

# Special Report

## Saving Summer: Lessons Learned

*The benefits of stretching the school year have not been proved; what we do know—it's costing Texans \$790 million annually.*

—Carole Keeton Strayhorn  
Texas Comptroller

*Over the last fifty years, additional student holidays have artificially stretched the school year by more than two weeks, from early to mid-August to late May or early June, at a cost to Texans of \$790 million annually.* The academic benefits of stretching the instructional year have not been proven, but the economic and societal costs are known. Each extra holiday that school districts add to school calendars is potentially costing parents, teachers, students and businesses \$67.8 million per day, statewide; each extra calendar week has a price tag of \$395 million.

Since 1991, when the Texas Legislature repealed the law requiring schools to start during the week of September 1, Texas schools have begun their years earlier and earlier. Following Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn's December 2000 Special Report detailing the economic costs of the earlier start dates, the 2001 Legislature attempted to reverse this trend with Senate Bill (S.B.) 108 which requires schools to begin during the week in which August 21 falls. In reality, schools are starting an average of two days later than they did prior to this bill, and more than 100 districts have received waivers from the provision from the Texas Education Agency (TEA); the earliest 2004-05 start date was August 3.

Many have questioned the impact and importance of S.B. 108, saying that it does not go far enough in preserving the summer vacation. Others support early August start dates, stating that later start dates compromise academic achievement. But understanding that, on average, schools are providing approximately the same number of instructional days as they did in 1949, while the school year has gotten two weeks longer, the additional economic and societal costs do not appear justified.

## History of School Start Dates in Texas

In a 1984 special session, the Texas Legislature required all schools to open after September 1. This law became effective on September 1, 1985 and in 1989 was amended

to allow schools to start on any day during the week in which September 1 falls. The Legislature repealed the start date law in another special session in 1990.

The Comptroller's 2000 report indicated that early school start dates and a shortened summer tourist season annually cut tourist spending in Texas, and that migrant farm workers lose millions in earnings, while many migrant children lose valuable days of instruction. The report also noted that the present structure of the school year costs districts higher cooling costs each year.

After the 2000 report was released, S.B. 108 amended Subchapter C, Chapter 25 of the Education Code by adding Section 25.0811, which states that a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the week in which August 21 falls. This law was fully implemented as of the 2002-03 school year.

Information obtained through the Texas Education Agency, indicates that, in 1990, the last year of Texas' old uniform start date requirement, 33 of what are currently the state's 50 largest districts began school on August 27. Since 1999, August 16 has been the most common start date. On average, however, the 50 largest school districts are starting two days later than they did prior to the implementation of S.B. 108 (Exhibit 1).

## EXHIBIT 1

### Start Dates for the 50 Largest School Districts in Texas

District Name	Total Students 2003-04	1990 Start Date	1999 Start Date	2004 Start Date	Change in Start Date, 1999 to 2004	Change in Start Date, 1990 to 2004
Houston	211,499	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Dallas	160,584	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Fort Worth	80,335	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Austin	79,007	27-Aug	11-Aug	17-Aug	6	-10
Cypress-Fairbanks (Houston Area)	74,877	27-Aug	11-Aug	11-Aug	0	-16
Northside (San Antonio)	71,798	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
El Paso	63,200	28-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-12
Arlington (Dallas Area)	62,454	27-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-11
Fort Bend (Houston Area)	61,248	27-Aug	12-Aug	12-Aug	0	-15
San Antonio	56,914	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
North East (San Antonio)	56,298	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Aldine (Houston Area)	56,292	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Garland (Dallas Area)	55,114	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Plano (Dallas Area)	51,869	27-Aug	*	4-Aug	*	-23
Ysleta (El Paso)	46,668	*	*	12-Aug	*	*
Pasadena (Houston)	46,142	27-Aug	2-Aug	16-Aug	14	-11

Area)						
Brownsville	45,923	27-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-11
Alief (Houston Area)	45,344	28-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-16
Lewisville (Dallas Area)	44,024	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Katy (Houston Area)	42,116	29-Aug	17-Aug	11-Aug	-6	-18
Corpus Christi	39,310	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Conroe (Houston Area)	39,246	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Klein (Houston Area)	35,558	28-Aug	11-Aug	17-Aug	6	-11
Round Rock	35,553	27-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-11
Richardson	34,536	27-Aug	11-Aug	19-Aug	8	-8
Mesquite	34,414	27-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-11
Spring Branch (Houston Area)	33,005	27-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	1	-15
Clear Creek (Houston Area)	32,810	*	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	*
Killeen	32,583	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
United (Laredo)	32,262	27-Aug	18-Aug	16-Aug	-2	-11
Socorro (El Paso) **	32,241	*	11-Aug	26-Jul	-16	*
Irving (Dallas Area)	31,249	4-Sep	*	24-Aug	*	-11
Amarillo	29,527	29-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-13
Lubbock	29,020	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
Humble (Houston Area)	27,009	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Spring (Houston Area)	26,768	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (Hidalgo County)	26,493	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Ector County	26,090	*	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	*
Carrollton-Farmers Branch (Dallas County)	25,638	28-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	1	-12
Edinburg Cons (Hidalgo County)	25,373	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Laredo	24,846	28-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-12
McAllen	23,492	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
Birdville (Tarrant County)	22,507	27-Aug	12-Aug	5-Aug	-7	-22
Grand Prairie (Dallas County)	22,132	27-Aug	16-Aug	11-Aug	-5	-16
Keller	21,803	*	*	3-Aug	*	*
La Joya	21,765	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Mansfield	21,060	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Midland	20,921	27-Aug	*	16-Aug	*	-11
Beaumont	20,732	3-Sep	10-Aug	9-Aug	-1	-25
Galena Park (Houston Area)	20,454	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11

<b>Average Difference</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-13</b>
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\* Data not available.

\*\* Socorro operates a districtwide year-round school system, making comparisons with other district calendars difficult.

*Source: Texas Education Agency and 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

For the 2004-05 school year, 35 of the districts (70 percent) began class during the week of August 21; 31 districts (62 percent) began school on August 16 (Exhibit 2).

## **EXHIBIT 2**

### **50 Largest School District Start Dates 2004-05**

<b>Start Date</b>	<b>Number of districts</b>
8/24	1
8/19	1
8/17	2
8/16	31
8/12	7
8/11	3
8/9	1
8/5	1
8/4	1
8/3	1
7/26	1

*Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

Of the 50 largest districts, Socorro had the earliest 2004-05 start date, beginning on July 26. It should be noted, however, that Socorro is the only Texas school district operating a year-round school system, meaning that school begins mid summer with three-week intersessions between grading periods.

## **Waivers from Start Date Requirements**

S.B. 108 grants school districts some flexibility in setting their calendars, allowing them to apply for waivers from its requirements. (Texas Education Code (TEC) 39.112, moreover, exempts school campuses or districts that the Texas Education Agency [TEA] rates as exemplary from the start date requirements.)

To qualify for a waiver, a district must publish a notice in a newspaper with general circulation in the district at least 60 days before the date upon which it submits its application to TEA.

The public notice must state that the district intends to apply for a waiver of the state requirement concerning the date of the first day of instruction; specify the date on which the district intends to begin instruction; and hold a public hearing concerning the date of

the first day of instruction. The application for a waiver must include a summary of opinions expressed at the public hearing, including any consensus of opinion. TEA has 30 days from the time the waiver application is received to issue or deny the waiver. At that time, the district must be notified by letter of the agency's decision.

Of those districts planning to start school before the state-mandated week in 2004, only Aldine ISD, which started on August 12th, did not have a waiver on file with TEA at this writing. TEA, however, stated that it is not uncommon for districts to send in their waivers after the start of school.

The law is clear about the need for parental and community involvement in setting school start dates. Waivers applications must summarize any consensus of opinion expressed at public hearings. Compliance with the legal guidelines, however, has left some wondering if the opinions of parents are gathered in a meaningful way, and if those opinions actually influence the final decisions.

A cursory review of comments made by parents and community members in TEA's waiver application files suggests that parents opposed to the earlier start dates are concerned with the calendar review process, particularly the number of school district staff members speaking for the early start date as opposed to parents and community members. There was also concern expressed that preferences for time off in the middle of the year were taking a back seat to concern for academics.

In Plano ISD, for example, the start date issue has become the topic of a Web site maintained by the Plano Parental Rights Council (<http://www.planoprc.org>). This Web site references newspaper articles indicating that in 2001, 93 citizens attending a public hearing expressed support for the waiver, while 27 (29%) opposed it. By their accounts 75 to 90 percent of those expressing support for the waiver were school district employees or Calendar Committee appointees. In 2003, the Web site reports that the district received more than 1,000 e-mails concerning the waiver, and that a "preponderance" of these were from teachers, district staff and various PTA members supporting an early start date and a week-long fall break.

## **School Calendars Around the Nation**

While most states have school years of about 180 days, start dates tend to vary from region to region. Generally, schools in the Northeast and Midwest start near September 1 or Labor Day, while schools in the southern states tend to start in August—sometimes, quite early in August. In Florida, for example, 34 out of 67 school districts in 2003 started school in the week of August 4<sup>th</sup>. Even so, there are many exceptions to this pattern. Virginia, for instance, requires all districts to start after Labor Day, while many districts in Indiana start in mid-August. And until recently, a few districts in southern Florida retained a more traditional (and relatively late) start date.

The move to earlier start dates is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to Market Data Retrieval, a national market research firm, about half of American public schools started school before September 1 in 1988. By 2002, that percentage had risen to 71

percent. The reasons usually cited for earlier start dates include the desirability of administering semester exams before the Winter Break and maximizing the number of instructional days before standardized achievement testing in the spring. As testing has become more a high-stakes affair, both in terms of student academics and funding, this has emerged as a significant issue.

The southern states' general acceptance of earlier start dates is at least in part a response to reports such as The U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, calling for public school reforms to boost student achievement. Historically, southern states have trailed behind their northern neighbors in student performance. Advocates of the calendar shift saw it as a way to increase educational effectiveness. Opponents of earlier start dates such as Texans for a Traditional School Year, by contrast, point to data they compiled indicating that most of the states with top student performance start their school year after September 1, or in very late August.

Other factors have played a role in the calendar shift. The increased availability of air conditioning allows schools to operate during the hottest parts of the year. And a longer term before the Winter Break gives schools more flexibility in scheduling autumn extracurricular activities.

Interestingly, most states do not have laws regarding start dates. Tradition alone appears to anchor their calendars. According to a report entitled "Overview of Other State's Approaches to School Calendar Issues" prepared by Oklahomans for Saving Our Summers, only 10 states mandate start dates: Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. On August 11, an eleventh state joined the group: NPR talk-radio announced that North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley had signed a "school calendar" bill that says schools can start no earlier than Aug. 25.

In the last few years, several states have examined the start date issue. Supporters of a later school start date in South Carolina, a state that regulates start dates through administrative regulations and not statute, gained support from the state's board of education, but failed to receive statutory backing from the Legislature. Several states considered start date legislation in 2004. Some school districts in states without start date laws have returned to later start dates; Oklahoma City and Flagstaff, Arizona, for instance, recently moved from a mid-August start date to a later one.

