



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 2003-112

January 2003

Committee on Commerce and Economic Opportunities

Senator James E. "Jim" King, Jr., President

IMPACT OF A UNIFORM SCHOOL YEAR ON FLORIDA'S ECONOMY

SUMMARY

Historically, Florida public schools started in late-August and ended in early-June. Over the last decade, schools have been starting and ending earlier. As a result, for most students the summer vacation period begins in late-May. Most children return to school in early to mid-August. School district superintendents report that earlier school start dates have been adopted to increase the number of days of instruction prior to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) testing dates and to end the first semester of schooling before the winter break. Due to more breaks and holidays within the school year, the summer vacation period in 2002 was 6 days shorter than in 1983.

The change in school calendars has changed the dates when families with school-aged children are able to engage in-state tourism activities and has limited the ability of teachers and high school students to work for the tourism industry after mid-August. This project examines whether later school start dates would benefit the state's economy, particularly the tourism industry, without harming Florida's public education system. No currently available data shows that returning to later start dates would increase tourism industry revenues or significantly benefit the state's economy. The current, early school start dates may have only caused a change in the timing of tourism revenues and expenditures. As a result, committee staff recommends against enacting uniform school start dates or a uniform calendar at this time.

harvesting.¹ Today, other factors more directly influence school calendars. Florida school calendars continue to be set at the discretion of the 67 county district school boards.² These calendars must provide for school start and end dates, holidays, vacation periods, and at least 180 days of pupil instruction.³ There is no requirement for district school boards to consider local economic interests when adopting school calendars.

School Start Dates

The average public school student has started school earlier nearly every year since 1991. Figure 1 represents school district start dates weighted by district enrollment for the years in which data is available. (Complete data was not available for years represented by gaps in the graph in Figure 1 and before 1980.) In 1980, the average public school student started school on August 28. In 2002, the average public school student started school on August 14, and students in more than half of the school districts started before August 10.

BACKGROUND

School Calendars

Historically, economic interests have influenced school calendars. For example, when agriculture was a larger component of the state's economy, school calendars were based on agricultural schedules of planting and

¹ Gary Hopkins, *The School Calendar: It's Time to Make Time for Learning!*, Education World, May 18, 1998, p.1, available at http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues034.shtml.

² Section 1001.42(4)(f) and (g) and (10)(a), F.S.:

The district school board, acting as a board, shall exercise all powers and perform all duties listed below:

(4) ESTABLISHMENT, ORGANIZATION, AND OPERATION OF SCHOOLS.—Adopt and provide for the execution of plans for the establishment, organization, and operation of the schools of the district, including, but not limited to, the following:

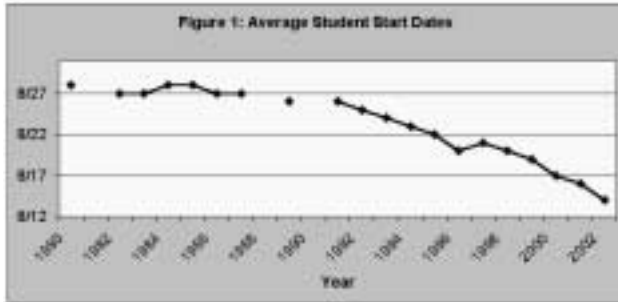
(f) *Opening and closing of schools; fixing uniform date.*—Adopt policies for the opening and closing of schools and fix uniform dates.

(g) *Observance of school holidays and vacation periods.*—Designate the observance of school holidays and vacation periods.

(10) FINANCE.—Take steps to assure students adequate educational facilities through the financial procedure authorized in chapters 1010 and 1011 and as prescribed below:

(a) *Provide for all schools to operate at least 180 days.*—Provide for the operation of all public schools, both elementary and secondary, as free schools for a term of at least 180 days or the equivalent on an hourly basis as specified by rules of the State Board of Education;

....
³ *Id.*



SOURCE: Compilation of school district start dates and school district enrollment data from the Department of Education.

