



Maryland State Chapter health, safety and equity in education

Governor Larry Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

October 17, 2016

Dear Governor Hogan:

I am writing to follow up on my May 3, 2016 letter to you, in light of your recent Executive Order regarding the day Maryland schools start and end. **This letter is in regards to the *time of day* schools start.** As you know, local school boards have the authority to determine bell schedules/start times for their schools, similar to school calendars. **I am hoping that you and your staff will consider** a similarly dramatic executive order regarding **setting healthy and safe school hour requirements.**

The State of Maryland has similar interests in school hours as in school days. As I read the first few paragraphs of your Executive Order, a few lines caught my eye. "The State has a particularly compelling interest in the physical and psychological well being of minors" and ""This policy imposes unacceptable public health and safety risks upon those students".

Contrary to the recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), and a wealth of other public health groups, the majority of Maryland's middle and high schools start well before 8:30 a.m. Indeed, as early as 7:17 a.m. in your home county of Anne Arundel. The reason for the public health recommendations for school start times is directly correlated to the many adverse physical and psychological impacts and health and safety risks for adolescents with chronic sleep deprivation and early school start times. **Only 23.8% of Maryland's students are getting a minimum of 8 hours of sleep each night, rendering them chronically sleep deprived** (2014 Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

Adolescents are subject to sleep deprivation as the result of changing/delayed sleep patterns and the early time at which they must catch buses/walk to school (as early as 5:23 a.m. in Anne Arundel County). Among the **public health risks** to teens from early school start times: obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, athletic injuries, substance abuse, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Among the **safety risks** to the students with early school start times: drowsy driving (equivalent to drunk driving), risky behaviors, and a lack of visibility of students waiting for buses/walking to school before dawn on dark streets. **Equally, if not more serious, health and safety concerns as the lack of air conditioning in schools in August, as cited in your Executive Order.**

I also noted with interest the statement "This policy has placed a significant competitive burden on Maryland's economy..." Economists have calculated a minimum of a 9:1 benefit-to-cost ratio and increased lifetime earnings, for adjusting school hours to developmentally appropriate ones. Furthermore, **chronic sleep deprivation in teens is correlated to decreased academic performance/graduation rates and increased absenteeism/tardiness, which both have economic impacts on Maryland.** The Enclosure is an analysis of the chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and standardized test scores of early versus late start middle and high schools within Washington and Charles Counties,

respectively. The difference is even more dramatic for minority and free-and-reduced-meal populations within those counties.

Early school start times hold back our students from their full potential and limit Maryland's potential as well. Just across the Potomac, there are school systems with healthy and safe school hours, against whom Maryland students must compete, even though those Virginia students have the opportunity for a full night worth of additional sleep per week, as a result of their healthier school schedules. **Maryland concedes the competitive edge of rested students consistently to other jurisdictions. Maryland needs "innovative school schedules" as it relates to school hours for all students**, but disadvantaged students will benefit even more (twice as much by some estimates) from later middle and high school start times.

Making an adjustment to school hours sounds like a win-win situation doesn't it then, with well-documented health, safety, academic, and economic benefits? Though a few counties have developmentally appropriate school hours (i.e. Garrett County for both middle and high school), why have not more school boards not done so? As the 2014 joint study between the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) eloquently noted "**...in preserving the status quo whereby school start times are a matter for each local jurisdiction, the state risks letting local resistance trump a strong body of scientific evidence that sleep is critical to health and academic achievement.**" The fear of change by both the public and educational institutions themselves stifles the conversation.

MSDE is currently preparing guidance it will issue by the end of the calendar year to school superintendents and boards of education regarding applying for Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours recognition, which you signed into law in April. While we are optimistic that the Orange Ribbon will encourage school systems to change, it may not be sufficient to inspire the kind of change that will make a widespread difference in Maryland's future. **Maryland was a national leader with its 2014 and 2016 legislation on school start times. I am hopeful that with your attention to the matter, it will continue to be.**

I welcome the opportunity to speak with your staff regarding this issue further and sincerely hope that you or Lieutenant Governor Rutherford will be involved next fall in the awarding the first Orange Ribbon to the few counties already eligible for one of the recognition levels.