### **EXHIBIT 3**

#### **Required/Minimum Student Instructional Days 1949 to Present**

Effective School Year	Instructional Days
1949-50	Nine full months, with a full month defined as at least 20 days, inclusive of holidays (20 X 9=180 days)
1973-74	180 instructional days with 10 days of in-service teacher training
1977-78	175 instructional days with 10 days of in-service training in 1977-78 and eight days of

	in-service training thereafter
1991-92	180 instructional days with 20 hours of staff development
1994-95	180 instructional days plus three days of teacher preparation and 20 hours of staff development
1995-96 to Present	180 days with commissioner of education to set staff development requirements

Source: Texas Education Code

## Student Instructional Days in Texas

While the number of calendar weeks in the Texas school year has increased over time, the number of days of instruction has remained fairly constant over the last 50 years. Prior to 1971, the Texas Education Code did not stipulate a minimum number of instructional days, but instead stated that school would be held for “nine full months” with a school month consisting of not less than 20 school days, inclusive of holidays (20 X 9=180). While it was clearly the intent of then-Commissioner J. W. Edgar that schools provide 180 days of instruction, a lack of historical evidence as a result of limited oversight by the education agency at the time, it is not clear whether the intent of the bill was universally implemented. In 1971, the law was changed to stipulate 180 instructional days; removing mention of nine months.

The 63rd Legislature in 1977 set a state minimum of 175 instructional days per school year, with not less than 10 days of in-service teacher training for preparation during the 1977-78 school year and not less than eight days of in-service training annually thereafter. The minimum number of instructional days remained at 175 until the 1991 legislative session, when S.B. 351 changed the minimum to 180 days for the 1991-92 school year and thereafter (Exhibit 3).

The rewrite of the Texas Education Code by the 74th Texas Legislature (Senate Bill 1) kept the number of instructional days at 180. Prior to the rewrite, TEA granted waivers from various provisions of the Education Code, including the number of instructional days on a case-by-case basis; the rewrite codified a formal waiver process.

Senate Bill 1 (1995) also charged the state’s commissioner of education with developing minimum staff development standards.

Although no specific state law or rule addresses the issuance of waivers from instructional days for any purpose other than bad weather, in practice, the commissioner allows the instructional day waivers for staff development and early release (Exhibit 4).

### EXHIBIT 4

#### Most Commonly Requested Waivers

<b>General Staff Development</b>
• Districts may request up to a maximum of three waiver days for general staff development in lieu of student instruction.
• No application for more than three staff development days in lieu of student instruction will be

approved unless there are extenuating circumstances.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiver requests may be approved for up to three years.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The commissioner of education reserves the right to modify or revoke approvals for the second or third year of a waiver, if such a change is required, districts will be notified in writing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts must apply for the waiver days using the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers or a letter addressing all requirements in the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Development for Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics; Science; and/or Social Studies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may request a waiver to conduct additional staff training for reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies teaching strategies, in lieu of a maximum of two days of student instruction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extra day or days must be related to staff development on the Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for reading/language arts, mathematics, science and/or social studies respectively, or on the early reading diagnostic instruments for kindergarten through grade two.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on staff development modules related to the TAKS and the early reading diagnostic instruments is available from the regional education service centers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Center for Reading &amp; Language Arts Initiative products can be accessed at <a href="http://www.texasreading.org">www.texasreading.org</a> by clicking on the icons for professional development information.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development materials related to mathematics may be found at <a href="http://www.tenet.edu/teks/math">www.tenet.edu/teks/math</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Development Available Through Specific Conferences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may request a waiver for one extra staff development day, so that staff may participate in conferences relating to their assignment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district may allow individual campuses to utilize the single conference waiver day at different times during the year to respond to local staff development priorities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members may be approved locally to attend conferences in lieu of student instruction and may utilize one or more of the seven teacher-contracted staff development days for this purpose, subject to local policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Early Release</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may request a waiver for up to six early release days each year.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may use early release time for staff development or for other locally determined needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts must submit a request for early release day(s) completing Sections One through Four of the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers or request the waiver in a letter addressing all requirements in the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers.</li> </ul>

Source: TEA Website, State Waiver Unit – Description of Most Commonly Requested Waivers," <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/waivers/desc.html>.

Eight of Texas’ largest 50 districts (16 percent) scheduled 180 instructional days for 2004-05; nine scheduled 175 instructional days. The median among the 50 districts was 177 days (Exhibit 5). Comptroller staff also examined 382 other school districts’ school calendars, bringing the total examined to 432. The median number of instructional days for these districts was 177 as well, but nearly 29 percent of them are operating 180-day calendars in 2004-05.

## EXHIBIT 5

### Number of Instructional Days 2004-05

Number of instructional	50 Largest Districts	Sample of 432 Districts
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days	Number of districts	Percent of Total	Number of districts	Percent of Total
180	8	16%	106	24.5%
179	3	6%	32	7.4%
178	6	12%	70	16.2%
177	20	40%	131	30.3%
176	4	8%	39	9.0%
175	9	18%	52	12%
174	-	-	2	0.5%

Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from district Web sites.

Comptroller staff found no correlation between earlier start dates and a higher number of instructional days. Exhibit 6 illustrates the pattern among the largest 50 districts, but similar variations existed in the larger sample as well.

## EXHIBIT 6

### 50 Largest School Districts 2004-05 Calendar

Instructional Days	Start Date	End Date	Number of Districts
180	12-Aug	24-May	1
180	16-Aug	25-May	1
180	12-Aug	26-May	1
180	16-Aug	26-May	2
180	12-Aug	27-May	1
180	16-Aug	27-May	2
179	4-Aug	20-May	1
179	9-Aug	20-May	1
179	16-Aug	27-May	1
178	16-Aug	26-May	3
178	3-Aug	27-May	1
178	12-Aug	27-May	1
178	16-Aug	27-May	1
177	11-Aug	25-May	2
177	11-Aug	26-May	1
177	12-Aug	26-May	1
177	16-Aug	26-May	10
177	17-Aug	26-May	1
177	26-Jul	27-May	1
177	16-Aug	27-May	2
177	16-Aug	2-Jun	1
177	24-Aug	2-Jun	1
176	16-Aug	25-May	1
176	12-Aug	26-May	1
176	16-Aug	26-May	1
176	19-Aug	26-May	1
175	16-Aug	24-May	1

175	16-Aug	25-May	1
175	17-Aug	25-May	1
175	12-Aug	26-May	1
175	16-Aug	26-May	4
175	5-Aug	27-May	1

Source: 2004-05 school calendars as reported on district Web sites.

As shown, districts with fewer holidays and fewer staff development and workdays during the school year typically have more total instructional days (Exhibit 7).

As shown in the last column of Exhibit 7, the average number of student holidays, excluding those resulting from staff development or workdays, ranges from 23 to 25.

## EXHIBIT 7

### 50 Largest School Districts Distribution of Holidays and Instructional, Training and Work Days 2004-05 Calendar

Number of instructional days	Number of Districts	Range in number of student holidays	Average number of student holidays	Range in number of teacher in-service training and work days*	Average number of teacher in-service training and work days*	Average number of student holidays not attributed to staff development
180	8	23-27	25.0	1-2	1.6	23.4
179	3	25-29	26.7	1-4	2.7	24.0
178	6	26-36	28.2	1-4	3.2	25.0
177	20	25-32	27.7	2-6	3.95	23.8
176	4	25-29	27.3	3-5	4.0	23.3
175	9	27-36	29.2	6-7	5.6	23.6

\* Between beginning and end of student instructional days; does not include teacher preparation, staff development or workdays before or after student instructional days.

Source: Comptroller analysis of 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.

## Staff Development Waivers

TEC sections 25.081 and 25.082 require school districts to provide 180 instructional days a year, seven hours a day. Districts may provide fewer days of instruction if they seek waivers for staff development. According to TEC 7.056 (d), these waivers are valid for a period of up to three years, and remain in force without reapplication if a district continues to meet the achievement goals stated in its original waiver application. TEA officials, however, said that school districts are encouraged to reapply for waivers whether or not their levels of achievement change.

In addition, school districts rated “Exemplary” under the state’s accountability system may operate for fewer days without applying for a waiver. Of the 432 districts examined for purposes of this study, 48 were Exemplary school districts based upon their 2001-02 performance, the last year in which districts were rated on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills [TAAS] (the test that preceded Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills [TAKS]). Of those 48, 85 percent started during the week in which the 21<sup>st</sup> fell, or later, and 2 percent ended the school year in the first week of June. Forty-eight percent of the Exemplary districts provided 180 instructional days, compared to just 24.5 percent of the larger group of 432 districts. This suggests that it is possible to deliver 180 days of instruction without starting early or ending late, and that the result may be academically beneficial.

**EXHIBIT 8**

**Staff Development Waivers Granted by TEA  
2001-02 through 2003-04**

Type of Staff Development	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
General	406	375	396
Subject Area Specific	177	178	207
Conference Attendance	29	26	24
Total	612	579	627

*Source: Texas Education Agency, State Waivers Unit,  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/waivers/granted.html>.*

Exhibit 8 shows how many staff development waivers were granted in the past few years.

Some but not all of the 50 largest districts offering fewer than 180 instructional days have active staff development waivers. Exhibit 9 lists districts with fewer than 180 days and no active waiver on file with TEA for 2004-05.

As noted above, TEA has stated that it is not unusual for districts to apply for waivers after the beginning of the school year. Any district rated Exemplary in 2001-02 is not required to adhere to the instructional day requirements or to file for a waiver for the 2004-05 school year, unless its rating falls below Exemplary for 2003-04.

**EXHIBIT 9**

**Fewer than 180 Instructional Days – 2004-05; No Waiver on File  
50 Largest School Districts**

School District with Fewer than 180 Instructional Days	Number of Instructional Days
Birdville	175
Corpus Christi	175
Ector County	176
Galena Park (Exemplary)	175
Grand Prairie	177
Humble	177

Katy	177
Killeen	177
La Joya	178
Pasadena	177
Plano	179
Socorro	177
Spring Branch	178
United (Laredo)	175

*Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites; TEA waiver lists.*

## **Family, Personal and Academic Issues**

Parents and Texans in general favor a uniform school start date and many of those favor a start date after Labor Day.

As part of the Comptroller’s original 2000 study, one of the major objections heard from individuals regarding later start dates was voiced by secondary school teachers, who overwhelmingly opposed starting school later if it would delay finals for the fall semester until after the Winter Break. Some teachers and parents also told Comptroller staff that earlier start dates have led to lower attendance in the early days of school.

However, many teachers also use the summer months to further their college educations; a shortened summer reduces their ability to complete some coursework.

Other personal and family reasons cited by individuals supporting a longer summer break included increased earning potential during summer employment, improved income opportunities for migrant families and lower child care costs.

### **Finals Before Winter Break**

Whether to schedule semester finals before Winter Break is an issue for all jurisdictions with school start dates near or after Labor Day. All of Texas’ 50 largest school districts separate semesters by the Winter Break, administering exams for the fall semester before the holiday period begins.

In Texas, semesters consist of three six-week or two nine-week grading periods, depending on the grade. The fall and spring semesters and individual grading periods do not, however, include equal numbers of days. All Texas school districts schedule about five additional instructional days in the spring semester to account for TAKS testing days. Some school districts have said that they also use these extra days in the second semester for “enrichment” activities such as field trips, holding them after the TAKS so as not to interfere with preparation for the tests.