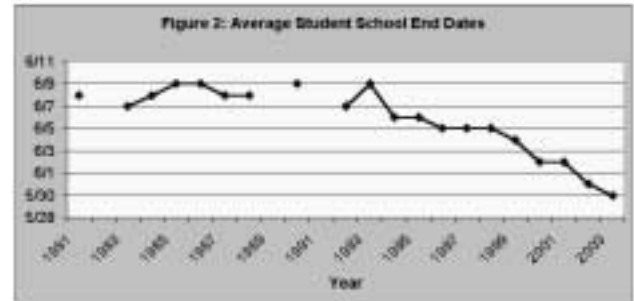
The few school districts that have started after Labor Day since 1980 have done so only intermittently. In 1992, Pasco County was the last Florida school district to start after Labor Day. A review of the limited number of school district calendars available predating 1980 suggests that post-Labor Day school starts occurred more often before 1980. Most of these older calendars, however, showed that school start dates in late-August were the norm. In 1959, the Legislature enacted a law requiring school districts to provide a minimum of 180 days of student instruction beginning in the 1960-1961 school year.⁴ Because there was no statutory requirement before 1960 to provide 180 days of instruction, school start dates after Labor Day may have been more common before 1960 than between 1960 and 1979.

Like Florida, many school districts in states throughout the country are starting earlier in the calendar year. In 1988, 51 percent of all public schools started before September 1. In 2000, 76 percent of all public schools started before September 1.⁵ Some schools continue to start after Labor Day because they are not air-conditioned.⁶ Several states, however, have mandated school start dates from late-August to the day after Labor Day because of perceived benefits to their tourism industries. (See a discussion of actions in other states in the “Findings” section of this report.)

School End Dates

As a result of earlier school start dates, Florida public schools are also ending earlier. Figure 2 shows how the date of the last day of school has changed for the average student since 1981. Figure 2 represents school district end dates weighted by district enrollment for

the years in which data is available. (Complete data was not available for years represented by gaps in the graph in Figure 2 and before 1981.) In 1981, the last day of school for the average student was June 8. In 2003, the average student will end school on May 30, and only five school districts will end in June.



SOURCE: Compilation of school district end dates and school district enrollment from the Department of Education.

Length of School Year

In the 2002-2003 school year, a period of 290 calendar days, including weekends and other breaks, will be used to provide students with the required 180 days of instruction. In 1980, only 285 calendar days were needed. The length of the school session has increased because additional breaks and holidays have been added to school calendars. Most of the increased length can be attributed to the recognition of Veterans' Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, Presidents' Day, and Memorial Day. Other factors that have lengthened the school year include lengthened traditional breaks and earlier school start dates. Most school districts currently schedule three or four teacher planning days during the school year – one at the end of each quarter. The number of planning days has not significantly increased since 1980.

Length of Summer Vacation Period

As a result of the lengthened school calendar, the summer vacation period was reduced from 80 days in 1983 to 74 days in 2002. The length of the summer vacation period may also change as school start dates change. When schools start earlier one year than the start date in the preceding year, the length of the summer vacation period may be shorter. When schools start later one year than the start date in the preceding year, the summer vacation period may be longer.

Differences among District Calendars

School district calendars also differ in the timing and number of holidays, breaks, and teacher planning days. For example, some school districts have breaks that coincide with county fairs or other local events.

⁴ Section 2, ch. 59-371, L.O.F.

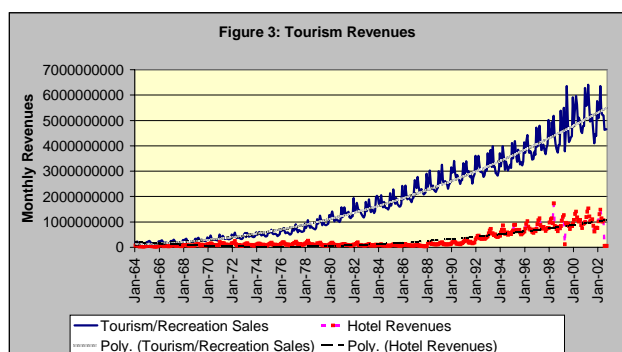
⁵ Bess Keller, *August Openings Put Schools On Hot Seat*, Education Week, August 8, 2001, p. 1, available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/story.cfm?slug=43start.h20>.

