

2 Calendar Bills Fail; 3rd On Workday Changes Scheduled

From NCASA's Legislative Link 4-3-09

A House committee on Wednesday voted down two separate bills that would have exempted a handful of mountain school districts from a requirement that classes not start before Aug. 25 each year. The bills seeking exemptions from the law come five years after legislators established the date in response to complaints from parents and tourism-related business owners that school systems were beginning classes earlier and earlier each year and cutting into family vacation time.

Rep. Phil Haire, D-Jackson, whose bill would have exempted six mountain county school systems from the school start date, told members of the House Local Government II Committee that mountain counties, because of missed days due to snow, need more flexibility. But tourism industry opponents cited poll results showing that 71 percent of the small sampling of North Carolinians who were contacted for the poll support the current school start date. Both Haire's bill and a similar bill affecting Buncombe County, sponsored by Rep. Bruce Goforth, D-Buncombe, both failed on 8-5 votes.

A separate school calendar measure proposed by Rep. Haire has been scheduled for consideration by the House Education Committee at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 7.

House Bill 636, Staff Development OK on Protected Workdays, would not adjust the mandated start and end dates for any public schools but would seek to address another problem concerning the lack of time available within the current school calendar to provide necessary professional development for teachers and other personnel. Rep. Haire's proposal would allow some of the five current teacher workdays that are now restricted only for teacher planning and paperwork time to also be used for scheduling training that all teachers need. In addition, upon a request from the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA), Rep. Haire has agreed to amend the bill to allow the five days to also be used for making up lost instructional days due to weather-related closings and other state emergencies.

It is imperative that NCASA members who support these proposed changes to the allowable uses of restricted teacher workdays contact all House Education Committee members before their April 7 meeting to urge them to vote in favor of Rep. Haire's bill and his proposed change on making up lost instructional time. Please also encourage teachers to support this measure, since it may provide school districts with a viable option for making up lost instructional time without cutting into spring break, as many districts are now forced to do when they encounter weather-related closings mid-way through the school year.

A key point to make in all contacts with legislators on this particular school calendar bill is that it does not affect the opening and closing dates preferred by the state's tourism industry, and it could actually help preserve spring break time, which is mid-year family vacation time for many school personnel.

Contact information for all House Education Committee members and access to Rep. Haire's House Bill 636 are available at <http://www.ncasa.net/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=200>.

Members who receive feedback from their contacts with representatives on this issue are asked to share that information with NCASA Assistant Executive Director Katherine W. Joyce at kjoyce@ncasa.net.