## **EXHIBIT 10**

### **Instructional Days Per Semester 50 Largest School Districts\***

<b>Instructional days - Fall Semester</b>	<b>Number of districts</b>
88	4
87	3
86	3
85	8
84	12
83	13
82	4
81	1
80	1
<b>Instructional days - Spring Semester</b>	<b>Number of districts</b>
97	2
96	1
95	7
94	11
93	13
92	6
91	5
90	3
88	1

\* Excluding Socorro ISD with year round schedules.

Source: 2004-05 School Calendars obtained from school district Web sites.

In the 50 largest Texas districts, the number of days in the fall semester ranges from a low of 80 days in Spring ISD, which observes a week-long fall break, to a high of 88 in Lewisville, Keller, Plano and Beaumont ISDs, which begin school on August 12, August 3, August 4 and August 9, respectively.

The number of instructional days in the spring semester ranges from a low of 88 days in Birdville ISD to a high of 97 in Clear Creek and Spring ISDs; these districts end school on May 27 and June 2, respectively.

Spring ISD has the most significant difference in length between its fall and spring semesters, at 17 days; Birdville's semester lengths are the most similar, with only one day's difference (87 instructional days in the fall semester and 88 in the spring). The average for the 50 largest districts is nine days' difference. Exhibit 10 summarizes semester lengths for the 50 largest districts.

According to a 1999 study completed for the Texas Department of Economic Development by Dr. Peter Tarlow, the top academically rated states (based on SAT/ACT scores), all administered mid-term exams after a winter holiday, and they all began school in late August or early September.

The question of finals before Winter Break appears to have been asked and answered in practice. With fewer instructional days during the fall semester, the question then becomes: is a student who takes a course in the fall being short-changed or held to a different standard than one who takes it in the spring?

## Attendance Issues

Advocates of later school start dates maintain that early school starts prompt poor student attendance during the first few weeks of school, resulting in poor student achievement; moreover, low attendance costs local school districts money because attendance is a factor in state aid. TEA collects attendance data only as six-week cumulative totals, however, making it difficult to quantify or analyze this phenomenon.

But later start-date proponents claim that school districts that start after Labor Day generally begin with better attendance than those starting during the last weeks of August. And while lost state aid to local districts constitutes a savings to the state, this is hardly an area of savings that the state should encourage as a public policy.

## Teacher Training

Continuing teacher training is becoming increasingly important as the state implements incentives designed to attract more highly trained “master” teachers in critical subject areas.

The summer session at many colleges ends in mid- to late August, so an early school start date may interfere with teachers’ ability to take advantage of opportunities for professional development. Holding classes in early June can also interfere with teachers’ ability to attend the first summer session. One teacher noted, in documentation accompanying a waiver application for an early start date, that starting school early would prevent her from taking the summer courses she needed.

With an academic school year that starts in early September and ends in late May or early June, teachers have an opportunity to take two summer sessions of coursework instead of just one.

Interestingly, some of the state’s larger colleges and universities are offering accelerated coursework for teachers who must return to work before the end of the summer semester.

## Lost Summer Employment

Another effect of the compressed summer season is to reduce seasonal employment of high school and college students as well as teachers. Many must forgo such employment to return to school. This employment loss equates to a reduction in personal income for those individuals. Wages for summer positions vary significantly, with some of the higher paid positions being in the area of construction (Exhibit 11).

### EXHIBIT 11

#### Texas Statewide Compensation Summary (Surveys taken between October 1999 and August 2003)

Occupation	Entry Level Hourly Wage
All occupations in all industries	\$7.20
Minimum Wage	\$5.15
Simple Average	\$6.57
Amusement Parks and Arcades	\$6.00
Amusements (golf courses, marinas, fitness centers, etc.)	\$6.15

Accommodations (primarily hotels and motels)	\$6.15
Food Services and Drinking Establishments	\$6.05
Food and Beverage Stores	\$6.40
Clothing and Clothing Accessory Stores	\$6.30
Electronics and Appliance Stores	\$7.15
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores	\$6.20
All Retail	\$6.55
Construction	\$8.75

Source: Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Labor Market Information:  
<http://www.texaswages.com/>

Assuming that half of the state's 511,000 high school juniors and seniors hold part-time (30 hour per week/6 hours per day) jobs during the summer, and that they earn the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour, these students will lose nearly \$7.9 million in potential income for every day lost from the summer break.

Furthermore, if it is assumed that a third of Texas' 289,000 teachers work part-time (30 hours per week/6 hours per day) during the summer, and that they earn the simple average for the industries shown in Exhibit 11 of \$6.57 per hour, teachers could lose another \$3.8 million in potential income for every day lost from the summer break. Similarly, if a third of Texas' 236,000 school district paraprofessional and auxiliary staff take summer work at minimum wage they could lose \$2.4 million for every day lost from the summer break.

Schlitterbahn, a water park in Central Texas, began recruiting college-age workers from Europe this year. The workers usually earn the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour and must pay their own travel and living expenses. Schlitterbahn hires more than 1,500 workers for summer season, which lasts from about mid-April through early September. Terry Adams, chief operations officer for Schlitterbahn, recently told the *Dallas Morning News* that "Local kids will always be the backbone of our workforce, but we have to have people working through the end of the season, that's where the international students come in. They can work later in the season than the locals." Extending the summer break would allow Schlitterbahn and other tourist destinations to employ more local kids because they could work for the full summer. Longer summer employment would translate into more disposable income for local economies and less money exported not only out of state but also out of the United States.

### **Lost Income for Migrant Families**

According to TEA, in the 2001-2002 school year Texas had 138,200 migrant children aged three and older, up from 122,877 in 1998-1999. The state's growing migrant population poses a unique educational challenge that is made more difficult by early school start dates and extended school years.

Texas migrant farm laborers start their annual migration from Texas to other states in May, as demand for farm labor rises. Some migrants delay their return until September and October. Most migrant families with school-aged children, however, do not leave Texas until late May and early June, when schools dismiss for the summer, and return to Texas in August so that their children can start school with their peers.

Several Texas school districts with large numbers of migrant families have moved their school start dates to accommodate them.

Early school start dates affect migrant families economically and academically. For many migrant families, early school start dates shorten the period over which they can earn the bulk of their yearly income. Children of migrant workers who must continue working to support their families have to adjust to frequent school transfers that can disrupt their learning experience.

**Economic Impact** – Migrant farm workers and their families live and work in every part of the United States, leaving their homes each year to plant, cultivate, harvest and pack fruits and vegetables. Other migrants work in the fishing, meatpacking and dairy industries. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey for 1997-1998 (the most recent data available), the average hourly wage for farm workers is \$5.94. In addition, the report notes that half of all farm worker families earn less than \$10,000 per year, substantially below the 2002 U. S. poverty level of \$18,100 for a family of four.

By choosing to come back to Texas in August for school instead of September, when work in the fields and canneries comes to an end, a migrant farm worker family earning \$10,500 at \$629 per week (minus expenses for basic needs) foregoes close to \$1,260 in lost wages—12 percent of their yearly family income.

Of the 138,200 Texas migrant children, about 95 percent come from Hispanic families that typically average 2.2 children per family. This means that some 62,820 migrant families with children in Texas call this state home.

Some 79 percent of migrant families (about 49,600) enroll their children in school in August, in time for the first day of classes. Each of these families would earn about \$629 less than what they could have earned if they worked two weeks longer. For the 49,600 Texas families affected, this represents a total of \$31 million in lost direct income to migrant families if they returned to work two weeks early. If the Texas migrant families reduce their work season by two weeks (10 working days), each day would result in \$3.1 million of lost direct income.

**Academic Impact** – Even if school began as late as the day after Labor Day, many migrant children would miss the beginning weeks of the school year. The earlier school begins, however, the more weeks of school these migrant children miss, making it more difficult for them to catch up with their peers.

Interrupted school attendance and lack of continuity in curriculum from that interruption of studies are additional conditions that raise the dropout rate for migrant students. These conditions mean that migrant students often do not accumulate the credits they otherwise would.

Although the federally funded Migrant Education Program has provided additional resources for the education of migrant children, they still lag significantly behind the state as a whole in test results. In 2001-02, only 86.2 percent of migrant students passed the TAAS math exam, compared to 91.7 percent of all Texas students. The passage rates of

migrant students in reading and writing were 79.9 percent and 74.7 percent respectively, compared to passage rates of 90.6 percent and 87.2 percent for all students.

The TAAS passage rates reported above reflected significant improvement over previous years' results, for migrants as well as for the overall student population. Nevertheless, migrant students are not performing at the state's average level. There are many reasons for this, but missing two or more weeks of school cannot have a positive effect on academic performance.

### **Child Care**

Another factor reducing the length of the summer break is the growing number of holidays during the school year. Earlier start dates appear linked to a large number of student holidays observed during the year, including staff development and workdays (Exhibits 7 and 12).

### **EXHIBIT 12**

#### **Average Number of Student Holidays Including Staff Development and Work Days 2004-05**

<b>Start Dates</b>	<b>Largest 50 Districts</b>	<b>Sample of 432 Districts</b>
August 19-24	25.5	24.6
August 17	26	25.3
August 16	26.8	25.9
August 13	-	23.5
August 12	27.7	27.4
August 11	29.3	28.3
Aug 3 -9	31.5	-
Jul 20- Aug 10	-	31.0

*Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

Opponents of SB 108 maintained that school districts would be forced to hold classes into June to make up for later start dates. As shown in Exhibit 13, however, only a small number of school districts are scheduled to hold classes in June 2005. Of the largest 50 districts only two, Spring and Irving ISDs, have scheduled classes in June 2005. Irving started classes on August 24, a full week later than any of the other largest districts.

Spring ISD began on August 16, the same start date used by most districts that ended classes on May 26 or 27. But Spring allowed five days for the Thanksgiving holiday; 12 days at Winter Break (compared to 10 and 11 days in other districts) and an overall 32 days of holidays during the school year.

### **EXHIBIT 13**

#### **2004-05 End Dates**

<b>End date</b>	<b>Largest 50 Districts</b>	<b>Sample of 432 Districts</b>
6/3	-	1

6/2	2	6
6/1	-	3
5/30	-	1
5/27	11	109
5/26	27	249
5/25	6	32
5/24	2	6
5/20	2	19
5/19	-	4
5/18	-	1
5/5	-	1

*Source: 2004-05 School calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

When student holidays fall on dates other than state or federal holidays, parents may be unable to take time off as well. Working parents then must arrange to have a friend or family member care for their children, or pay an after-school care program or other child care provider.

The Texas Workforce Commission estimates that 762,500 Texas children under age 13 with working parents are cared for in licensed and regulated child care facilities. About 450,000 of these children are in the Pre-K through grade 6 age range. This does not include children cared for in unregulated facilities or by friends and relatives. The number of children in such settings may be much larger the number in licensed facilities, since 2.4 million Texas children are enrolled in public schools in grades Pre-K through 6, and a 1997 report by the Urban Institute indicated that 59 percent of mothers with children younger than 13 are employed. It is reasonable to assume that as many as 1.4 million children are being cared for in a regulated or unregulated childcare facility or by a caregiver.

