

ISSUE: School Calendar Changes

The General Assembly in 2004 mandated that most public schools start classes no earlier than Aug. 25 and end no later than June 10, beginning with the 2005-06 school year. Since implementation, this mandate has negatively impacted students, teachers and the learning process in public schools in many ways, as indicated below:



Impact On Students

- **High School Reform** – The calendars for high schools, community colleges and universities are out-of-sync by approximately two weeks. This causes scheduling problems for high school students who take courses on higher education campuses to assist with college preparation and/or job-readiness. The issue is most pronounced in the second semester, when college courses begin before high schools complete their final exams in mid-January. It also is hindering the high school reform effort, which depends in large part on the ability of high schools, community colleges and universities to have cooperative arrangements and coordinated calendars.
- **Testing Concerns** – High school students on the block schedule must take high-stakes end-of-course exams in January after the winter holiday break. Many students and teachers have complained that this timing is not optimal for ensuring student success. Similarly, the amount of instructional time students have before taking Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests has decreased and has drawn concerns among some of the state's highest achieving students.

Impact On Teachers

- **Teacher Workdays** – The calendar law's reduction in five teacher workdays and restrictions on when remaining workdays must occur limits the time teachers have throughout the school year to meet with parents, complete progress reports and offer remediation to struggling students.
- **Professional Development** – The reduction in workdays limits the opportunity for school systems to provide professional development training that helps teachers upgrade their skills and maintain their licensure, thus requiring them to earn most of their renewal credits on their own time and expense. Teachers' availability to enroll in higher education courses also is reduced, since their teaching schedule conflicts with their college course schedule. These limitations are being exacerbated by the "highly qualified" requirements of No Child Left Behind.

SOLUTION:

The 2007 General Assembly should take the following steps to ensure that the school calendar facilitates rather than impedes the delivery of a quality education to students across North Carolina:

1. Restore the ability of local school districts to set the school calendar based on the specific needs of their students and their communities.
2. Realign the public school calendar with the calendars of community colleges and universities to facilitate dual enrollment and enhance educational opportunities for students. (Support House Bills 359 and 473 and Senate Bill 461.)
3. Reinstate the five teacher workdays eliminated by the 2004 school calendar changes, since those days are essential for professional development of school personnel. (Support Senate Bill 191 and House Bill 360.)



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