

School Calendar Bill Gets 1 Last Chance To Clear Committee!

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The House Commerce Committee on Tuesday narrowly defeated a bill that would permit school districts to start classes on the second Monday in August, but that legislation – House Bill 593 – is being given another shot to clear this committee and move on for consideration by the full House of Representatives. The bill is slated for a Commerce Committee hearing at 2 p.m. Monday, May 11.

The bill failed on a 13-14 vote in the committee this week, when five of the committee members were absent. **The committee members who voted in favor of the bill included the following:**

- Rep. Margaret Dickson, D-Cumberland and the committee chairman
- Rep. Alma Adams, D-Guilford
- Rep. Vann Braxton, D-Lenoir
- Rep. Bob England, D-Rutherford
- Rep. Jean Farmer-Butterfield, D-Wilson
- Rep. Bruce Goforth, D-Buncombe
- Rep. Ty Harrell, D-Wake
- Rep. Bryan Holloway, R-Stokes
- Rep. Grey Mills, R-Iredell
- Rep. Garland Pierce, D-Robeson
- Rep. Ray Rapp, D-Madison
- Rep. Winkie Wilkins, D-Person
- Rep. Michael Wray, D-Northampton

Voting against the bill this week were the following committee members:

- Rep. Cary Allred, R-Alamance
- Rep. Marilyn Avila, R-Wake
- Rep. Hugh Blackwell, R-Burke
- Rep. Curtis Blackwood, R-Union
- Rep. James Boles, R-Moore
- Rep. Larry Brown, R-Forsyth
- Rep. Phillip Frye, R-Mitchell
- Rep. Mitch Gillespie, R-McDowell
- Rep. William McGee, R-Forsyth
- Rep. Bill Owens, D-Pasquotank
- Rep. Ruth Samuelson, R-Mecklenburg
- Rep. Edgar Starnes, R-Caldwell
- Rep. Fred Steen, R-Rowan
- Rep. Randy Stewart, D-Nash

Members who were not present for the vote included: Reps. Lucy Allen, D-Franklin; Nelson Cole, D-Rockingham; Elmer Floyd, D-Cumberland; Cullie Tarleton, D-Watauga; and Edith Warren, D-Pitt.

It is critical for all members of the North Carolina Association of School Administrators who support this legislation to **contact members of the House Commerce Committee at home this weekend or in Raleigh on Monday before the 2 p.m. committee hearing to urge them to be present and to vote in favor of House Bill 593!** Even if the legislator voted against the bill this week, he or she needs to hear from school administrators on the importance of this bill.

If the bill does not clear the committee, the issue of allowing school districts to start school earlier than Aug. 25 may not be considered again until the new General Assembly convenes in 2011. The main reasons the bill is so important to public schools include allowing alignment of public school calendars with those of community colleges and universities and allowing high school students to take high-stakes exams before their winter break.

The Commerce Committee needs to hear that aside from the many educational reasons for allowing an earlier school start for schools, there also are economic reasons to support this change as well. Some of those reasons include:

- The current school calendar forces many school districts to cut into spring break and Saturdays for making up missed days due to inclement weather. The missed days made up during spring break take family travel time and cut into tourism spending at that time of year. In addition, Saturday make-up days prevent families from taking a weekend trip or visiting local businesses for entertainment and recreation purposes.
- Since schools cannot complete first semester high school exams before the winter break now, family travel to mountain ski resorts or other parts of the state are being curtailed so that students can study for high-stakes tests they must take in January.
- The school calendar mandate was put in place to benefit the tourism industry, but the school calendar should be based first and foremost on the educational needs of students and ensuring they can take advantage of higher education courses in high school to enhance their learning experience and preparation for attending college or entering the workforce.

Contact information for all House Commerce Committee members is available at:
<http://www.ncasa.net/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=241>.