Sincerely,



Lisa VanBuskirk
Chapter Leader

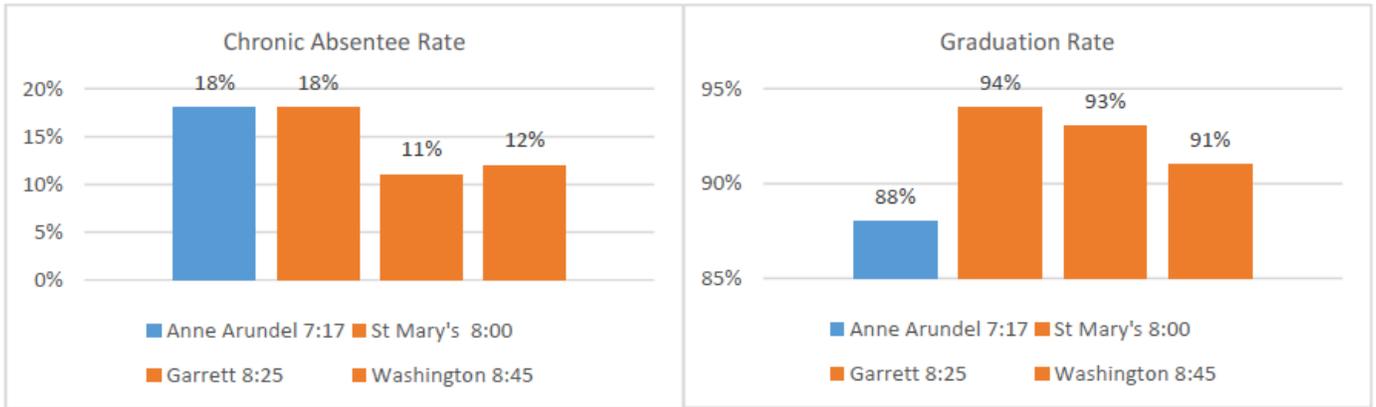
Start School Later Maryland and Start School Later Anne Arundel County
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Enclosure: School Start Times for Maryland Teens: Absenteeism-Graduation Rates-Standardized Test Scores

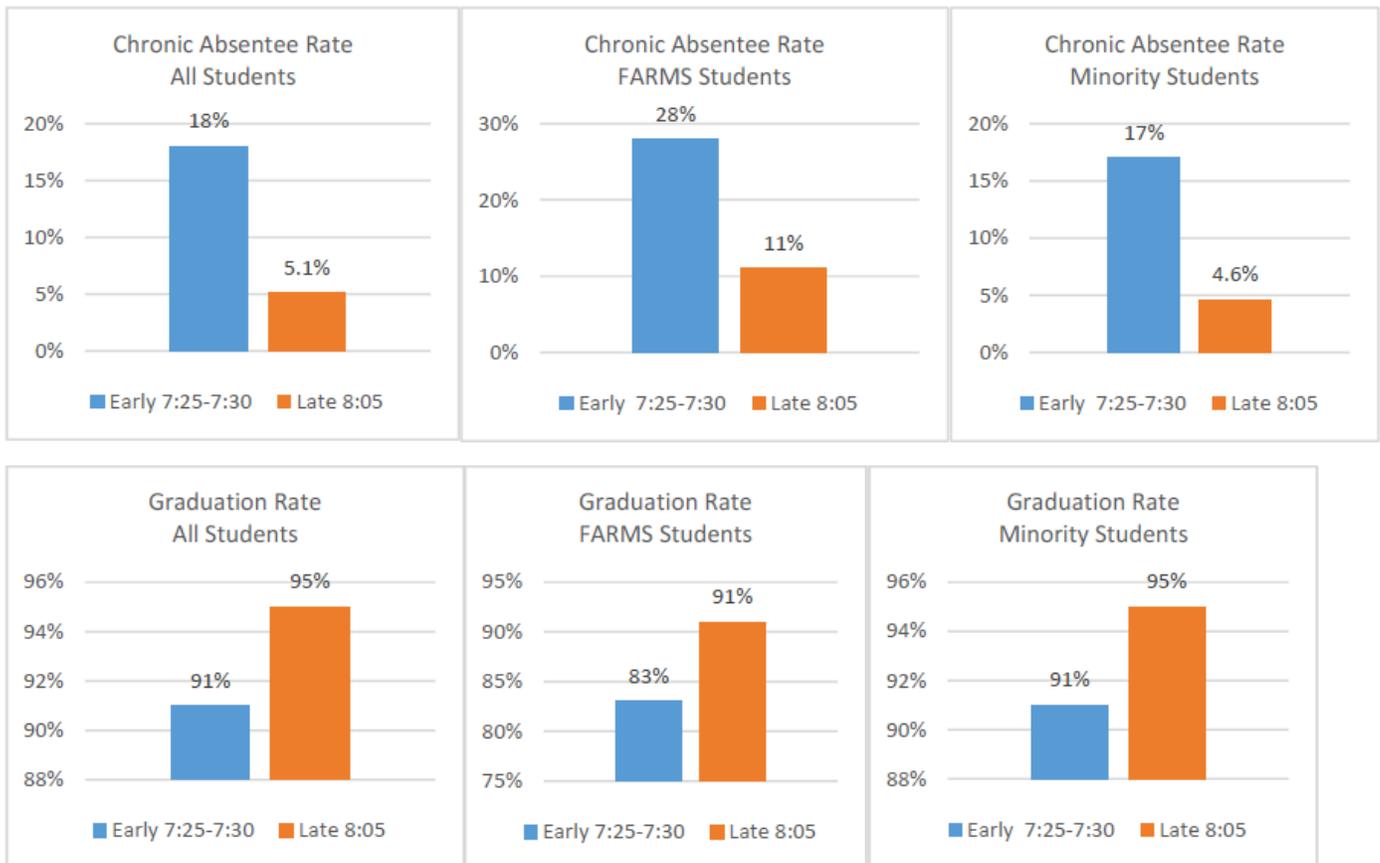
School Start Times for Maryland Teens

Absenteeism | Graduation Rates | Standardized Test Scores

With a **7:17 a.m.** first bell, **Anne Arundel County** has the earliest starting high schools in Maryland.