⁶ Eric Hubler, *Denver schools OK mid-August start*, The Denver Post, October 20, 2000, at B-01.

Seminole County has a week-long fall break between the first and second quarters of the school calendar. Some school districts take two days off for Thanksgiving; others take three.

Tourism Industry

The tourism industry is an important component of the state's economy. The tourism industry generated \$50 billion in taxable sales and provided more than \$3.5 billion in tax revenue to the state and local governments in 2000.⁷ Sales taxes generated from tourism activity represented 20 percent of all sales tax collections. In 2000, 71.5 million people visited the state, and 843,400 people were employed by the tourism industry.⁸ Figure 3 shows the growth in monthly tourism and recreational sales and the growth in hotel revenues since 1964.



SOURCE: Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Florida Legislature.

Early school start dates limit the ability of families with school-aged children to travel and limit the ability of teachers and high school students to work for the tourism industry after mid-August. Some representatives of the tourism industry have cited earlier school start dates as contributing to declines in August hotel occupancy rates and to increases in employment-training costs.

Prior Legislation

The school start date issue previously came to the attention of the Legislature in 1986 through Senate Bill 634 and House Bill (HB) 600. Both bills required all

public schools and post-secondary educational institutions to begin after Labor Day. The staff analysis for HB 600 stated the following:

The hotel/motel and tourist industry should realize some economic benefits from the extended summer vacation period. However, it is not possible to quantify these benefits at this time.⁹

Both bills died in their first committee of reference.

Purpose of Interim Project

This interim project considered whether requiring public schools to start in late-August or after Labor Day would produce benefits for the economy, particularly the tourism industry, without harming the public education system.

METHODOLOGY

Research into the economic impact of a change in school calendars began with consultations with the Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research. These consultations were followed by interviews of tourism industry representatives and professionals, and by requests for tourism statistics and other relevant data. Research into factors influencing school start dates began with interviews of education professionals and representatives. These interviews were followed by a questionnaire to school superintendents. Historical school start date data was gathered for comparison with tourism activity. Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) performance was compared with school start dates. Lastly, states that have considered uniform school start dates were reviewed.

FINDINGS

Adoption of School District Calendars

Most of the 48 school districts that responded to a questionnaire from the committee have established calendar committees comprised of parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators to propose calendars for adoption by the district school board. Some calendar committees did not include parents of school students, but the calendar committees received parental input through school advisory councils. Participation in some calendar committees included students and

⁷ Visit Florida, *2000 Florida Visitor Study*, pp. 44-49. This \$50 billion figure is based on the amount of taxable sales made in 14 of the 99 kind codes used to track sales tax revenue by the Department of Revenue. The amount of taxable sales made in these 14 different kind code categories is considered the best indicator of the amount of tourism activity. Because these 14 kind code categories, however, are quite broad, some non-tourism economic activity is also captured.

⁸ *Id.* at pp. 3 and 48.

⁹ State of Florida H.R., Committee on Education, K-12, Staff Analysis for HB 600, April 2, 1986, p. 2.

members from the local community and business community. Several school districts have surveyed parents for input on school calendars. A few districts reported no direct or indirect parental involvement in the development of the school district calendars.

Calendar Considerations

The questionnaire to school district superintendents also asked them to describe the factors influencing school start dates. According to the responding superintendents, the desire to increase the number of days of instruction before the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and the desire to end the first semester before the winter break are the most important factors influencing school start dates.

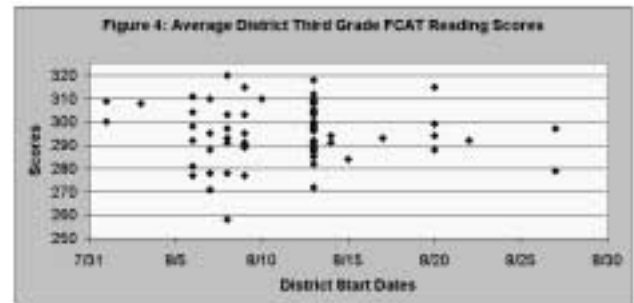
FCAT Preparation

Many school superintendents responding to the committee's questionnaire believe that increasing the number of days of instruction prior to administration of the FCAT will increase student scores. The FCAT is administered to nearly all public school children in grades 3 through 10.¹⁰ One of the purposes of the test is to assess the annual learning gains of each student toward achieving the Sunshine State Standards appropriate to the student's grade level.¹¹ Schools and school districts have the following incentives to ensure that their students perform well on the FCAT:

- FCAT scores determine school and school district grades.¹²
- School grades determine whether teachers are eligible for certain bonuses.¹³
- Funding may be tied to school performance.¹⁴
- Third grade FCAT reading scores determine eligibility for promotion to the fourth grade.¹⁵
- Students must pass the tenth grade FCAT to graduate from high school.¹⁶

The FCAT testing dates are set by the Department of Education and are the same for all school districts. Differences in school district start dates can provide school districts that start earlier than others with more time to prepare students for the FCAT. In 2001, for

example, Holmes County started school on August 1–26 days before Dade and Broward counties. School grades and student scores are not adjusted for the number of days of instruction provided prior to the FCAT. School districts that have early school start dates, however, are not guaranteed better FCAT scores than schools with later start dates. Figure 4, for example, compares school district start dates from the 2001-2002 school year with average district scores on the reading section of the third grade FCAT in 2002.



SOURCE: Compilation of *Statistical Brief*, Florida Department of Education, Series 2002-02B, July 2001, and *State and District Scores for All Curriculum Groups*.¹⁷

An analysis of school district start dates and average district scores for other grades and other sections of the FCAT similarly shows that there is no apparent correlation between start dates and scores, suggesting that other variables may have a larger impact on FCAT scores than school start dates.

Finish First Semester by Winter Break

The other major factor cited by superintendents as influencing school start dates is the desire to end the first semester before the winter break. Mid-term exams are scheduled at the end of the first semester of schooling. If the first semester ends after the winter break, some school districts said, students will forget much of what they were taught prior to the break. Teachers need about a week to review the material forgotten over the winter break to refresh students' memories before exams, school districts reported. When the first semester ends before the winter break, less time is spent reviewing old material and more time is spent learning new material. School districts also reported that it is more efficient for teachers to prepare for the spring semester over the winter break if the first semester ends before the break.

Ending the first semester before the winter break is especially important to schools using block schedules.

¹⁰ Section 1008.22(3)(c), F.S.

¹¹ Section 1008.22(1)(a), F.S.

¹² Section 1008.34(3) and (8), F.S. Florida has a statewide assessment program that requires the Commissioner of Education to assign grades A through F to schools and school districts based on student FCAT performance.

¹³ Section 1008.36(5)(a), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 1008.34(7), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1008.25(5)(b), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 1008.22(3)(c)5., F.S.

¹⁷ *State and District Scores for All Curriculum Groups*, available at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat/fcpress2.htm>.

Block schedules restructure the school day into classes with much longer than the traditional 50-minute period. Students on block schedules typically have three or four long class periods per day instead of seven or eight, learning a year's worth of material in a semester. According to the school districts, it is convenient for students on block schedules to start a new schedule of classes after the winter break.

Critics of Current Calendars

Critics of current school calendars from the tourism industry have suggested that the comparisons among school districts based on FCAT scores would be more accurate if all schools had the same amount of time to prepare for the FCAT. Administering the FCAT later in the spring semester, critics argue, would reduce one incentive to have early school start dates. Critics also suggest that administering first semester exams to students after the winter break will encourage long-term learning instead of cramming.

Economic Analysis

The Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) advised that if the timing of school start and end dates affects the amount of tourism expenditures by Florida families with school-aged children, then there must be a climatological or sociological explanation for the change in tourism expenditures. Climatological factors, for example, explain that people are more likely to snow ski in the winter because winter brings cold weather and snow. Sociological factors explain, for example, that people give gifts to a person on a birthday because of historical traditions. In sum, there must be a reason that explains why tourism expenditures would increase if schools started later in August or after Labor Day. If no sociological or climatological factors can explain why tourism expenditures would increase, then later school start and end dates may result solely in a shift in the timing of some tourism expenditures, rather than an increase in tourism expenditures.

