

# MAINTAINING LOCAL AUTONOMY ON SCHOOL CALENDAR DECISIONS



Mandating a post-Labor Day start is not only counterproductive to the needs of our students and educators, but it could also jeopardize the academic progress that we must continue to make.



School calendars should be developed locally, by parents, educators, and community members with the best interests of students in mind, not mandated from the top down at the request of the tourism industry.

**A state mandated post-Labor Day start date would widen achievement gaps and negatively impact student achievement.**

Proponents of the mandatory post-Labor Day start date argue that the school year should still end at the same time. In this scenario, local school districts would eliminate days off during the school year, giving students a longer summer break. This would worsen “summer brain drain,” the loss of math and reading ability that comes from gaps in instructional time.

## FACT

Local school systems already have the authority to start their school year after Labor Day.

Students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds suffer from a far greater summer brain drain than their peers who are more likely to participate in summer programs and read regularly. Studies have shown that students from low-income homes lose two to three months of the reading ability they gained in the previous school year, while their more affluent peers make overall gains. From an educational standpoint, it is incredibly counterproductive to mandate a policy that would allow poorer students to slip behind to instead focus on encouraging their more affluent peers to spend time at the beach.

Advocates for mandating a post-Labor Day start also propose cutting professional development days for educators. Such a solution is deeply ignorant of the needs of our school systems, as this training is crucial to our efforts to successfully implement the Common Core, develop effective strategies to close achievement gaps, create safe schools, and other state and local priorities.

Mandating a post-Labor Day start also would mean fewer days of instruction before students must sit for high stakes PARCC, AP, IB, SAT, and other tests that have an outsize influence on the future of students, educators, and schools. Fewer days to learn and prepare before these tests will only serve to lower scores on them.

## FACT

None of the state's 24 school systems support a state mandate on the start date, and neither does the interim state superintendent of schools.

## FACT

The Department of Legislative Services estimates that changing all school start dates to after Labor Day would fail to bring in new revenue—instead shifting economic activity to late August from other parts of the year.



*MSEA is the 71,000-member affiliate of the National Education Association, which represents 3 million education employees across the country. MSEA is the state's professional employee organization.*

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## School calendars are impacted by local factors—including weather and testing—and should therefore be decided at the local level.

Locally determined instructional demands, professional development needs, holiday planning, and winter weather accommodations must be the factors that guide school calendar decisions across the state. It is misguided to mandate school calendar decisions on the basis of trying to sell more ice cream cones and hotel rooms rather than on what is best for local communities and students.

Right now, local school districts have full authority over their calendars, as long as they include 180 school days within a 10-month window. That means districts already have the ability to set their school start date after Labor Day. Several counties have done so historically, and Worcester County has done so recently. Each local school system has a calendar planning committee that considers various factors including testing, holidays, winter weather planning, and other issues that impact each system differently.

Local districts need to weigh many unique factors when developing their school calendar. In Virginia—where a post-Labor Day mandate is increasingly unworkable for local school systems—the vast majority of school districts now routinely receive waivers from the requirement because of local issues like inclement weather. This trend led Virginia State Senator Tommy Norment to say, “Eventually the law is going to have so many exemptions for individual school divisions, it could just as well be repealed.” In fact, the Virginia House of Delegates passed legislation earlier this year to repeal their post-Labor Day mandate by a decisive 71-26 margin.

A one-size-fits-all model cannot account for all the factors that a local jurisdiction must consider while developing a calendar that works for its students. All districts should continue to be able to choose the start date that works best for their community.

## It is unclear whether shifting back school start dates will generate new tax revenue.

The most common argument for a state mandated school start date is increased economic development and tax revenue. The more time off during the summer, the more families who will take vacations and increase consumer spending—especially in places like Ocean City and Deep Creek Lake.

But the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) is not convinced. Their analysis states, “tax revenues would increase in August and decline in subsequent months, and due to the timing of the effect, largely be revenue neutral in a given fiscal year.” Because students would still be in school for the same amount of days, families would merely shift their consumer spending to a different time of year—not spend additional money overall. This means the state would not bring in additional revenue from a mandatory school start date. The DLS estimate remains the only independent fiscal or economic analysis of a mandatory post-Labor Day start.

**A state mandate to start school after Labor Day would widen achievement gaps, lower student achievement scores, and interfere with educator professional development—all for a policy that would likely result in no new state revenue. Local school decisions should be made by local school systems. Legislation (HB 1349/ SB 767) and resolutions (HJ 5) to enact this mandate should receive unfavorable reports.**