

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DATE: February 28, 2006

TO: **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

FROM: Thomas G. Grzymiski, President

SUBJECT: **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE SCHOOL CALENDAR**

ORIGINATOR: Luis E. Borunda, Board Member
Chair, Board of Education Ad Hoc Calendar Committee

RESOURCE PERSON(S): Frances A.S. Harris, JoAnn C. Murphy, Joseph J. Pallozzi

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Education review the findings and recommendations for consideration by the Superintendent

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Appendix I – Recommendations

*Recommendations of the
Baltimore County Board of Education's
Ad Hoc Committee on the School Calendar*

February 28, 2006

Summary

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Baltimore County Board of Education (hereinafter referred to as the Board) of December 20, 2005, Board President Tom Grzymiski appointed an Ad Hoc Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) to review the Baltimore County Public School (BCPS) Calendar. Specifically, the Committee was tasked by the President to review the content of school system's official calendar, and to recommend any procedural or substantive changes to the Superintendent. The Committee members included Luis E. Borunda, Frances A.S. Harris, JoAnn C. Murphy, and Joseph J. Pallozzi. Board President Grzymiski appointed Luis Borunda to chair the Committee. The Committee met formally on Saturday, January 7, 2006 and Tuesday, January 31, 2006.

Finding of the Committee Regarding the 2005-2006 BCPS Calendar

The Committee reviewed the 2005-2006 BCPS School Calendar. Each month of the school calendar, which is designed as a wall calendar, is divided into two pages. The upper portion of each month contains information of interest to the community, while the lower portion is comprised of date blocks, and includes school holidays, assessment days, and early school closings. The Committee notes that all holidays and festivals are listed on the opposite page—or upper portion—of the Calendar itself. These holidays and festivals are the same as provided by the *National Conference for Community and Justice Calendar of Holidays and Festivals*. The Committee found that the holidays celebrated by many of this community's citizens were not reflected in the calendar's date blocks, including the Islamic holidays of Id al-Fitre and Id al-Adha. Rather, these holidays were duly listed on the opposite page of the Calendar under "Holidays and Dates of Interest."

Recommendations of the Committee to the Board

- 1) The Committee believes that the school calendar should support the instructional program by minimizing disruption to the school week. As such, the Committee encourages the school system to pay specific attention to ensuring that each instructional week includes, at a minimum, four consecutive school days.
- 2) The Committee notes that the school system cannot sanction any particular religious practice or belief. Moreover, the State Board of Education has indicated that "it would be illegal for a local school system to close schools for the purpose of recognizing a religious holiday," *ADC Baltimore v. Baltimore County Board of Education*, MSBE Op. 05-01, at 5 (2005). However, the Committee believes that acknowledgement of holidays on the official calendar would increase awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures represented in this community. As a result, the Committee recommends that the Islamic holidays at Id al-Fitre and Id Al-Adha be noted in the calendar blocks on the appropriate days.

- 3) The Committee understands that the holidays of Id al-Fitre and Id al-Adha may fall on school days and that this occurrence may cause hardship to Muslim families in Baltimore County. Because these holidays are of major importance to the growing Muslim population in the county and because the Committee appreciates the familial nature of these holidays, the Committee recommends to the Board that BCPS make every effort to refrain from scheduling or announcing any tests, exams, or assessments on either of these holidays.
- 4) The Committee is sensitive to the fact that students and families may feel torn between their academic and religious obligations. The *Blueprint for Progress* recognizes the importance of the moral and ethical development of our county's students. Therefore, the Committee recommends that **any** student may take up to two excused absences for **religious observance**. The Superintendent should determine the proper manner and method for verifying the necessity for any such absences. The Committee further recommends to the Board that BCPS petition the Maryland State Board of Education to amend COMAR 13A.08.01.03F, concerning lawful absences. In this way, religious observance would not mar a student's official attendance record nor prevent any student from obtaining perfect attendance.
- 5) The Committee recommends that because the holidays of Id al-Fitre and Id Al-Adha are of importance to the growing Muslim population in the County of Baltimore and because these holidays are significant from a global perspective, the Superintendent should make an effort to educate the county's students on the significance of these holidays during the week preceding these holidays, or at an appropriate time during the school year. The Committee believes that this effort would increase students' cultural sensitivity.
- 6) Because of the growing cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity in Baltimore County, the Committee recommends that the Board issue an annual proclamation to be read at the appropriate regularly scheduled meeting of the Board celebrating the rich and varied cultural heritage of the county's students and communities.
- 7) The Committee recommends that the Superintendent begin to monitor attendance at schools located in known geographical areas with high concentrations of Muslim adherents to determine the impact on student and staff attendance and to make appropriate recommendations based on available data.
- 8) The Committee recommends that the Superintendent periodically review best practices on observance of holidays so that BCPS remains at the forefront of educational trends in this area.

Recommendations of the Board of Education's
School Calendar Ad Hoc Committee
February 28, 2006
Page 3

This concludes the recommendations and the function of the Board's Ad Hoc Committee on the School Calendar.

Respectfully Submitted to the BOARD OF EDUCATION OF BALTIMORE COUNTY

AD HOC SCHOOL CALENDAR COMMITTEE

Luis E. Borunda

Chair

Frances A.S. Harris

JoAnn C. Murphy

Joseph J. Pallozzi