According to the economists at EDR, statistical data such as historical school start and end dates, sales tax revenue, number of tourists, or other statistical data cannot predict the propensity of families with school-aged children to increase tourism expenditures. The best way to determine whether these families would increase tourism expenditures as the result of later school start dates is to conduct a survey to ask how their tourism expenditures would change.

If climatological or sociological factors can be determined that explain why tourism expenditures will increase as a result of later school start and end dates, then revenues will likely shift from another segment of the state's economy to the tourism industry. Revenue will shift from one segment of the state's economy because consumers must reduce spending in one area if spending is increased in another. As a result, later school start dates are not likely to provide a net economic benefit to the state, according to EDR.

Issues Raised by Tourism Industry

The issues raised by representatives of the tourism industry regarding the idea of establishing a later school start date can be grouped into three principal categories or theories. First, there may be something that occurs in mid-August through Labor Day that encourages so much tourism activity by families with school-aged children that their reductions in tourism activity in May and June will be more than offset. Second, the tourism industry needs high school labor more in mid-August to Labor Day than in late-May to early-June. Lastly, moving school start dates to late-August or after Labor Day would encourage more tourism by enabling families to travel in late-August when prices are cheaper. Each theory will be discussed below.

The first theory is that something occurs in mid-August through Labor Day that encourages tourism. This August occurrence more than offsets tourism that would be lost as the result of later school end dates. Based on EDR's guidance, this August occurrence must be a climatological (weather) or sociological factor.

August weather is hotter and wetter than the weather in June and May. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Florida Average Temperatures and Rainfall

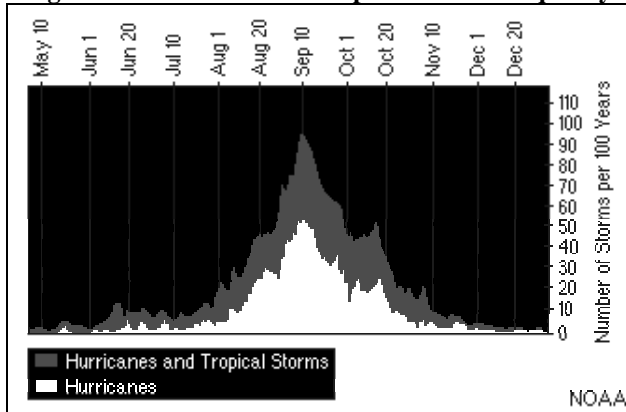
Month	Average Temperature	Average Rainfall
May	75.43°F	3.87 inches
June	79.81°F	7.02 inches
July	81.27°F	7.53 inches
August	81.34°F	7.27 inches
September	79.32°F	6.75 inches

SOURCE: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration¹⁸

¹⁸ U.S. Statewide Analysis, available at <http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/cag3/state.html>.

Additionally, the peak hurricane season begins in mid-August.¹⁹ (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Hurricane and Tropical Storm Frequency



Assuming that hot, wet weather discourages tourism, August weather conditions do not suggest that there is a climatological factor that would cause an increase in tourism. A survey of families with school-aged children could be conducted to determine whether there is a sociological explanation that would validate the theory that something occurs after mid-August that encourages more tourism in August than in late-May to early-June.

The second theory is that the tourism industry needs high school labor more after mid-August to Labor Day than in late-May to early-June. Labor-dependent businesses in the tourism industry, such as attractions and theme parks, seek high school labor during the summer months. When high school laborers return to school in August, replacements must be found who will work through Labor Day. The tourism industry incurs additional hiring and training costs to replace high school students.

Universal Studios in Orlando reported to committee staff that it needs high school labor most from July 1 through Labor Day. Universal begins hiring and training high school students for the busiest part of the summer during mid-May. Last summer, 375 employees quit between mid-May and July 1 because few work hours were available at that time. These employees had to be replaced at a cost of \$350 each. When these high school students return to school from early to mid-August, Universal must hire and train about 1,000

workers at a cost of about \$350 each to work through Labor Day. Many of these late summer laborers had to be bussed to Universal from outlying areas at a cost of \$37,500 last summer. Additionally, full time staff was paid an additional \$130,000 for overtime for the period of time after high school students returned to school through Labor Day. These costs totaled \$648,750 for Universal last year. According to Universal, if school calendars would permit high school students to work through the month of August, the students would be able to earn an additional \$792 each during the summer. The Florida Attractions Association reported to the committee that the results of a survey of its members show that many attractions share Universal Studios' need for summer labor.

