



School Calendar Issue Brief

Background

Public opinion favors local control of the school calendar.¹ Setting school calendars was a local issue until state lawmakers seized that authority in 2004. Additional school calendar changes were inserted into a 2012 technical bill. The state-mandated one-size-fits-all legislation requires school districts to begin on the Monday closest to August 26 and end on the Friday closest to June 11.

North Carolina is one of two states in the country that has a required end date. It's one of 14 states with a mandated start date. Exceptions to the NC calendar law include the state's 185 public charter schools, which serve more than 100-thousand students, the state's 100+ low performing Restart schools, the state's Innovative School District, early colleges, and Renewal School Systems (Rowan-Salisbury Schools).

Devastating storms have disrupted North Carolina's public school calendars for years. In the fall of 2018, Hurricanes Florence and Michael impacted almost 80% of the state's school districts.

- ✓ More than 60% of LEAs closed school for at least three days
- ✓ More than 35% of LEAs shut down for at least one week
- ✓ More than 10% of LEAs had no school for at least a month

Note: For many districts, this was the second devastating hurricane season in three years. In 2016-17, Hurricane Matthew forced dozens of districts to miss school for an extended amount of time.

Winter storms also hit the state hard annually. This past December, a snow storm impacted more than 60% of NC school districts, several for more than one week. Due to the restrictive nature of the calendar law, instructional time is often made-up on teacher workdays, holidays, Saturdays or during scheduled vacations. A "good cause" waiver allows LEAs to start a week early if they've been closed eight or more days per year during any 4 of the last 10 years due to severe weather conditions. However, it's not unusual for school districts in western NC to miss 20 or more days of school in any given school year.

The existing law sets annual instructional time requirements at either 185 instructional days or 1,025 hours. According to the 2017 NC General Assembly staff report, the **number of LEAs with less than 180 days of instruction increased 57% from 2015-16 to 2016-17.**²

Even though classrooms open in late August, high school fall sports and band start-up on August 1 – schedules for extracurriculars have not changed to coincide with the State-mandated school calendar. Typically, one to two football games are played before the first day of school.

As a result of starting the school year so late, first semester exams are taken after winter break, which causes the K-12 second semester to begin two to three weeks later than community colleges and

¹ Page 1, [PED Report # 2017-01](#) to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, Feb. 13, 2017.

² Page 11, PED Report # 2017-01, Feb. 13, 2017.

universities. The calendar misalignment hurts local workforce development efforts by making it extremely difficult for high school students or recent graduates to take courses at a community college or university during the second semester.

Highlights of 2017 Legislative PED Report on Current School Calendar Law³:

- ✓ 94+% of superintendents say it impedes their ability to schedule teacher workdays, school make-up days, and to align high school schedules with the schedule of community colleges.
- ✓ 91% of school superintendents perceive it decreases high school student performance.
- ✓ 72% of North Carolina parents and school personnel say having final exams before winter break is very or extremely important.
- ✓ July is the most preferred month for family summer vacations, June is 2nd, August is 3rd (13%).
- ✓ 41% of families do not have a preference for which summer month to vacation.
- ✓ When LEAs had local control, 90+% started school in August. Most LEAs maintained a summer break equal to or greater than 10 weeks.

In response to the report, NC Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson wrote on behalf of the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction, “The SBE and DPI believe that school calendars should be set by those elected officials closest to their communities, local school board members.”⁴

NCSBA Position

NCSBA believes the General Assembly should grant local boards of education the authority to set local school calendars. School boards are in the best position to determine the most appropriate school calendar by weighing the unique factors of its community - geography, demographics, climate, culture, local needs, and the economy. Benefits to local control include:

- ✓ Schedule first semester exams before winter break
- ✓ Align K-12 calendars with Community College and University calendars
- ✓ Provide additional instruction for AP/IB students prior to end of year exams, which are given on the same day nationwide whether or not students have learned all the material
- ✓ Coordinate additional professional development and planning opportunities
- ✓ Reduce summer learning loss and achievement gaps
- ✓ Improve student achievement
- ✓ Build anticipated weather-related school closures into the calendar
- ✓ Better align academic and extracurricular schedules

NCSBA firmly believes the current school calendar law is not educationally sound and that it’s doing North Carolina’s public-school children a disservice. If calendar flexibility has shown to improve student achievement at low performing schools and charter schools, it’s a tool that should be available to ALL public school students.

³ PED Report # 2017-01 to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, Feb. 13, 2017.

⁴ Agency Response, PED Report # 2017-01, Feb. 13, 2017.