



Ambassador for Education – Uniform School Start Dates

Background

For the past several years, there has been a growing movement across the state to push back the date on which schools start. Proponents assert several reasons for the initiative:

- the utility costs in August are among the highest of the year
- students are not receiving a full summer “to be kids”
- kids need summer jobs
- longer summers would generate additional tourism dollars for the state

This past legislative session, this movement’s progress was apparent by the legislation passing both the full Senate and House of Representatives. However, each body passed very different versions of the bill, and the matter was tabled for the year. Both versions, though, would have prohibited a school from starting prior to the fourth Monday in August. In light of the legislation’s relative success this year, it is certain that the issue will be revisited next year.

TSBA Position

Local school boards should maintain the ability to set school calendars. Boards may seek input from teachers, parents, and citizens before making the final decision to ensure that the community approves of the calendar. Boards may also make these decisions while considering the unique events and circumstances of particular districts. For example, Bedford County takes a week off during its annual Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. This tradition is of great importance to this community, its citizens, and its revenues.

Talking Points

- None of the proponents’ arguments mention students or student achievement. It is the responsibility of school boards to consider these issues above all else.
- Students need as many instructional days as possible prior to taking mandated examinations.
- School board members are accountable to their constituents. If the community is unhappy with the school calendars, the ballot box will reflect that.
- Teachers, administrators, and students enjoy the breaks. Beginning school so late in the year will most likely result in shortening and/or eliminating fall breaks, Christmas breaks, and spring breaks since there must be a minimum of 150 instructional days prior to the examinations.
- Proponents assume that later start dates will mean longer summers. If a system still wishes to build a calendar around local events and provide breaks, the school year will move into June, and the summer will be the same length.