

Please Support HB 543

It's good for the economy, it's good for schools and it's wanted by voters!

The House Education Policy Committee voted 7-2 to send HB 543 to the floor.

Chairwoman McClurkin was joined by Representatives Black, Beech, Henry, Vance, Gallaher and Rich in supporting the bill.

What does HB 543 do?

Allows school districts to make-up cancelled instructional days by adding time to remaining school days.

Increases flexibility and control for school boards in determining the length of the school year - as long as students receive the current 1,080 instructional hours. Current law requires calendars to contain at least 180 school days with six hours in each day.

Creates a 12 week summer vacation for students by setting the school start date no earlier than two weeks before Labor Day, unless August 31 is a Monday, then schools may start as early as August 17th. The last day of instruction can be no later than the Friday before Memorial Day.

Takes effect beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

Early-August school-start dates and the compressed summer season are costing Alabama over \$333 million annually – with an increase of \$259 million in direct tourism spending and 4,500 jobs – according to the February 2009 economic impact report by Auburn University Montgomery economist M. Keivan Deravi. By comparison, the total economic impact of all Auburn and Alabama home football games combined on the state of Alabama is \$323 million each year - \$10 million less than early-August school start dates cost Alabama tourism each year.

Later school start dates and increased flexibility in scheduling school days could save school districts over \$40 million in non-instructional costs – according to Auburn University Montgomery economist M. Keivan Deravi. It is estimated school districts could save almost \$40 by reducing their school year by ten days, while maintaining the same number of instructional hours offered today. Consider, if this savings was used to fund small group tutoring and districts paid retired teachers \$25 per hour to tutor four children the savings could fund over six million small group tutoring hours for struggling students.

Even though asked numerous times to start the school year so that public school choice can be offered 14 days before the first day of school, as required under federal education laws, many Alabama school districts continue to begin the school year before the requested date – opening the state up to fines and civil rights violations. Federal education law requires any student attending a school that has failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years to offer public school choice to students attending the school at least 14 days before the first day of school. A letter from the Office of Civil Rights emphasized the importance of the law and the civil rights implications of non-compliance. The No Child Left Behind Act also includes provisions that allow the U.S. Department of Education to fine states that are not in compliance with federal law – as has happened in other states.

Teachers, parents and voters want a uniform, late-August school start date. AEA teachers have voted to support the later school start date for the past three years. A 2009 by Capital Survey Research Center in association with the Alabama Education Association showed 83 percent of voters supported a standard public school starting date. An August 2005 SurveyUSA Poll showed the majority of those surveyed thought the school year should begin the fourth Monday in August or later.