There may be segments of the tourism industry for which the demand for labor is greater from late-May to early-June than from mid-August to Labor Day. Monthly tourism/recreation taxable sales data for 2000 shows that there were \$4.1 billion in sales in May, \$4.0 billion in June, and \$3.7 billion in August.²⁰ The number of Florida welcome center visitors was greater in June than in August in 1998-2000.²¹

The third theory, which was suggested by the Florida Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, is that later school start dates would encourage price-conscious consumers to travel in late-August when prices are discounted on tourism activities. Committee staff does not have data to determine how tourism expenditures will change in response to lower prices, or data to determine how prices might change if more families with school-aged children could travel in late-August.

Actions in Other States

Several other states have adopted school start dates for late-August or after Labor Day, including, for example: Texas, Virginia, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Arkansas. In every state that have considered the issue, the tourism industry typically supported the later start dates and the education community almost always opposed a loss of local control over the authority to set start dates. Several states that have adopted or considered legislation mandating later school start dates are discussed below.

Pennsylvania

Legislation filed during the 2002 legislative session

¹⁹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Hurricane Basics*, available at <http://hurricanes.noaa.gov/prepare/season.htm>.

²⁰ Visit Florida, *2000 Florida Visitor Study*, p. 45.

²¹ *Id.* at 39.

would have required Pennsylvania schools to start after Labor Day.²² According to staff of the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee, the tourism industry supported later start dates, in part, because some attractions had to close in August or go to a limited schedule due to a lack of high school labor. The legislation mandating later start dates died in committee. A resolution, however, passed which urged school districts to consider the effects of starting school before Labor Day.²³

Michigan

In 1997, legislation was proposed that would have required schools to begin after Labor Day. Legislation was also proposed that would have created a commission comprised of education, business, and tourism representatives to study the effect of starting school after Labor Day.²⁴ Neither piece of legislation became a law. According to the House Fiscal Agency (HFA):

[I]t is reasonable to assume that increased money spent on tourism would lead to less money spent on other revenue-generating activities, creating a possible “wash” in revenues.²⁵

The HFA further opined that shifting start dates may only shift the time when people take vacations or allow Michigan residents to vacation out-of-state.²⁶

In 1999, legislation was introduced that would have created a commission to study the effect of early school start dates.²⁷ Prior to becoming a law,²⁸ the legislation was amended to make the Friday before Labor Day a school holiday, representing a compromise between the tourism industry and the education community.²⁹

Wisconsin

Prior to 1998, legislation had been filed in several legislative sessions providing for later school start dates. In 1998, the Special Committee on the School Calendar was appointed to study the advantages and disadvantages of later school start dates. The committee heard testimony that 67 percent of survey respondents

were somewhat supportive of legislation that would require all public schools to start after September 1.³⁰

In 1999, legislation was enacted that prohibited schools from starting before September 1 unless a school board held a public hearing on the issue and adopted a resolution to start school earlier.³¹ In the 2000-2001 school year, 368 of the 426 school districts opted out of the September 1 start date.³² In 2001, legislation was enacted to limit the ability of school districts to opt out of the September 1 start date.³³ Exemptions from the start date are only available if the Department of Public Instruction finds an extraordinary reason for granting an exemption.³⁴

South Carolina

During the 2002 legislative session, legislation was proposed that would have required Charleston County schools to start school on the day after Labor Day. The legislation would have also required the Department of Education to administer the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, South Carolina's version of the FCAT, on the 160th day of student instruction for Charleston County students.³⁵ According to the State Board of Education, the bill would have compromised test security by testing Charleston County at a different time than other county schools. As a result, the sponsors tabled the bill in exchange for the Department of Public Instruction's support of an alternative proposal.³⁶

Ultimately, s. 59-5-71, South Carolina Statutes, was enacted which created a taskforce of parents and tourism, business, and education representatives to recommend whether a uniform start date should be adopted and to suggest a uniform start date to the Board of Education. The taskforce held several public hearings throughout the state to gather information and gauge public opinion. An economist member of the taskforce determined that tourism revenues would increase \$180 million if school start dates were later.³⁷

³⁰ State of Wisconsin Joint Legislative Council, *Legislation on Determination of a School Calendar*, Report No. 9 to the 1999 Legislature, October 21, 1999, p. 5.