Short holidays, then, often involve an expense for working parents, either in terms of a loss of income or vacation days or a cost for child care.

According to an informal poll taken by the Texas Licensed Child Care Association (TLCCA) of its members, holiday days for children already enrolled in after-school care cost parents from \$7 to \$17 per day, per child. Assuming a mid-range of \$12 per day, the additional cost to parents for the 450,000 children in licensed child care would be \$5.4 million. Obviously, costs for children not already enrolled in such settings may be much higher.

TLCCA also pointed out that teachers often have children of their own in school and must find full-day child care for staff development days or teacher workdays as well as for days before and after the regular school year when teachers must work. The students are off, but the teachers are not. Assuming that a fourth of about 289,000 teachers in Texas have only one child needing full-day child care while they are in training or observing a workday, the cost to teachers would be about \$867,000 per day.

Some questioned whether school year compression would mean that parents will incur even greater costs for summer care. TWC data does not support that premise. According

to TWC, the cost per day for a full day [summer] program for school age children ranges from \$6 to \$25 with a mid-range of \$14 per day, depending on the region of the state and the type of center, while after school program costs range from \$5 to \$15 per day with a mid-range of \$10 per day. Therefore, the mid range cost for full day care in the middle of the school year is in the neighborhood of \$22 (\$12 additional cost plus \$10 for basic after school care) as compared to a full day of care during the summer of \$14, a premium of about \$8 per day. Efficiencies are lost primarily because childcare facilities have increased staffing, food and other costs for a smaller number of children for only one or two isolated days.

Conservatively, the potential premium cost, the difference between an extra full day of care during the year versus the cost of full day care during the summer, for the parents of just those 450,000 children enrolled in licensed and regulated after school care programs, or about one-third of the children estimated to be in some kind of child care setting, would be \$3.6 million. The potential premium cost for the children of one-fourth of all teachers would be \$578,000.

## Other Economic Issues

The primary economic effects of shortened summer breaks are reduced tourist activity, higher school cooling costs and higher operational costs for school districts.

### EXHIBIT 14

#### Top Texas Tourist Attractions in 2002

Percentage of Visitors	Attraction	Rank
30.5	(River Walk) Paseo del Rio	1
29.5	Alamo	2
22.0	San Marcos Outlet Malls	3
16.9	State Capitol	4
16.2	Six Flags Over Texas	5
15.8	Padre Island National Seashore	5
14.4	Sea World of Texas	7
12.5	Moody Gardens	8
12.4	Fort Worth Zoo	9
12.3	Schlitterbahn (New Braunfels)	10
11.0	Minute Maid Field (Enron Astrodome)	11
11.0	Ballpark at Arlington	11
10.7	San Antonio Zoo	13
10.2	Fiesta Texas	14
9.3	LBJ Library	15
8.6	Astroworld	16
8.3	Fort Worth Stockyards	17
7.9	USS Lexington	18
7.9	Texas Motor Speedway	18
7.9	Texas Stadium	18

7.1	Texas State Aquarium	21
7.1	Dallas Zoo	22
5.9	Houston Space Center	23
4.7	Trader's Village (Grand Prairie)	24
4.0	Big Bend National Park	25
3.7	Houston Zoological Garden	26
3.6	Bush Presidential Library	27
2.0	Grapevine Mills	28
1.7	Galveston Strand	29
1.2	Natural Bridge	30

*Source: Office of the Governor Economic Development and Tourism.*

### **Shortened Summer Tourist Season**

The most noticeable result of changes in the school calendar has been a negative impact on the summer seasonal industries such as travel, tourism, amusements and summer camps. Travel industry representatives believe that a longer summer break would improve the tourism sector. The Comptroller's office estimates that extending the summer break by two weeks would generate an additional \$28 million per day for the state's tourist destinations; \$392 million for the two additional weeks.

Summer is essentially the entire business season for coastal areas and water and theme parks. But all of the state's 30 top travel and tourism attractions are affected by the length of the summer travel season (Exhibit 14).

Six of the top 30 attractions in Texas, including the top two, the River Walk and the Alamo, are in or near San Antonio. For San Antonio and South Texas, a shortened season represents a considerable net reduction of economic activity. San Antonio lost 2,800 jobs—more than 28 percent—in amusement and recreation from June to September 2002. Corpus Christi lost 11.5 percent of its jobs in amusement and recreation from June to September 2002. The metro area, including Padre Island, suffered a 14.5 percent loss.

Summer activities can also provide a meaningful learning experience for children and their families. Visiting locations such as cultural and historical sites, natural geological formations, and aquatic parks and zoos can enhance a child's knowledge and make related topics come alive in the classroom.

### **Higher School Utility Bills**

To analyze the average cost of electricity in different months of the school year, an independent organization collected electric bills from 20 districts of varying size and geographic location across the state for the 2001-02 school year. These bills were given to Comptroller staff for analysis. Estimates are based upon an average of three weeks of operation in August, four weeks in May, and two weeks in June (assuming some summer school).

Using these assumptions, the average per-student, per-day electricity cost in August is 89 cents; in May, 45 cents; and in June, 78 cents. Given statewide enrollment of about 4.3 million for the 2003-04 school year, the estimated statewide electricity cost of an average

August day is approximately \$3.8 million. The cost of a May day is about \$1.9 million, while the cost of a June day is about \$3.4 million.

A later start day, then, can result in savings even if it involves extending the school year into late May or early June. The greatest savings, however, are achieved if the school year is compressed to avoid—as many August school days as possible.

A separate study of calendar 2003 utility bill data, including electricity, natural gas and water, derived from a sample of 43 school districts with 59 schools in various areas of the state, estimated the year-round average cost for all utilities at \$2.9 million per day (Exhibit 15).

## EXHIBIT 15

### Estimated Daily Utility Costs Based on Student Enrollment 2003-04

	Student Enrollment 2003-04	Average Utility Cost per Student per Day *	Utility Costs Per School Day (Electric and Gas)
Early Education	27,571		
Pre-K	166,579		
Kinder	323,502		
First	338,727		
Second	325,943		
Third	323,373		
Fourth	321,788		
<b>Total Elementary</b>	<b>1,827,483</b>	<b>\$.61</b>	<b>\$1,107,020</b>
Fifth	324,046		
Sixth	327,093		
Seventh	329,560		
Eighth	324,316		
<b>Total Middle School</b>	<b>1,305,015</b>	<b>\$.64</b>	<b>\$832,448</b>
Ninth	375,358		

Sophomore	309,187		
Junior	267,682		
Senior	243,303		
<b>Total High School</b>	<b>1,195,530</b>	<b>\$.79</b>	<b>\$938,862</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,328,028</b>		<b>\$2,878,331</b>

\* Derived from a sample set of 43 school districts with 59 schools from various areas of the state.

Source: Compiled by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

According to a November 2002 account in the *Tulsa World*, Tulsa, one of Oklahoma's public school districts, saved nearly \$500,000 by delaying the start of school until after Labor Day. Electricity costs for the district \$465,000 and natural gas costs by \$4,300 for the July to September period, compared with the same time period in previous years.

Not only does the heat in late summer increase the cost of utilities, but there are also dangers to students and staff from heat and air-quality related factors.

### Higher School Operating Costs

Texas school districts employ about 600,000 persons. Some of these employees work year-round; others work only when school is in session; and still others begin working just before the school year begins and work a given number of days after school finishes. Data reported through the Public Education Information Management System indicates school district employees were expected to work an average of 195 days in the 2003-04 school year. This translates to a little more than nine months out of each year in which most districts need to be fully staffed.

Sixty percent of school district employees are in professional positions such as teachers, librarians, counselors, or administrators, whose salaries are established based on the number of days they are expected to work. The remaining 40 percent, about 236,000 employees, are paraprofessionals and support or auxiliary staff. For this analysis, it is assumed that employees working fewer than 240 days work schedules based on the school year. Those working more than 240 days may be year-round maintenance personnel or central office staff that would be unaffected by a change in the school year calendar.

About 196,000 non-professional employees work fewer than 240 days a year; their average work year is 192 days. Budgeted payroll data from 2003-04 shows that these employees earn an average of \$79 a day. If the school year were compressed so that these employees worked fewer days, the savings would be \$15.5 million per day.

## Conclusion

Compressing the school calendar to extend the summer break is popular with parents, teachers, businesses and tourists, although the idea still faces resistance. Adding holidays during the academic year does not have a direct or indirect impact on the number of instructional days.

Summer has always been a time for families to relax, take vacations and spend quality time together. Although schools provide formal education, family values and self-esteem are learned at home.

Based upon an analysis of the more than 400 school calendars, Texas schools today appear to offer approximately the same number of instructional days as in 1949, yet offer substantially shorter summer breaks (Exhibit 16).

The academic benefits of stretching the instructional year have not been proved, but the economic costs are known. Earlier and later start and end dates appear to be driven primarily by the scheduling of optional holidays rather than staff development or work days. Districts that choose to start and end school earlier and later than the norm appear to be doing so at a cost to teachers, students, parents and our state's economy as a whole.

### EXHIBIT 16

#### Comparison of School Calendars 2004-05 versus 1949-50

Element	Average Instructional Days 2004-05	Gilmer Aikins Act 1949
Instructional days	177	9 months X 20 = 180
Holidays other than staff development or work days	24	15
Staff development or work days during school year	4	0
Average school year	9.5 months/41 weeks	9 months/39 weeks
Average summer break	11 weeks	13 weeks

Clearly, compressing the school year, while maintaining a 180-day instructional calendar has proven successful in some of the highest performing states in the nation and is feasible under current Texas law, and with current accountability requirements.

### EXHIBIT 17

#### Economic Impact (in millions) of Early School Start Dates

Lost Personal Income	Income lost per day	Two Week Loss
Students	\$7.9	\$79.0
Teachers	\$3.8	\$38.0

Support staff	\$2.4	\$24.0
Migrant Workers	\$3.1	\$31.0
<b>Loss to Tourist Economies</b>		
	<b>Loss per day</b>	<b>Two Week Loss</b>
Tourist Economies (Calculated based upon two week estimate divided by 14 calendar days.)	\$28.0	\$392.0
<b>Costs to Schools</b>		
	<b>Cost per day</b>	<b>Two Week Cost</b>
School operations	\$15.5	\$155.0
School utilities (\$1.9 to \$3.8 million, depending on the time of the year; \$2.9 for average day)	\$2.9	\$29.0
<b>Costs to Parents and Teachers</b>		
	<b>Cost per day</b>	<b>Two Week Cost</b>
Child care costs for parents	\$3.6	\$36.0
Child care costs for teachers	\$0.6	\$6.0
<b>Total losses/costs</b>	<b>\$67.8</b>	<b>\$790.0</b>

Carole Keeton Strayhorn  
Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

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## Saving Summer: Lessons Learned

*The benefits of stretching the school year have not been proved; what we do know—it's costing Texans \$790 million annually.*

—Carole Keeton Strayhorn  
Texas Comptroller

*Over the last fifty years, additional student holidays have artificially stretched the school year by more than two weeks, from early to mid-August to late May or early June, at a cost to Texans of \$790 million annually.* The academic benefits of stretching the instructional year have not been proven, but the economic and societal costs are

known. Each extra holiday that school districts add to school calendars is potentially costing parents, teachers, students and businesses \$67.8 million per day, statewide; each extra calendar week has a price tag of \$395 million.

