

state news

Top states start school later, avoid winter break blues

Students in states that follow a more traditional school calendar rank among the best on college-entrance exams and standardized tests. Schools in these top-rated states also tend to administer end-of-semester exams after the Winter Break — a fact that stifles a major argument for early school start dates.

Proponents of starting school in early August often argue that students need to take end-of-semester exams before the Winter Break so they don't "lose" what they have learned before taking time off. But key education data suggests states that adhere to this philosophy are having little success in making promised academic progress.

A late August or early September school start date was observed in the majority of schools ...

■ ... in the top 10 states with students posting the highest average scores on the American College Test (ACT) in 2003.

■ ... in 8 of the top 10 states with the highest average 2003 Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores.

■ ... in the top 10 states in the American Legislative Exchange Council's "Report Card on American Education," which considers standardized test scores, expenditures per pupil and student-teacher ratio.

■ ... in the top 10 states in Morgan Quitno Press' "State and City Rankings." The annual rankings are based on 21 categories ranging from school

revenue per \$1,000 personal income, per pupil expenditures, class size, high school dropout rates and percent of students proficient or better in reading, writing and mathematics.

The majority of schools in these states also administered end-of-semester exams after the Winter Break.

Backers of the traditional school calendar — one that begins classes after or near Labor Day and that ends in late May or early June — contend that the shape of a school calendar has no impact on academic performance. This data also gives weight to a logical follow-up statement: Traditional school calendars don't hinder academic excellence.

Calendars do not teach children — teachers and parents do!

2003 ACT Scores

1. Oregon — Eighty-five percent of school districts returned August 30 or later. Sixty-eight percent of school districts began September 1 or later.

2,3,4 (all have same score)

Maine — Ninety-one percent of the school districts began classes August 30 or later. Sixty-six percent began September 1 or later.

Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin instruction the fourth week of August or later.

Washington — Seventy percent of school districts began instruction September 1 or later. Ninety percent began August 30 or later.

5,6 New York — One school district begins classes prior to September 1.

Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

7,8 New Hampshire — Eighty-two percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28.

Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

9 Connecticut — Eighty-three percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28. Earliest school start date was August 26.

10. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

2003 SAT Scores

1. North Dakota — Ninety percent of districts began the fourth week of August or later.

2. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

3. Illinois — Sixty percent of the districts began classes the 4th week of August or later. Ninety-nine percent of the districts began the 3rd week of August or later.

4. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

5. South Dakota — Eighty-six percent of schools began classes the 4th week of August or later.

6. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

7. Missouri — Ninety-three percent of school districts began classes the third week of August or later.

8. Kansas — Eighty-nine percent of districts began classes August 18 or later.

9. Michigan — Eighty-three percent of districts returned August 25 or later. Fifty-four percent opened August 30 or later.

10. Oklahoma — Eighty-three percent of school districts began August 12 or later.

The American Legislative Exchange Council

Report Card on American Education. A State-by-State Analysis: 1981-2003

1. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

2. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

3. Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

4. New Hampshire — Eighty-two percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28.

5. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

6. Montana — Seventy-three percent of school districts began class August 25 or later.

7. Vermont — Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin the fourth week of August or later.

8. Washington — Seventy percent of school districts began instruction September 1 or later. Ninety percent began August 30 or later.

9. Kansas — Eighty-nine percent of districts began classes August 18 or later.

10. South Dakota — Eighty-six percent of school districts began the 4th week of August or later.

Morgan Quitno Press

(Texas ranks 34th)

1. Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

2. Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin the fourth week of August or later.

3. Connecticut — Eighty-three percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28. Earliest school start date was August 26.

4. Montana — Seventy-three percent of school districts began class August 25 or later.

5. New Jersey — One school district began classes before September 3.

6. Maine — Ninety-one percent of the school districts began classes August 30 or later. Sixty-six percent began September 1 or later.