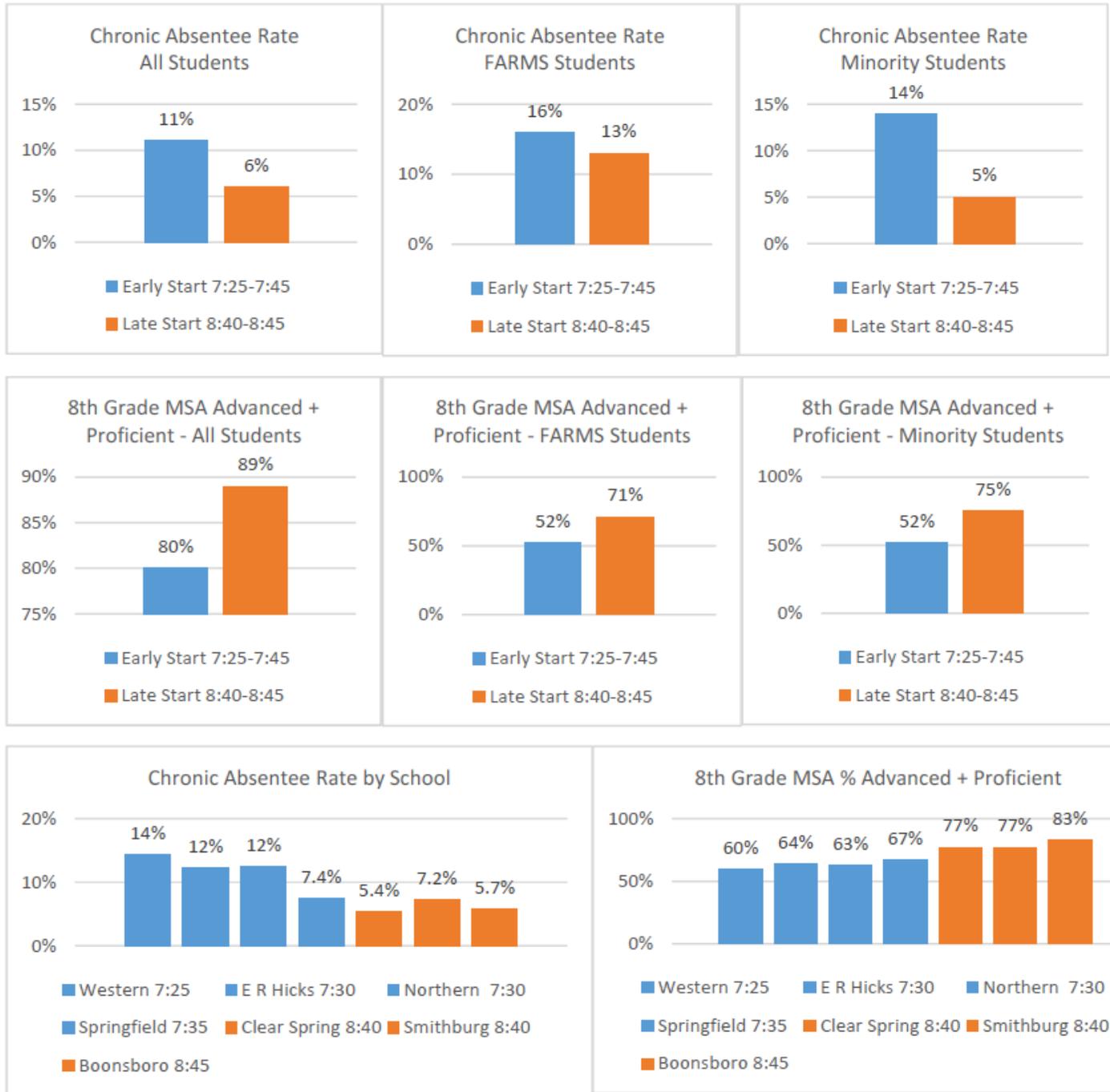
Comparing **early** and **late** high school start times *within* Charles County*



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Comparing early and late middle school start times *within* Washington County*



NOTES

- School start times were obtained from bell schedules posted online by each school district for the 2016-2017 school year. Performance/attendance data was collected from the Maryland Report Card at <http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>
- As defined by the Maryland Report Card, a student who is chronically absent has missed 20 or more days of school in an academic year.
- FARMs students (students whose families meet "Free and Reduced Meal Standards") were assessed to account for socio-economic differences that may impact attendance and/or performance in school.

* Charles and Washington counties were chosen because they had markedly different start times within the same district and the school bell schedules were readily available online.