Since 1991, when the Texas Legislature repealed the law requiring schools to start during the week of September 1, Texas schools have begun their years earlier and earlier. Following Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn's December 2000 Special Report detailing the economic costs of the earlier start dates, the 2001 Legislature attempted to reverse this trend with Senate Bill (S.B.) 108 which requires schools to begin during the week in which August 21 falls. In reality, schools are starting an average of two days later than they did prior to this bill, and more than 100 districts have received waivers from the provision from the Texas Education Agency (TEA); the earliest 2004-05 start date was August 3.

Many have questioned the impact and importance of S.B. 108, saying that it does not go far enough in preserving the summer vacation. Others support early August start dates, stating that later start dates compromise academic achievement. But understanding that, on average, schools are providing approximately the same number of instructional days as they did in 1949, while the school year has gotten two weeks longer, the additional economic and societal costs do not appear justified.

## **History of School Start Dates in Texas**

In a 1984 special session, the Texas Legislature required all schools to open after September 1. This law became effective on September 1, 1985 and in 1989 was amended to allow schools to start on any day during the week in which September 1 falls. The Legislature repealed the start date law in another special session in 1990.

The Comptroller's 2000 report indicated that early school start dates and a shortened summer tourist season annually cut tourist spending in Texas, and that migrant farm workers lose millions in earnings, while many migrant children lose valuable days of instruction. The report also noted that the present structure of the school year costs districts higher cooling costs each year.

After the 2000 report was released, S.B. 108 amended Subchapter C, Chapter 25 of the Education Code by adding Section 25.0811, which states that a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the week in which August 21 falls. This law was fully implemented as of the 2002-03 school year.

Information obtained through the Texas Education Agency, indicates that, in 1990, the last year of Texas' old uniform start date requirement, 33 of what are currently the state's 50 largest districts began school on August 27. Since 1999, August 16 has been the most common start date. On average, however, the 50 largest school districts are starting two days later than they did prior to the implementation of S.B. 108 (Exhibit 1).

### **EXHIBIT 1**

#### **Start Dates for the 50 Largest School Districts in Texas**

District Name	Total Students 2003-04	1990 Start Date	1999 Start Date	2004 Start Date	Change in Start Date, 1999 to 2004	Change in Start Date, 1990 to 2004
Houston	211,499	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Dallas	160,584	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Fort Worth	80,335	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Austin	79,007	27-Aug	11-Aug	17-Aug	6	-10
Cypress-Fairbanks (Houston Area)	74,877	27-Aug	11-Aug	11-Aug	0	-16
Northside (San Antonio)	71,798	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
El Paso	63,200	28-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-12
Arlington (Dallas Area)	62,454	27-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-11
Fort Bend (Houston Area)	61,248	27-Aug	12-Aug	12-Aug	0	-15
San Antonio	56,914	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
North East (San Antonio)	56,298	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Aldine (Houston Area)	56,292	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Garland (Dallas Area)	55,114	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Plano (Dallas Area)	51,869	27-Aug	*	4-Aug	*	-23
Ysleta (El Paso)	46,668	*	*	12-Aug	*	*
Pasadena (Houston Area)	46,142	27-Aug	2-Aug	16-Aug	14	-11
Brownsville	45,923	27-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-11
Alief (Houston Area)	45,344	28-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-16
Lewisville (Dallas Area)	44,024	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Katy (Houston Area)	42,116	29-Aug	17-Aug	11-Aug	-6	-18
Corpus Christi	39,310	27-Aug	16-Aug	12-Aug	-4	-15
Conroe (Houston Area)	39,246	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Klein (Houston Area)	35,558	28-Aug	11-Aug	17-Aug	6	-11
Round Rock	35,553	27-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-11
Richardson	34,536	27-Aug	11-Aug	19-Aug	8	-8
Mesquite	34,414	27-Aug	12-Aug	16-Aug	4	-11
Spring Branch (Houston Area)	33,005	27-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	1	-15
Clear Creek (Houston Area)	32,810	*	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	*
Killeen	32,583	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
United (Laredo)	32,262	27-Aug	18-Aug	16-Aug	-2	-11
Socorro (El Paso) **	32,241	*	11-Aug	26-Jul	-16	*
Irving (Dallas Area)	31,249	4-Sep	*	24-Aug	*	-11
Amarillo	29,527	29-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-13
Lubbock	29,020	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11

Humble (Houston Area)	27,009	27-Aug	16-Aug	16-Aug	0	-11
Spring (Houston Area)	26,768	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (Hidalgo County)	26,493	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Ector County	26,090	*	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	*
Carrollton-Farmers Branch (Dallas County)	25,638	28-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	1	-12
Edinburg Cons (Hidalgo County)	25,373	27-Aug	9-Aug	16-Aug	7	-11
Laredo	24,846	28-Aug	10-Aug	16-Aug	6	-12
McAllen	23,492	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
Birdville (Tarrant County)	22,507	27-Aug	12-Aug	5-Aug	-7	-22
Grand Prairie (Dallas County)	22,132	27-Aug	16-Aug	11-Aug	-5	-16
Keller	21,803	*	*	3-Aug	*	*
La Joya	21,765	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Mansfield	21,060	*	*	16-Aug	*	*
Midland	20,921	27-Aug	*	16-Aug	*	-11
Beaumont	20,732	3-Sep	10-Aug	9-Aug	-1	-25
Galena Park (Houston Area)	20,454	27-Aug	11-Aug	16-Aug	5	-11
<b>Average Difference</b>					<b>2</b>	<b>-13</b>

\* Data not available.

\*\* Socorro operates a districtwide year-round school system, making comparisons with other district calendars difficult.

Source: Texas Education Agency and 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.

For the 2004-05 school year, 35 of the districts (70 percent) began class during the week of August 21; 31 districts (62 percent) began school on August 16 (Exhibit 2).

## EXHIBIT 2

### 50 Largest School District Start Dates 2004-05

Start Date	Number of districts
8/24	1
8/19	1
8/17	2
8/16	31
8/12	7
8/11	3
8/9	1

8/5	1
8/4	1
8/3	1
7/26	1

*Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

Of the 50 largest districts, Socorro had the earliest 2004-05 start date, beginning on July 26. It should be noted, however, that Socorro is the only Texas school district operating a year-round school system, meaning that school begins mid summer with three-week intersessions between grading periods.

## **Waivers from Start Date Requirements**

S.B. 108 grants school districts some flexibility in setting their calendars, allowing them to apply for waivers from its requirements. (Texas Education Code (TEC) 39.112, moreover, exempts school campuses or districts that the Texas Education Agency [TEA] rates as exemplary from the start date requirements.)

To qualify for a waiver, a district must publish a notice in a newspaper with general circulation in the district at least 60 days before the date upon which it submits its application to TEA.

The public notice must state that the district intends to apply for a waiver of the state requirement concerning the date of the first day of instruction; specify the date on which the district intends to begin instruction; and hold a public hearing concerning the date of the first day of instruction. The application for a waiver must include a summary of opinions expressed at the public hearing, including any consensus of opinion. TEA has 30 days from the time the waiver application is received to issue or deny the waiver. At that time, the district must be notified by letter of the agency's decision.

Of those districts planning to start school before the state-mandated week in 2004, only Aldine ISD, which started on August 12th, did not have a waiver on file with TEA at this writing. TEA, however, stated that it is not uncommon for districts to send in their waivers after the start of school.

The law is clear about the need for parental and community involvement in setting school start dates. Waivers applications must summarize any consensus of opinion expressed at public hearings. Compliance with the legal guidelines, however, has left some wondering if the opinions of parents are gathered in a meaningful way, and if those opinions actually influence the final decisions.

A cursory review of comments made by parents and community members in TEA's waiver application files suggests that parents opposed to the earlier start dates are concerned with the calendar review process, particularly the number of school district staff members speaking for the early start date as opposed to parents and community members. There was also concern expressed that preferences for time off in the middle of the year were taking a back seat to concern for academics.

In Plano ISD, for example, the start date issue has become the topic of a Web site maintained by the Plano Parental Rights Council (<http://www.planoprc.org>). This Web site references newspaper articles indicating that in 2001, 93 citizens attending a public hearing expressed support for the waiver, while 27 (29%) opposed it. By their accounts 75 to 90 percent of those expressing support for the waiver were school district employees or Calendar Committee appointees. In 2003, the Web site reports that the district received more than 1,000 e-mails concerning the waiver, and that a “preponderance” of these were from teachers, district staff and various PTA members supporting an early start date and a week-long fall break.

## **School Calendars Around the Nation**

While most states have school years of about 180 days, start dates tend to vary from region to region. Generally, schools in the Northeast and Midwest start near September 1 or Labor Day, while schools in the southern states tend to start in August—sometimes, quite early in August. In Florida, for example, 34 out of 67 school districts in 2003 started school in the week of August 4<sup>th</sup>. Even so, there are many exceptions to this pattern. Virginia, for instance, requires all districts to start after Labor Day, while many districts in Indiana start in mid-August. And until recently, a few districts in southern Florida retained a more traditional (and relatively late) start date.

The move to earlier start dates is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to Market Data Retrieval, a national market research firm, about half of American public schools started school before September 1 in 1988. By 2002, that percentage had risen to 71 percent. The reasons usually cited for earlier start dates include the desirability of administering semester exams before the Winter Break and maximizing the number of instructional days before standardized achievement testing in the spring. As testing has become more a high-stakes affair, both in terms of student academics and funding, this has emerged as a significant issue.

The southern states’ general acceptance of earlier start dates is at least in part a response to reports such as The U.S. Department of Education’s National Commission on Excellence in Education’s 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, calling for public school reforms to boost student achievement. Historically, southern states have trailed behind their northern neighbors in student performance. Advocates of the calendar shift saw it as a way to increase educational effectiveness. Opponents of earlier start dates such as Texans for a Traditional School Year, by contrast, point to data they compiled indicating that most of the states with top student performance start their school year after September 1, or in very late August.

Other factors have played a role in the calendar shift. The increased availability of air conditioning allows schools to operate during the hottest parts of the year. And a longer term before the Winter Break gives schools more flexibility in scheduling autumn extracurricular activities.

Interestingly, most states do not have laws regarding start dates. Tradition alone appears to anchor their calendars. According to a report entitled “Overview of Other State’s

Approaches to School Calendar Issues” prepared by Oklahomans for Saving Our Summers, only 10 states mandate start dates: Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. On August 11, an eleventh state joined the group: NPR talk-radio announced that North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley had signed a “school calendar” bill that says schools can start no earlier than Aug. 25.

In the last few years, several states have examined the start date issue. Supporters of a later school start date in South Carolina, a state that regulates start dates through administrative regulations and not statute, gained support from the state’s board of education, but failed to receive statutory backing from the Legislature. Several states considered start date legislation in 2004. Some school districts in states without start date laws have returned to later start dates; Oklahoma City and Flagstaff, Arizona, for instance, recently moved from a mid-August start date to a later one.