7. Pennsylvania — Eighty-six percent of school districts begin classes on or after August 27.

8. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

9. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

10. New York — One school district began classes prior to September 1.

state news

South Carolina parents favor later school start date

The results of a September 2004 Coastal Carolina University study surveying South Carolina parents on public school start dates indicate that 79.9 percent of parents surveyed feel school should start no earlier than August 20. The majority of the parents felt school should start after Labor Day.

Georgia uniform school start date looks good on all counts

*Courtesy of Georgians Need Summers
www.georgiansneedsummers.com*

(Atlanta) – Citing research that shows students excel academically in states where end-of-semester exams are taken after the Winter Break, Representatives Mark Burkhalter (R-Alpharetta) and Joe Wilkinson (R-Atlanta) pledged to file legislation codifying a uniform school start date while passing the travel and tourism industry's anticipated extra revenue to the schools.

As laid out, the proposed bill would set a revenue threshold for the travel and tourism industry for the month of August. The proposal calls for the threshold to be set based on the average domestic and international travel spending in the state for the past three years, but Wilkinson underlined he is open and eager to hear any and all ideas; as his is a preliminary idea.

Wilkinson said the proposal is a win for everyone. "The schools receive more money for teacher salaries, small group tutoring and academic

programming; the tourism industry gets the longer summer they have been asking for; and taxpayers benefit from better-funded public schools – without carrying a heavier tax burden," he explained.

Based on savings schools that other states have experienced from later school start dates, Wilkinson said Georgia schools will receive more money under his proposal while driving down non-instructional costs.

August is the most expensive month of the school year to cool a school, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Energy Department figures also show that it takes 35 percent less electricity to cool a building in September than August. June also shows a 16 percent decrease in cooling degree-days versus August.

Burkhalter said the changes prompted by the legislation could also improve air quality, reducing the money the state is forced to spend on air quality programs while allowing Georgia to qualify for federal grant dollars because of the air improvement.

Alabama legislators announced plans to file parent friendly school start date legislation

*Courtesy of Save Alabama Summers
www.savealabamasummers.org*

(Montgomery) – Saying it is unacceptable for parents and teachers to be left in the dark as to the academic status of schools before the school year begins, Senator and Senate Floor Leader Zeb Little (D-Cullman) and Representative Craig Ford (D-Gadsden) announced plans to file legislation that would require school to start no earlier than August 21 and ensure that parents will have a minimum of one week before the school year begins to review the information outlined in the federally required Adequate Yearly Progress Reports.

While the federal law requires that the reports be out no later than the first day of school, Little and Ford said Alabama is obeying neither the letter nor the spirit of the law. They went on to say issuing adequate yearly progress reports after the school year begins prevents parents from making timely and informed decisions regarding their children's education and cannot be allowed to continue in Alabama.

Senate President Pro-Tem Lowell Barron (D-Fyffe), Senators Bradley Byrne (R-Montrose) and Steve French (R-Birmingham), House Education Committee Chair Yvonne Kennedy (D-Mobile) and Representatives Randy Davis (R-Daphne) and Steve Hurst (D-Munford) have all signed on as supporters of the legislation.

Texas senator to introduce legislation to increase the length of the school day and reduce the length of the school year

(Austin) Senator Eddie Lucio, (D-Brownsville) has announced plans to introduce legislation that would enable school districts to add a few minutes to the school day and shave a few days off the school year. The move could save school districts several million dollars.

Texas State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn conducted a study showing that Texas schools could save more than \$35 million in gas and electric utility costs if 12 days were cut from

the school calendar.

Texas law currently defines the school year as 180 instructional days of seven hours in length. By adding 15 or 30 minutes to a school day, districts still could achieve the 1,260-hour yearly instructional minimum while cutting the calendar year by six to 12 days. Considering daily food, transportation and utility costs, the potential for savings to public schools is enormous.

Lucio says the benefits also may translate into

a better quality education in the classroom, since savings in non-instructional costs could be diverted into instructional expenditures.

Teachers still would be teaching the same number of hours during the school year and, even if a district chooses to hold class for fewer days, their contracts and pay would not be affected. Support staff also would work the same number of hours. Instructional days could be swapped for staff development days by requesting a waiver.