

## Point – Counterpoint

### Arguments For and Against a Late-August School Start Date

#### Local Control

##### Opponents say:

- Local elected officials are better able to set school calendars that work for their district.
- School Board members are elected by the people and should have the power to set the school calendar.
- Each school system has vastly different needs and that one school-start date does not fit all.
- Local school administrators know what's best for children.

##### Proponents say:

- Local school systems should be allowed to set their own school calendars. Holidays, teacher workdays, fall breaks, winter breaks, spring breaks and semester tests should all be set at the local level. Setting an earliest start date for K-12 public schools in Alabama would continue to allow that.
- July and early-August school start dates create headaches for working parents who need quality child care during additional breaks throughout the school year. The vast majority of educational programs for children outside of the classroom can't be offered during non-summer months because the college students needed to staff them are back in school themselves.
- It is also important to remember the state pays the largest portion of the education tab and thus should ensure non-instructional costs are kept to a minimum.
- This will ensure the bulk of taxpayer dollars go towards educational programming, classroom supplies and teacher salaries.
- Federal guidelines require Adequate Yearly Progress Reports be provided to parents no later than the first day of school. The 2004 No Child Left Behind Accountability Workbook completed by the Alabama State Department of Education and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (Attachment F) said the State Department of Education's Final Determination of school status should be issued by "Mid-Month" in August. Most Alabama schools began August 8<sup>th</sup> or earlier, making compliance with their own plan impossible.
- Federal law requires parents be notified of the academic status of their children's school before school starts so they might transfer from failing schools. Alabama's continuing failure to comply with this law jeopardizes the continued receipt of over \$230 million a year in federal Title I education funding.
- In the summer of 2004, the North Carolina legislature passed a law requiring schools in that state begin classes no earlier than August 25th. North Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Virginia and Texas all enforce school start date laws. Many other states are considering them, including, Georgia, South Carolina, South Dakota, Arizona and Tennessee.

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#### Fall Semester Exams

##### Opponents say:

- A later school start date will preclude the first semester from being completed prior to the Winter Break and students do better if they are able to take exams before the long break.

##### Proponents say:

- In past years, Alabama schools that began classes in July and those schools that started after mid-August completed one semester before Christmas – if they chose to do so.
  - We have been unable to find research to support the assumption that students perform better academically if the first semester is complete prior to the winter break. To the contrary, evidence that supports the calendar configuration does not impact academic performance.
  - No academic benefits from early school starts have been shown to exist, in fact, schools in top-performing states start classes later than schools in Alabama. The top 10 academic states, in four commonly used state education ranking systems, have two things in common - they begin the school year in late August or early September and administer semester finals after the winter break.
  - Long-term learning is enhanced when students have an opportunity to review and study material that they have been presented over a semester in a thoughtful and timely manner. This is called the "spacing effect" and is well documented in psychology literature.
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## Teacher's Continuing Education

### Opponents say:

- Institutions of higher learning should modify their schedules to accommodate teachers' needs.
- It is not the school systems responsibility to set a school calendar that works with the summer sessions offered by colleges and universities.
- Alabama ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the number of teachers holding National Board Certification in 2004.

### Proponents say:

- While the Alabama program encouraging National Board Certification is fabulous and should serve as a model to other states, less than two percent of Alabama teachers currently hold National Board Certification. Requiring teachers to complete the vigorous requirements during the school year takes time away from classroom students. A longer summer may make the program more appealing and certainly would not do harm.
  - Evidence shows that most colleges and universities pull from many different school systems. Institutions of higher learning cannot be expected to set summer class schedules around several school system start and end dates.
  - It is difficult to create advanced learning opportunities for teachers when school system calendars vary by weeks.
  - Many of our dedicated teachers are currently not certified in the area in which they teach. Federal education law requires certification in areas of teaching for all by the year 2012.
  - Teachers often receive increased pay as advanced degrees are received and we should maximize teachers have to achieve advanced learning.
  - Research shows that students taught by teachers who hold national certification score better on standardized tests.
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## Attendance Lag

### Opponents say:

- Attendance during the first few days, or weeks, of school is low regardless of when the school year begins.

### Proponents say:

- When the school year begins in July or early August, many Alabama school districts have low attendance the first few weeks of school. It is well known that school systems across the state lose hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece each year due to low attendance during the first days of school when attendance figures are calculated and used to determine state funding.

- Prior to passage of an August 21 school start bill in Texas, research found over 250,000 students not in school on the first day of class. The year following the law's implementation, attendance on the first day of school increased 60%.
  - Even the best teachers can't teach students who aren't in class.
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## **Student Employment**

### **Opponents say:**

- Student work is a matter of personal choice and the school calendar should not be structured around it.

### **Proponents say:**

- The majority of students today don't work for the "fun" of it. Many work to help with household expenses or to save for higher learning.
  - The Employment Policies Institute found that students who worked during high school had higher paying jobs upon graduation.
  - Teachers also report students with part-time jobs are more focused and more appreciative of their education than others.
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## **Agrarian Calendar**

### **Opponents say:**

- We should not continue to use an "agrarian calendar" in this modern age.