**EXHIBIT 3**

**Required/Minimum Student Instructional Days  
1949 to Present**

Effective School Year	Instructional Days
1949-50	Nine full months, with a full month defined as at least 20 days, inclusive of holidays (20 X 9=180 days)
1973-74	180 instructional days with 10 days of in-service teacher training
1977-78	175 instructional days with 10 days of in-service training in 1977-78 and eight days of in-service training thereafter
1991-92	180 instructional days with 20 hours of staff development
1994-95	180 instructional days plus three days of teacher preparation and 20 hours of staff development
1995-96 to Present	180 days with commissioner of education to set staff development requirements

*Source: Texas Education Code*

**Student Instructional Days in Texas**

While the number of calendar weeks in the Texas school year has increased over time, the number of days of instruction has remained fairly constant over the last 50 years. Prior to 1971, the Texas Education Code did not stipulate a minimum number of instructional days, but instead stated that school would be held for “nine full months” with a school month consisting of not less than 20 school days, inclusive of holidays (20 X 9=180). While it was clearly the intent of then-Commissioner J. W. Edgar that schools provide 180 days of instruction, a lack of historical evidence as a result of limited oversight by the education agency at the time, it is not clear whether the intent of the bill was universally implemented. In 1971, the law was changed to stipulate 180 instructional days; removing mention of nine months.

The 63rd Legislature in 1977 set a state minimum of 175 instructional days per school year, with not less than 10 days of in-service teacher training for preparation during the 1977-78 school year and not less than eight days of in-service training annually thereafter. The minimum number of instructional days remained at 175 until the 1991 legislative session, when S.B. 351 changed the minimum to 180 days for the 1991-92 school year and thereafter (Exhibit 3).

The rewrite of the Texas Education Code by the 74th Texas Legislature (Senate Bill 1) kept the number of instructional days at 180. Prior to the rewrite, TEA granted waivers from various provisions of the Education Code, including the number of instructional days on a case-by-case basis; the rewrite codified a formal waiver process.

Senate Bill 1 (1995) also charged the state’s commissioner of education with developing minimum staff development standards.

Although no specific state law or rule addresses the issuance of waivers from instructional days for any purpose other than bad weather, in practice, the commissioner allows the instructional day waivers for staff development and early release (Exhibit 4).

## **EXHIBIT 4**

### **Most Commonly Requested Waivers**

<b>General Staff Development</b>
• Districts may request up to a maximum of three waiver days for general staff development in lieu of student instruction.
• No application for more than three staff development days in lieu of student instruction will be approved unless there are extenuating circumstances.
• Waiver requests may be approved for up to three years.
• The commissioner of education reserves the right to modify or revoke approvals for the second or third year of a waiver, if such a change is required, districts will be notified in writing.
• Districts must apply for the waiver days using the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers or a letter addressing all requirements in the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers.
<b>Staff Development for Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics; Science; and/or Social Studies</b>
• Districts may request a waiver to conduct additional staff training for reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies teaching strategies, in lieu of a maximum of two days of student instruction.
• The extra day or days must be related to staff development on the Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for reading/language arts, mathematics, science and/or social studies respectively, or on the early reading diagnostic instruments for kindergarten through grade two.
• Information on staff development modules related to the TAKS and the early reading diagnostic instruments is available from the regional education service centers.
• Texas Center for Reading & Language Arts Initiative products can be accessed at <a href="http://www.texasreading.org">www.texasreading.org</a> by clicking on the icons for professional development information.
• Staff development materials related to mathematics may be found at <a href="http://www.tenet.edu/teks/math">www.tenet.edu/teks/math</a> .
<b>Staff Development Available Through Specific Conferences</b>
• Districts may request a waiver for one extra staff development day, so that staff may participate in conferences relating to their assignment.
• The district may allow individual campuses to utilize the single conference waiver day at different

times during the year to respond to local staff development priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members may be approved locally to attend conferences in lieu of student instruction and may utilize one or more of the seven teacher-contracted staff development days for this purpose, subject to local policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Early Release</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may request a waiver for up to six early release days each year.</li> <li>• Districts may use early release time for staff development or for other locally determined needs.</li> <li>• Districts must submit a request for early release day(s) completing Sections One through Four of the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers or request the waiver in a letter addressing all requirements in the Application for Expedited and General State Waivers.</li> </ul>

Source: TEA Website, State Waiver Unit – Description of Most Commonly Requested Waivers," <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/waivers/desc.html>.

Eight of Texas’ largest 50 districts (16 percent) scheduled 180 instructional days for 2004-05; nine scheduled 175 instructional days. The median among the 50 districts was 177 days (Exhibit 5). Comptroller staff also examined 382 other school districts’ school calendars, bringing the total examined to 432. The median number of instructional days for these districts was 177 as well, but nearly 29 percent of them are operating 180-day calendars in 2004-05.

**EXHIBIT 5**

**Number of Instructional Days  
2004-05**

Number of instructional days	50 Largest Districts		Sample of 432 Districts	
	Number of districts	Percent of Total	Number of districts	Percent of Total
180	8	16%	106	24.5%
179	3	6%	32	7.4%
178	6	12%	70	16.2%
177	20	40%	131	30.3%
176	4	8%	39	9.0%
175	9	18%	52	12%
174	-	-	2	0.5%

Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from district Web sites.

Comptroller staff found no correlation between earlier start dates and a higher number of instructional days. Exhibit 6 illustrates the pattern among the largest 50 districts, but similar variations existed in the larger sample as well.

**EXHIBIT 6**

**50 Largest School Districts  
2004-05 Calendar**

Instructional Days	Start Date	End Date	Number of Districts
180	12-Aug	24-May	1
180	16-Aug	25-May	1

180	12-Aug	26-May	1
180	16-Aug	26-May	2
180	12-Aug	27-May	1
180	16-Aug	27-May	2
179	4-Aug	20-May	1
179	9-Aug	20-May	1
179	16-Aug	27-May	1
178	16-Aug	26-May	3
178	3-Aug	27-May	1
178	12-Aug	27-May	1
178	16-Aug	27-May	1
177	11-Aug	25-May	2
177	11-Aug	26-May	1
177	12-Aug	26-May	1
177	16-Aug	26-May	10
177	17-Aug	26-May	1
177	26-Jul	27-May	1
177	16-Aug	27-May	2
177	16-Aug	2-Jun	1
177	24-Aug	2-Jun	1
176	16-Aug	25-May	1
176	12-Aug	26-May	1
176	16-Aug	26-May	1
176	19-Aug	26-May	1
175	16-Aug	24-May	1
175	16-Aug	25-May	1
175	17-Aug	25-May	1
175	12-Aug	26-May	1
175	16-Aug	26-May	4
175	5-Aug	27-May	1

Source: 2004-05 school calendars as reported on district Web sites.

As shown, districts with fewer holidays and fewer staff development and workdays during the school year typically have more total instructional days (Exhibit 7).

As shown in the last column of Exhibit 7, the average number of student holidays, excluding those resulting from staff development or workdays, ranges from 23 to 25.

## EXHIBIT 7

### 50 Largest School Districts Distribution of Holidays and Instructional, Training and Work Days 2004-05 Calendar

Number of instruct	Number of	Range in number of student	Average number of	Range in number of teacher in-service training	Average number of teacher in-service training	Average number of student holidays not attributed to
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ional days	Distr icts	holidays	student holidays	and work days*	and work days*	staff development
180	8	23-27	25.0	1-2	1.6	23.4
179	3	25-29	26.7	1-4	2.7	24.0
178	6	26-36	28.2	1-4	3.2	25.0
177	20	25-32	27.7	2-6	3.95	23.8
176	4	25-29	27.3	3-5	4.0	23.3
175	9	27-36	29.2	6-7	5.6	23.6

\* Between beginning and end of student instructional days; does not include teacher preparation, staff development or workdays before or after student instructional days.

*Source: Comptroller analysis of 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

## Staff Development Waivers

TEC sections 25.081 and 25.082 require school districts to provide 180 instructional days a year, seven hours a day. Districts may provide fewer days of instruction if they seek waivers for staff development. According to TEC 7.056 (d), these waivers are valid for a period of up to three years, and remain in force without reapplication if a district continues to meet the achievement goals stated in its original waiver application. TEA officials, however, said that school districts are encouraged to reapply for waivers whether or not their levels of achievement change.

In addition, school districts rated “Exemplary” under the state’s accountability system may operate for fewer days without applying for a waiver. Of the 432 districts examined for purposes of this study, 48 were Exemplary school districts based upon their 2001-02 performance, the last year in which districts were rated on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills [TAAS] (the test that preceded Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills [TAKS]). Of those 48, 85 percent started during the week in which the 21<sup>st</sup> fell, or later, and 2 percent ended the school year in the first week of June. Forty-eight percent of the Exemplary districts provided 180 instructional days, compared to just 24.5 percent of the larger group of 432 districts. This suggests that it is possible to deliver 180 days of instruction without starting early or ending late, and that the result may be academically beneficial.

### EXHIBIT 8

#### Staff Development Waivers Granted by TEA 2001-02 through 2003-04

Type of Staff Development	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
General	406	375	396
Subject Area Specific	177	178	207
Conference Attendance	29	26	24
Total	612	579	627

Source: Texas Education Agency, State Waivers Unit,  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/waivers/granted.html>.

Exhibit 8 shows how many staff development waivers were granted in the past few years.

Some but not all of the 50 largest districts offering fewer than 180 instructional days have active staff development waivers. Exhibit 9 lists districts with fewer than 180 days and no active waiver on file with TEA for 2004-05.

As noted above, TEA has stated that it is not unusual for districts to apply for waivers after the beginning of the school year. Any district rated Exemplary in 2001-02 is not required to adhere to the instructional day requirements or to file for a waiver for the 2004-05 school year, unless its rating falls below Exemplary for 2003-04.

## **EXHIBIT 9**

### **Fewer than 180 Instructional Days – 2004-05; No Waiver on File 50 Largest School Districts**

<b>School District with Fewer than 180 Instructional Days</b>	<b>Number of Instructional Days</b>
Birdville	175
Corpus Christi	175
Ector County	176
Galena Park (Exemplary)	175
Grand Prairie	177
Humble	177
Katy	177
Killeen	177
La Joya	178
Pasadena	177
Plano	179
Socorro	177
Spring Branch	178
United (Laredo)	175

Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites;  
TEA waiver lists.

## **Family, Personal and Academic Issues**

Parents and Texans in general favor a uniform school start date and many of those favor a start date after Labor Day.

As part of the Comptroller's original 2000 study, one of the major objections heard from individuals regarding later start dates was voiced by secondary school teachers, who overwhelmingly opposed starting school later if it would delay finals for the fall semester until after the Winter Break. Some teachers and parents also told Comptroller staff that earlier start dates have led to lower attendance in the early days of school.

However, many teachers also use the summer months to further their college educations; a shortened summer reduces their ability to complete some coursework.

Other personal and family reasons cited by individuals supporting a longer summer break included increased earning potential during summer employment, improved income opportunities for migrant families and lower child care costs.

### **Finals Before Winter Break**

Whether to schedule semester finals before Winter Break is an issue for all jurisdictions with school start dates near or after Labor Day. All of Texas' 50 largest school districts separate semesters by the Winter Break, administering exams for the fall semester before the holiday period begins.

