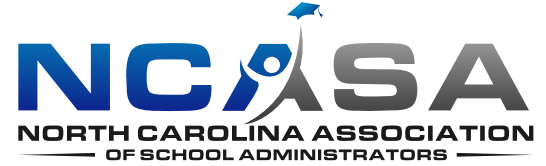


# RESTORE STUDENT-FOCUSED SCHOOL CALENDAR FLEXIBILITY



**BACKGROUND** | In 2004, the North Carolina General Assembly took school calendar authority away from local school districts through legislation mandating when the public school instructional year could begin and end.

The school calendar law was revised again by a technical corrections bill in 2012 to require all school districts to begin on the Monday closest to August 26 and end on the Friday closest to June 11, meaning students did not return to school until August 29 in some years. Currently, North Carolina is one of only 14 states with a mandated start date, and one of only two states with a required end date.

**Impact on Student Learning** | These legislative mandates were passed at the behest of travel and tourism groups, which argued that North Carolina needed to “preserve the summer months.” Yet research has shown that fewer families are choosing to take lengthy vacations over the summer, and those who do prefer to vacation in July, not June or August. Research also shows that summer learning loss is a real and growing problem, particularly for low-income and non-traditional students. Further, by pushing back the school start date in August, North Carolina’s school calendar law creates scheduling issues for students with dual enrollment at community colleges, students enrolled in AP/IB classes which give exams on the same day nationwide, and students engaged in extracurricular activities, such as sports, which must begin at the beginning of August.

**Impact of Hurricanes and Winter Storms** | The need to restore local calendar flexibility has been further reinforced by numerous weather emergencies in the past year, including Hurricanes Florence and Michael, which impacted almost 80% of the state’s school districts. These hurricanes caused more than 10% of school districts to miss school for at least one

month, requiring legislators to pass special waivers excepting significantly impacted schools from the one-size-fits-all calendar law. Also, in several circumstances since the school calendar law’s implementation, the General Assembly has taken special actions to allow some Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to “forgive multiple missed instructional days” and shorten their academic year due to inclement weather school closings.

Instead of allowing local school districts to create flexible school calendars to meet their unique community and school needs, especially in times of crises, the current law only allows school districts to apply for difficult-to-obtain school calendar law waivers that rely on a decade of weather history in each district rather than the actual impact of weather that students and educators are facing in any given year. “Good cause weather waivers” require districts to show their schools had been closed all day for 8 days per year during 4 of 10 years, due to inclement weather or other emergency situations. This provision does not allow school districts to adjust their calendar mid-year to accommodate the significant impact of instructional days missed due to unpredictable hurricanes and winter storms.

**Flexibility for Innovation** | In addition to allowing waivers on a case-by-case basis, the legislature has provided numerous exceptions to the school calendar law by granting full flexibility to the state’s 185 public charter schools, 100+ low-performing Restart schools, the Innovative School District, early colleges, and Renewal School Systems. The legislature has granted these exceptions with the inherent recognition that local flexibility is shown to improve student achievement. It is now time for all school districts and their students to be provided with this same opportunity to set student-focused calendars.

**RECOMMENDATION** | A top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to public school calendar design has had several negative impacts on North Carolina public schools, Local Education Agencies, and students. NCASA asks the General Assembly in 2019 to provide local school districts with the same flexibility granted to charter schools and other innovative school models in setting a school calendar that best meets the needs of local students and allows alignment with nearby colleges and universities to facilitate dual enrollment and advanced course offerings for high schoolers.