### **Proponents say:**

- We couldn't agree more. Kids today no longer need to attend classes on the agricultural-based school calendar that our grandparents remember from the early 1900s and the Great Depression, when schools were regularly closed down in the spring and fall so children and teachers could work on farms and help with the planting and harvesting.
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## **Equal Number of Days in the Semesters**

### **Opponents say:**

- Early-August school start dates are necessary to allow the first semester to end prior to the winter break and ensure equal number of days in the semester.
- Unequal semesters are unfair for students taking single semester advanced placement tests. Classes would be more difficult for students taking the class during the shorter semester.

### **Proponents say:**

- The Alabama State School Board requires standardized tests required by the federal government be given to all students at the same time statewide during the second semester. Many Alabama school systems, including

Birmingham and Mountain Brook, among others, have recognized that the second semester must be 10 days or more longer than the first semester in order to equalize instructional days.

- Schools are compared to each other based on students' performance on those standardized tests given at the same time statewide in the spring. That comparison is only fair if each school has the same amount of time to prepare students for those tests.
  - Students who start school early do not spend more time in class. Alabama state law requires public school students receive a minimum of 175 days of instruction. Alabama schools that start in July and those that start after mid-August complete one semester before Christmas.
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## **Early-August School Start Dates Necessary to End School Year in May**

### **Opponents say:**

- Parents want the school year to end prior to Memorial Day. This necessitates an early-August school start date.

### **Proponents say:**

- Surveys in other states have shown parents support the school year ending by late-May or early June.
  - Alabama law requires 175 instructional days for students. The 2004-2005 calendar shows 202 weekdays between August 21 and Memorial Day.
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## **Early-August School Start Dates Allow More Frequent and Much Needed Breaks During the School Year**

### **Opponents say:**

- Teachers and students enjoy mini-breaks during the school year. Frequent small breaks keep them refreshed and prevent student and teacher burnout.
- More breaks during the school year and a shorter summer break are better for student achievement.

### **Proponents say:**

- July and early-August school start dates create headaches for working parents who need quality child care during additional breaks throughout the school year. The vast majority of educational programs for children outside of the classroom can't be offered during non-summer months because the college students needed to staff them are back in school themselves.
- Calendars with many breaks interrupt the flow of learning. Valuable instructional time is lost in the days preceding and following each break in the school calendar. When their routine is disrupted, children require time to readjust.
- There is no evidence year-round school calendars, as calendars with frequent breaks are called, are better for student achievement, as proponents of year round school calendars claim. Actually, a recent study by world renowned education researcher, Dr. Gene V. Glass, found: "These arguments often rely on data drawn from laboratory experiments where subjects memorize nonsense syllables or perform other non-meaningful tasks. The relevance of these studies to actual classroom practice is questionable."
- News articles report school districts around the country have dropped year round school calendars for two basic reasons – increased non-instructional cost and no increase in academic performance.
- As school starts have crept into July from Labor Day, children are no longer able to participate in church or civic-sponsored summer programs, attend summer camps or be part of summer programs sponsored by local Park and Rec Departments.

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## Economic Impact

### Opponents say:

- School calendars should not be set around economic interests such as taxes collected from the travel and tourism industry or school utility costs.
- The early school start date often provides families the opportunity to travel at less expensive and less crowded times.

### Proponents say:

- As noted above, we have been unable to find research that shows starting school early benefits student academic achievement.
- We have found research supporting the need for increased dollars earmarked for education and research touting the benefits of youth work experiences
- Oklahoma Public Schools moved their school start date from August 19 to the day after Labor Day and saved approximately \$500,000 through reduced utility costs. When local school systems increase their operating efficiency, the savings become available for teacher salaries, classroom supplies and educational programming.
- Studies in Texas and North Carolina have found early school start dates cost their economies hundreds of millions of dollars each year.
- Giving children their summers back would also raise revenues without raising taxes. A South Carolina study estimates over \$8 million in lost state and local tax revenues due to early school starts.
- The Alabama Legislative Fiscal Office confirms economic losses in Alabama due to early school starts.
- School administrators and teachers are continually reminding elected officials of the need for more educational dollars. Alabama taxpayers have made it clear time and again that they do not support tax increases. By pushing back the start of the school year we would be eliminating one of the most expensive cooling months of the school year and increasing tax revenue to the state.
- Families with children in school find it difficult or impossible to schedule vacations, visit grandparents, participate in youth sports, church or civic programs, go to summer camp – or just let kids be kids – during the short summer.
- According to research done by the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, almost 55% of Alabama travelers live in Alabama. Most travel and tourism in Alabama takes place during the summer months. School holidays at other times of year increases the likelihood of Alabamians either not being able to travel at all, or taking their travel dollars out of state.
- Travel and tourism is perhaps the only Alabama industry that can never be outsourced to other countries, or even to other states. The jobs provided by this industry will stay in Alabama and support Alabama families. The taxes collected from travel and tourism support state and local government services. With no negative impact on student achievement and only minor adjustments in scheduling, we can support the Alabama families whose livelihood depends on travel-related businesses.

<http://www.savealabamasummers.org>