In Texas, semesters consist of three six-week or two nine-week grading periods, depending on the grade. The fall and spring semesters and individual grading periods do not, however, include equal numbers of days. All Texas school districts schedule about five additional instructional days in the spring semester to account for TAKS testing days. Some school districts have said that they also use these extra days in the second semester for "enrichment" activities such as field trips, holding them after the TAKS so as not to interfere with preparation for the tests.

## **EXHIBIT 10**

### **Instructional Days Per Semester 50 Largest School Districts\***

<b>Instructional days - Fall Semester</b>	<b>Number of districts</b>
88	4
87	3
86	3
85	8
84	12
83	13
82	4
81	1
80	1
<b>Instructional days - Spring Semester</b>	<b>Number of districts</b>
97	2
96	1
95	7
94	11
93	13
92	6
91	5
90	3
88	1

\* Excluding Socorro ISD with year round schedules.

Source: 2004-05 School Calendars obtained from school district Web sites.

In the 50 largest Texas districts, the number of days in the fall semester ranges from a low of 80 days in Spring ISD, which observes a week-long fall break, to a high of 88 in Lewisville, Keller, Plano and Beaumont ISDs, which begin school on August 12, August 3, August 4 and August 9, respectively.

The number of instructional days in the spring semester ranges from a low of 88 days in Birdville ISD to a high of 97 in Clear Creek and Spring ISDs; these districts end school on May 27 and June 2, respectively.

Spring ISD has the most significant difference in length between its fall and spring semesters, at 17 days; Birdville's semester lengths are the most similar, with only one day's difference (87 instructional days in the fall semester and 88 in the spring). The average for the 50 largest districts is nine days' difference. Exhibit 10 summarizes semester lengths for the 50 largest districts.

According to a 1999 study completed for the Texas Department of Economic Development by Dr. Peter Tarlow, the top academically rated states (based on SAT/ACT scores), all administered mid-term exams after a winter holiday, and they all began school in late August or early September.

The question of finals before Winter Break appears to have been asked and answered in practice. With fewer instructional days during the fall semester, the question then becomes: is a student who takes a course in the fall being short-changed or held to a different standard than one who takes it in the spring?

### **Attendance Issues**

Advocates of later school start dates maintain that early school starts prompt poor student attendance during the first few weeks of school, resulting in poor student achievement; moreover, low attendance costs local school districts money because attendance is a factor in state aid. TEA collects attendance data only as six-week cumulative totals, however, making it difficult to quantify or analyze this phenomenon.

But later start-date proponents claim that school districts that start after Labor Day generally begin with better attendance than those starting during the last weeks of August. And while lost state aid to local districts constitutes a savings to the state, this is hardly an area of savings that the state should encourage as a public policy.

### **Teacher Training**

Continuing teacher training is becoming increasingly important as the state implements incentives designed to attract more highly trained "master" teachers in critical subject areas.

The summer session at many colleges ends in mid- to late August, so an early school start date may interfere with teachers' ability to take advantage of opportunities for professional development. Holding classes in early June can also interfere with teachers' ability to attend the first summer session. One teacher noted, in documentation accompanying a waiver application for an early start date, that starting school early would prevent her from taking the summer courses she needed.

With an academic school year that starts in early September and ends in late May or early June, teachers have an opportunity to take two summer sessions of coursework instead of just one.

Interestingly, some of the state's larger colleges and universities are offering accelerated coursework for teachers who must return to work before the end of the summer semester.

### **Lost Summer Employment**

Another effect of the compressed summer season is to reduce seasonal employment of high school and college students as well as teachers. Many must forgo such employment to return to school. This employment loss equates to a reduction in personal income for those individuals. Wages for summer positions vary significantly, with some of the higher paid positions being in the area of construction (Exhibit 11).

### **EXHIBIT 11**

#### **Texas Statewide Compensation Summary (Surveys taken between October 1999 and August 2003)**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Entry Level Hourly Wage</b>
All occupations in all industries	\$7.20
Minimum Wage	\$5.15
Simple Average	\$6.57
Amusement Parks and Arcades	\$6.00
Amusements (golf courses, marinas, fitness centers, etc.)	\$6.15
Accommodations (primarily hotels and motels)	\$6.15
Food Services and Drinking Establishments	\$6.05
Food and Beverage Stores	\$6.40
Clothing and Clothing Accessory Stores	\$6.30
Electronics and Appliance Stores	\$7.15
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores	\$6.20
All Retail	\$6.55
Construction	\$8.75

*Source: Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Labor Market Information:  
<http://www.texaswages.com/>*

Assuming that half of the state's 511,000 high school juniors and seniors hold part-time (30 hour per week/6 hours per day) jobs during the summer, and that they earn the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour, these students will lose nearly \$7.9 million in potential income for every day lost from the summer break.

Furthermore, if it is assumed that a third of Texas' 289,000 teachers work part-time (30 hours per week/6 hours per day) during the summer, and that they earn the simple average for the industries shown in Exhibit 11 of \$6.57 per hour, teachers could lose another \$3.8 million in potential income for every day lost from the summer break. Similarly, if a third of Texas' 236,000 school district paraprofessional and auxiliary staff take summer work at minimum wage they could lose \$2.4 million for every day lost from the summer break.

Schlitterbahn, a water park in Central Texas, began recruiting college-age workers from Europe this year. The workers usually earn the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour and must pay their own travel and living expenses. Schlitterbahn hires more than 1,500 workers for summer season, which lasts from about mid-April through early September. Terry Adams, chief operations officer for Schlitterbahn, recently told the *Dallas Morning News* that “Local kids will always be the backbone of our workforce, but we have to have people working through the end of the season, that’s where the international students come in. They can work later in the season than the locals.” Extending the summer break would allow Schlitterbahn and other tourist destinations to employ more local kids because they could work for the full summer. Longer summer employment would translate into more disposable income for local economies and less money exported not only out of state but also out of the United States.

### **Lost Income for Migrant Families**

According to TEA, in the 2001-2002 school year Texas had 138,200 migrant children aged three and older, up from 122,877 in 1998-1999. The state’s growing migrant population poses a unique educational challenge that is made more difficult by early school start dates and extended school years.

Texas migrant farm laborers start their annual migration from Texas to other states in May, as demand for farm labor rises. Some migrants delay their return until September and October. Most migrant families with school-aged children, however, do not leave Texas until late May and early June, when schools dismiss for the summer, and return to Texas in August so that their children can start school with their peers.

Several Texas school districts with large numbers of migrant families have moved their school start dates to accommodate them.

Early school start dates affect migrant families economically and academically. For many migrant families, early school start dates shorten the period over which they can earn the bulk of their yearly income. Children of migrant workers who must continue working to support their families have to adjust to frequent school transfers that can disrupt their learning experience.

**Economic Impact** – Migrant farm workers and their families live and work in every part of the United States, leaving their homes each year to plant, cultivate, harvest and pack fruits and vegetables. Other migrants work in the fishing, meatpacking and dairy industries. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey for 1997-1998 (the most recent data available), the average hourly wage for farm workers is \$5.94. In addition, the report notes that half of all farm worker families earn less than \$10,000 per year, substantially below the 2002 U. S. poverty level of \$18,100 for a family of four.

By choosing to come back to Texas in August for school instead of September, when work in the fields and canneries comes to an end, a migrant farm worker family earning \$10,500 at \$629 per week (minus expenses for basic needs) foregoes close to \$1,260 in lost wages—12 percent of their yearly family income.

Of the 138,200 Texas migrant children, about 95 percent come from Hispanic families that typically average 2.2 children per family. This means that some 62,820 migrant families with children in Texas call this state home.

Some 79 percent of migrant families (about 49,600) enroll their children in school in August, in time for the first day of classes. Each of these families would earn about \$629 less than what they could have earned if they worked two weeks longer. For the 49,600 Texas families affected, this represents a total of \$31 million in lost direct income to migrant families if they returned to work two weeks early. If the Texas migrant families reduce their work season by two weeks (10 working days), each day would result in \$3.1 million of lost direct income.

**Academic Impact** – Even if school began as late as the day after Labor Day, many migrant children would miss the beginning weeks of the school year. The earlier school begins, however, the more weeks of school these migrant children miss, making it more difficult for them to catch up with their peers.

Interrupted school attendance and lack of continuity in curriculum from that interruption of studies are additional conditions that raise the dropout rate for migrant students. These conditions mean that migrant students often do not accumulate the credits they otherwise would.

Although the federally funded Migrant Education Program has provided additional resources for the education of migrant children, they still lag significantly behind the state as a whole in test results. In 2001-02, only 86.2 percent of migrant students passed the TAAS math exam, compared to 91.7 percent of all Texas students. The passage rates of migrant students in reading and writing were 79.9 percent and 74.7 percent respectively, compared to passage rates of 90.6 percent and 87.2 percent for all students.

The TAAS passage rates reported above reflected significant improvement over previous years' results, for migrants as well as for the overall student population. Nevertheless, migrant students are not performing at the state's average level. There are many reasons for this, but missing two or more weeks of school cannot have a positive effect on academic performance.

**Child Care**

Another factor reducing the length of the summer break is the growing number of holidays during the school year. Earlier start dates appear linked to a large number of student holidays observed during the year, including staff development and workdays (Exhibits 7 and 12).

**EXHIBIT 12**

**Average Number of Student Holidays Including Staff Development and Work Days 2004-05**

Start Dates	Largest 50 Districts	Sample of 432 Districts
August 19-24	25.5	24.6

August 17	26	25.3
August 16	26.8	25.9
August 13	-	23.5
August 12	27.7	27.4
August 11	29.3	28.3
Aug 3 -9	31.5	-
Jul 20- Aug 10	-	31.0

*Source: 2004-05 school calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

Opponents of SB 108 maintained that school districts would be forced to hold classes into June to make up for later start dates. As shown in Exhibit 13, however, only a small number of school districts are scheduled to hold classes in June 2005. Of the largest 50 districts only two, Spring and Irving ISDs, have scheduled classes in June 2005. Irving started classes on August 24, a full week later than any of the other largest districts.

Spring ISD began on August 16, the same start date used by most districts that ended classes on May 26 or 27. But Spring allowed five days for the Thanksgiving holiday; 12 days at Winter Break (compared to 10 and 11 days in other districts) and an overall 32 days of holidays during the school year.

### **EXHIBIT 13**

#### **2004-05 End Dates**

<b>End date</b>	<b>Largest 50 Districts</b>	<b>Sample of 432 Districts</b>
6/3	-	1
6/2	2	6
6/1	-	3
5/30	-	1
5/27	11	109
5/26	27	249
5/25	6	32
5/24	2	6
5/20	2	19
5/19	-	4
5/18	-	1
5/5	-	1

*Source: 2004-05 School calendars obtained from school district Web sites.*

When student holidays fall on dates other than state or federal holidays, parents may be unable to take time off as well. Working parents then must arrange to have a friend or family member care for their children, or pay an after-school care program or other child care provider.

