

School Calendar Bills Seek Changes In Mandated Start Dates

From NCASA's Legislative Link 3-27-09

Legislators are taking another run at a 2004 law that requires most school systems to begin classes no earlier than August 25. Seven separate bills have been filed that would undo the requirement, either in select counties or across the state.

Four of the bills are aimed at mountain counties, where cancellation of school days by snow can cause havoc with school calendars. The current law gives flexibility for systems where more than eight snow days are typical. But Rep. Phil Haire, D-Jackson, said the ceiling for flexibility is too high. Haire has filed a bill that would allow six mountain counties to begin classes as early as Aug. 11.

"The area is different, so you can't take the paint brush of starting school on August 25 and make it fit," Haire said. "It just doesn't fit."

Haire's bill was heard by the House Local Government II Committee on Wednesday, but no vote was taken. A bill filed by Rep. Bruce Goforth, D-Buncombe, which would push up the start date for Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools, is also scheduled to be heard by the committee when it meets again at 11 a.m. Wednesday, April 1.

A bill allowing a start date on the second Monday of August for all school systems in the state has been assigned to the House Education Committee.

The bills proposing school calendar changes include the following:

- **H483/S455, School Calendar Flexibility/Some LEAs** – Sponsored by Rep. Phil Haire in the House and Sen. John Snow in the Senate, the bills would modify the required opening and closing dates for school districts in Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties.
- **H499/S554 School Calendar Flexibility/2 LEAs** – Sponsored by Rep. Bruce Goforth in the House and Sen. Martin Nesbitt in the Senate, the bills would modify the required opening and closing dates for Asheville City Schools and Buncombe County Schools.
- **H547, School Calendar Flexibility/3 LEAs** – Sponsored by Rep. David Guice, the bill would modify the required opening and closing dates for school districts in Henderson, Polk, and Transylvania counties.
- **H593, Change School Starting Date** – Sponsored by Rep. Paul Luebke, the bill would allow schools statewide to open no earlier than the second Monday in August.
- **S478, Modify School Calendar Law** – Sponsored by Sen. Don East, the bill would eliminate any mandated opening and closing date for school districts statewide and would allow local boards of education to determine their own school calendar.

While enjoying some support in the House, Senate Democratic leaders in the past have shown no inclination to consider bills to revisit the 2004 law. Lobbyists for the tourism industry continue to work against all proposed legislation that calls for an earlier school start, saying that would cut into family vacation time at North Carolina tourist attractions.

The North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA) supports all of the proposed changes to the school calendar law that would restore more local flexibility for school districts to tailor their school calendars in the best interest of their students. NCASA members who support these proposals are encouraged to contact your own House and Senate members to make them aware of why changes are needed in the school calendar law.

Contact information for all House and Senate members, as well as information on the status these school calendar bills and other legislation, is at <http://www.ncasa.net/displaycommon.cfm?an=3>.