

## Early School Start Date Facts

- July and early-August school start dates create headaches for working parents who need quality child care during additional breaks throughout the school year. The vast majority of educational programs for children outside of the classroom can't be offered during non-summer months because the college students needed to staff them are back in school themselves.
- Valuable instructional time is lost in the days preceding and following each break in the school calendar. When their routine is disrupted, children require time to readjust.
- As school starts have crept into July from Labor Day, children are no longer able to participate in church or civic-sponsored summer programs, attend summer camps or be part of summer programs sponsored by local Park and Rec Departments.
- Students who start school early do not spend more time in class. Early school start dates simply shift vacation days from the summer into the school year. During the school year in Alabama, from early August to late May, the average student has one day of vacation for every 5 1/2 days of class. Alabama state law requires public school students receive a minimum of 180 days of instruction. Alabama schools that start in July and those that start after mid-August complete one semester before Christmas.
- No academic benefits from early school starts have been shown to exist, in fact, schools in top-performing states start classes later than schools in Alabama. The top 10 academic states, in four commonly used state education ranking systems, have two things in common - they begin the school year in late August or early September and administer semester finals after the winter break.
- Local school systems should be allowed to set their own school calendars. Holidays, teacher workdays, fall breaks, winter breaks, spring breaks and semester tests should all be set at the local level. Setting an earliest start date for K-12 public schools in Alabama would continue to allow that.
- When the school year begins in July or early August, many school districts have low student attendance the first few weeks of school. School systems across the state were losing hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece each year due to the low attendance during the first 40 days of the school year when attendance figures were calculated and used to determine state funding. In 2005, acknowledging this low attendance, the Alabama Legislature revised state law to require attendance calculations be made during the 20 days of class following Labor Day. The Legislature did not address the underlying problem of low attendance before Labor Day, legislators simply recognized that fact and provided a way to increase state funding for schools in spite of the low attendance. From an instructional point of view, it's obvious that even the best teachers can't teach students who aren't in class.
- Prior to passage of a late-August school start bill in Texas, research found over 250,000 students not in school on the first day of class. The year following the law's implementation, attendance on the first day of school increased 60%.
- Schools are compared to each other based on students' performance on standardized tests given in the spring. Tests are given at the same time statewide. That comparison is only fair if each school has the same amount of time to prepare students for those tests.
- Tulsa, Oklahoma Public Schools moved their school start date from August 19 to the day after Labor Day and saved approximately \$500,000 through reduced utility costs. When local school systems

increase their operating efficiency, the savings become available for teacher salaries, classroom supplies and educational programming.

- Studies in Texas and North Carolina have found early school start dates cost their economies hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Tourism and Travel is Alabama's only industry that can never be outsourced. It must be supported if it is to be expected to help support the state's economy. Over 68% of Alabama travelers are Alabama residents. Alabama family travel destinations are primarily warm weather ones – river, lake and beach related. When school vacation days are moved from the summer months into cool-weather times of the year, families who do travel are not likely to travel and spend their dollars inside Alabama. Lost revenues for Tourism and Travel mean lost income and jobs for Alabama families and lost tax revenue for state and local government and Alabama schools.
- Giving children their summers back would also raise revenues without raising taxes. A South Carolina study estimates over \$8 million in lost state and local tax revenues due to early school starts.
- The Alabama Legislative Fiscal Office confirms economic losses in Alabama due to early school starts.
- In 2006, the Florida Legislature passed a law requiring schools in that state begin classes no earlier than 14 days before Labor Day. North Carolina, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Virginia and Texas all enforce school start date laws. Many other states are considering them, including, Georgia, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Tennessee.
- Federal law requires parents be notified of the academic status of their children's school before school starts so they might transfer from failing schools. Alabama's continuing failure to comply with this law jeopardizes the continued receipt of over \$220 million a year in federal Title I education funding.
- Kids today no longer need to attend classes on the agricultural-based school calendar that our grandparents remember from the early 1900s and the Great Depression, when schools were regularly closed down in the spring and fall so children and teachers could work on farms and help with the planting and harvesting.

With minor adjustments in scheduling, Alabama school systems can save money, help give children and families more opportunities for learning and growth, help grow Alabama's economy, increase government revenues without increasing taxes, ensure continued receipt of federal dollars for education, provide parents and students with the information and options promised them by federal law – and still complete fall semester before Christmas if they so desire. All this can be achieved with no negative impact on student achievement.