The Texas Workforce Commission estimates that 762,500 Texas children under age 13 with working parents are cared for in licensed and regulated child care facilities. About 450,000 of these children are in the Pre-K through grade 6 age range. This does not include children cared for in unregulated facilities or by friends and relatives. The

number of children in such settings may be much larger the number in licensed facilities, since 2.4 million Texas children are enrolled in public schools in grades Pre-K through 6, and a 1997 report by the Urban Institute indicated that 59 percent of mothers with children younger than 13 are employed. It is reasonable to assume that as many as 1.4 million children are being cared for in a regulated or unregulated childcare facility or by a caregiver.

Short holidays, then, often involve an expense for working parents, either in terms of a loss of income or vacation days or a cost for child care.

According to an informal poll taken by the Texas Licensed Child Care Association (TLCCA) of its members, holiday days for children already enrolled in after-school care cost parents from \$7 to \$17 per day, per child. Assuming a mid-range of \$12 per day, the additional cost to parents for the 450,000 children in licensed child care would be \$5.4 million. Obviously, costs for children not already enrolled in such settings may be much higher.

TLCCA also pointed out that teachers often have children of their own in school and must find full-day child care for staff development days or teacher workdays as well as for days before and after the regular school year when teachers must work. The students are off, but the teachers are not. Assuming that a fourth of about 289,000 teachers in Texas have only one child needing full-day child care while they are in training or observing a workday, the cost to teachers would be about \$867,000 per day.

Some questioned whether school year compression would mean that parents will incur even greater costs for summer care. TWC data does not support that premise. According to TWC, the cost per day for a full day [summer] program for school age children ranges from \$6 to \$25 with a mid-range of \$14 per day, depending on the region of the state and the type of center, while after school program costs range from \$5 to \$15 per day with a mid-range of \$10 per day. Therefore, the mid range cost for full day care in the middle of the school year is in the neighborhood of \$22 (\$12 additional cost plus \$10 for basic after school care) as compared to a full day of care during the summer of \$14, a premium of about \$8 per day. Efficiencies are lost primarily because childcare facilities have increased staffing, food and other costs for a smaller number of children for only one or two isolated days.

Conservatively, the potential premium cost, the difference between an extra full day of care during the year versus the cost of full day care during the summer, for the parents of just those 450,000 children enrolled in licensed and regulated after school care programs, or about one-third of the children estimated to be in some kind of child care setting, would be \$3.6 million. The potential premium cost for the children of one-fourth of all teachers would be \$578,000.

## **Other Economic Issues**

The primary economic effects of shortened summer breaks are reduced tourist activity, higher school cooling costs and higher operational costs for school districts.

## EXHIBIT 14

### Top Texas Tourist Attractions in 2002

Percentage of Visitors	Attraction	Rank
30.5	(River Walk) Paseo del Rio	1
29.5	Alamo	2
22.0	San Marcos Outlet Malls	3
16.9	State Capitol	4
16.2	Six Flags Over Texas	5
15.8	Padre Island National Seashore	5
14.4	Sea World of Texas	7
12.5	Moody Gardens	8
12.4	Fort Worth Zoo	9
12.3	Schlitterbahn (New Braunfels)	10
11.0	Minute Maid Field (Enron Astrodome)	11
11.0	Ballpark at Arlington	11
10.7	San Antonio Zoo	13
10.2	Fiesta Texas	14
9.3	LBJ Library	15
8.6	Astroworld	16
8.3	Fort Worth Stockyards	17
7.9	USS Lexington	18
7.9	Texas Motor Speedway	18
7.9	Texas Stadium	18
7.1	Texas State Aquarium	21
7.1	Dallas Zoo	22
5.9	Houston Space Center	23
4.7	Trader's Village (Grand Prairie)	24
4.0	Big Bend National Park	25
3.7	Houston Zoological Garden	26
3.6	Bush Presidential Library	27
2.0	Grapevine Mills	28
1.7	Galveston Strand	29
1.2	Natural Bridge	30

*Source: Office of the Governor Economic Development and Tourism.*

#### **Shortened Summer Tourist Season**

The most noticeable result of changes in the school calendar has been a negative impact on the summer seasonal industries such as travel, tourism, amusements and summer camps. Travel industry representatives believe that a longer summer break would improve the tourism sector. The Comptroller's office estimates that extending the summer break by two weeks would generate an additional \$28 million per day for the state's tourist destinations; \$392 million for the two additional weeks.

Summer is essentially the entire business season for coastal areas and water and theme parks. But all of the state's 30 top travel and tourism attractions are affected by the length of the summer travel season (Exhibit 14).

Six of the top 30 attractions in Texas, including the top two, the River Walk and the Alamo, are in or near San Antonio. For San Antonio and South Texas, a shortened season represents a considerable net reduction of economic activity. San Antonio lost 2,800 jobs—more than 28 percent—in amusement and recreation from June to September 2002. Corpus Christi lost 11.5 percent of its jobs in amusement and recreation from June to September 2002. The metro area, including Padre Island, suffered a 14.5 percent loss.

Summer activities can also provide a meaningful learning experience for children and their families. Visiting locations such as cultural and historical sites, natural geological formations, and aquatic parks and zoos can enhance a child’s knowledge and make related topics come alive in the classroom.

**Higher School Utility Bills**

To analyze the average cost of electricity in different months of the school year, an independent organization collected electric bills from 20 districts of varying size and geographic location across the state for the 2001-02 school year. These bills were given to Comptroller staff for analysis. Estimates are based upon an average of three weeks of operation in August, four weeks in May, and two weeks in June (assuming some summer school).

Using these assumptions, the average per-student, per-day electricity cost in August is 89 cents; in May, 45 cents; and in June, 78 cents. Given statewide enrollment of about 4.3 million for the 2003-04 school year, the estimated statewide electricity cost of an average August day is approximately \$3.8 million. The cost of a May day is about \$1.9 million, while the cost of a June day is about \$3.4 million.

A later start day, then, can result in savings even if it involves extending the school year into late May or early June. The greatest savings, however, are achieved if the school year is compressed to avoid—as many August school days as possible.

A separate study of calendar 2003 utility bill data, including electricity, natural gas and water, derived from a sample of 43 school districts with 59 schools in various areas of the state, estimated the year-round average cost for all utilities at \$2.9 million per day (Exhibit 15).

**EXHIBIT 15**

**Estimated Daily Utility Costs Based on Student Enrollment 2003-04**

	<b>Student Enrollment 2003-04</b>	<b>Average Utility Cost per Student per Day *</b>	<b>Utility Costs Per School Day (Electric and Gas)</b>
Early Education	27,571		
Pre-K	166,579		
Kinder	323,502		
First	338,727		

Second	325,943		
Third	323,373		
Fourth	321,788		
<b>Total Elementary</b>	<b>1,827,483</b>	<b>\$.61</b>	<b>\$1,107,020</b>
Fifth	324,046		
Sixth	327,093		
Seventh	329,560		
Eighth	324,316		
<b>Total Middle School</b>	<b>1,305,015</b>	<b>\$.64</b>	<b>\$832,448</b>
Ninth	375,358		
Sophomore	309,187		
Junior	267,682		
Senior	243,303		
<b>Total High School</b>	<b>1,195,530</b>	<b>\$.79</b>	<b>\$938,862</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,328,028</b>		<b>\$2,878,331</b>

\* Derived from a sample set of 43 school districts with 59 schools from various areas of the state.

*Source: Compiled by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.*

According to a November 2002 account in the *Tulsa World*, Tulsa, one of Oklahoma's public school districts, saved nearly \$500,000 by delaying the start of school until after Labor Day. Electricity costs for the district \$465,000 and natural gas costs by \$4,300 for the July to September period, compared with the same time period in previous years.

Not only does the heat in late summer increase the cost of utilities, but there are also dangers to students and staff from heat and air-quality related factors.

## **Higher School Operating Costs**

Texas school districts employ about 600,000 persons. Some of these employees work year-round; others work only when school is in session; and still others begin working just before the school year begins and work a given number of days after school finishes. Data reported through the Public Education Information Management System indicates school district employees were expected to work an average of 195 days in the 2003-04 school year. This translates to a little more than nine months out of each year in which most districts need to be fully staffed.

Sixty percent of school district employees are in professional positions such as teachers, librarians, counselors, or administrators, whose salaries are established based on the number of days they are expected to work. The remaining 40 percent, about 236,000 employees, are paraprofessionals and support or auxiliary staff. For this analysis, it is assumed that employees working fewer than 240 days work schedules based on the school year. Those working more than 240 days may be year-round maintenance personnel or central office staff that would be unaffected by a change in the school year calendar.

About 196,000 non-professional employees work fewer than 240 days a year; their average work year is 192 days. Budgeted payroll data from 2003-04 shows that these employees earn an average of \$79 a day. If the school year were compressed so that these employees worked fewer days, the savings would be \$15.5 million per day.

## **Conclusion**

Compressing the school calendar to extend the summer break is popular with parents, teachers, businesses and tourists, although the idea still faces resistance. Adding holidays during the academic year does not have a direct or indirect impact on the number of instructional days.

Summer has always been a time for families to relax, take vacations and spend quality time together. Although schools provide formal education, family values and self-esteem are learned at home.

Based upon an analysis of the more than 400 school calendars, Texas schools today appear to offer approximately the same number of instructional days as in 1949, yet offer substantially shorter summer breaks (Exhibit 16).

The academic benefits of stretching the instructional year have not been proved, but the economic costs are known. Earlier and later start and end dates appear to be driven primarily by the scheduling of optional holidays rather than staff development or work days. Districts that choose to start and end school earlier and later than the norm appear to be doing so at a cost to teachers, students, parents and our state's economy as a whole.

## **EXHIBIT 16**

### **Comparison of School Calendars 2004-05 versus 1949-50**

Element	Average Instructional Days 2004-05	Gilmer Aikins Act 1949
Instructional days	177	9 months X 20 = 180
Holidays other than staff development or work days	24	15
Staff development or work days during school year	4	0
Average school year	9.5 months/41 weeks	9 months/39 weeks
Average summer break	11 weeks	13 weeks

Clearly, compressing the school year, while maintaining a 180-day instructional calendar has proven successful in some of the highest performing states in the nation and is feasible under current Texas law, and with current accountability requirements.

### **EXHIBIT 17**

#### **Economic Impact (in millions) of Early School Start Dates**

<b>Lost Personal Income</b>	<b>Income lost per day</b>	<b>Two Week Loss</b>
Students	\$7.9	\$79.0
Teachers	\$3.8	\$38.0
Support staff	\$2.4	\$24.0
Migrant Workers	\$3.1	\$31.0
<b>Loss to Tourist Economies</b>		
	<b>Loss per day</b>	<b>Two Week Loss</b>
Tourist Economies (Calculated based upon two week estimate divided by 14 calendar days.)	\$28.0	\$392.0
<b>Costs to Schools</b>		
	<b>Cost per day</b>	<b>Two Week Cost</b>
School operations	\$15.5	\$155.0
School utilities (\$1.9 to \$3.8 million, depending on the time of the year; \$2.9 for average day)	\$2.9	\$29.0
<b>Costs to Parents and Teachers</b>		
	<b>Cost per day</b>	<b>Two Week Cost</b>
Child care costs for parents	\$3.6	\$36.0
Child care costs for teachers	\$0.6	\$6.0
<b>Total losses/costs</b>	<b>\$67.8</b>	<b>\$790.0</b>