. And most significantly, the potential delay of school by a full week will in fact decrease the number of instructional hours prior to the administration of high stakes testing. A delayed start of school will have serious instructional implications that will impact our students.

Maintaining local board authority on educational policies and administration is essential to the success of our public schools and fostering ownership and responsibility for our students’ futures. We firmly believe that local boards of education are best positioned to establish policies and operational processes, as well as to balance educational practices, academic needs of students, available resources, and community interests. We urge you to reject the recommendation of the Task Force to Study a Post-Labor Day Start Date for Maryland Public Schools mandating all public school systems begin the school year after the Labor Day holiday.

Sincerely,

Philip Kauffman
President

Copy to:
Members of the Board of Education
Dr. Starr
Mr. Bowers
Dr. Statham
Dr. Navarro
Mr. Ikheoa
Dr. Zuckerman