³¹ Section 2066m, 1999 Wis. Act 9.

³² See Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *2000-2001 District Calendar*.

³³ Wis. Stat. § 118.045(3) (2002).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ H.B. 4569, 114th Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (S.C. 2002).

³⁶ Conversation with Molly Spearman, Deputy Superintendent of Governmental Affairs, S.C. State Board of Education, Dec. 2002.

³⁷ Steven C. Morse, Ph.D., *South Carolina Early School Start Dates and the South Carolina Travel and Tourism Industries: An Analysis of Economic & Tax Revenue Impacts*, p. 19.

²² H.B. 2262, 2002 Gen. Assem., 186th Sess. (Pa. 2002).

²³ H.R. 446, 2002 Gen. Assem., 186th Sess. (Pa. 2002).

²⁴ H.B. 5080 and S.B. 300, 1997 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mich. 1997).

²⁵ Mich. H.R., House Staff Analysis for H.B. 5080, October 9, 1997, p. 1.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ H.B. 4099, 1999-2000 Reg. Sess. (Mich. 1999).

²⁸ Mich. Comp. Laws § 380.1284b(1) (2002).

²⁹ Mich. H.R., House Legislative Analysis Section, Analysis of H.B. 4099, May 5, 1999, p. 1.

The analysis, however, did not consider the reduction in tourism activity caused by later school end dates.

The taskforce could not reach a consensus on uniform school start dates. Nevertheless, on December 11, 2002, the State Board of Education voted nine to eight to establish a 10-day window in late-August to early-September for schools to open. Some members of the General Assembly believe that the State Board of Education acted without legislative authority.³⁸

Texas

In 2001, the Texas Legislature enacted legislation that prohibited schools from starting “before the week in which August 21 falls” unless, after a public hearing, the Commissioner of Education allows a school to start earlier.³⁹ Proponents of later school start dates were supported by a study by the Comptroller of Public Accounts which found: 65 percent of Texas parents supported a uniform date; 46 percent favored a start date after Labor Day; later starts could save \$10 million in energy costs; and the tourism industry would gain \$332 million in revenue.⁴⁰ A second study by the Texas Department of Economic Development and Tourism and More Consulting Services found that tourism activity drops after the school year begins and that the tourism industry loses at least \$180 million in tourism revenue due to early start dates.⁴¹ Neither study, however, discussed the reductions in tourism activity caused by later school end dates if school calendars remain the current length.

Virginia

In 1986, Virginia adopted s. 22.1-79.1, Code of Virginia, which prohibits schools from starting before Labor Day. In nearly every year since 1995, legislation has been introduced to either repeal the law, create an exemption, limit an exemption, or to give local school boards discretion over school calendars. Today, the only exemptions from the law are for schools that have been disrupted by severe weather in past years, schools that are dependent on another school that has an exemption, and year-round schools.

³⁸ South Carolina Department of Education, *State Board of Education approves statewide uniform start dates for schools*, available at <http://myscschools.com/news/more.cfm?articleID=275>.

³⁹ Tex. Education Code § 25.0811 (2003).

⁴⁰ Carole Keeton Rylander, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, *An Economic Analysis of the Changing School Start Date in Texas*, December 2000, p 1., available at <http://www.cpa.state.tx.us/>.

⁴¹ Texas Department of Economic Development and Tourism & More Consulting Services, *The Effects of Alternative Academic Calendars on the Texas Travel Industry*, February 1999.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee staff recommends that district school boards continue to have the authority to set school calendars at their discretion, because currently available data for Florida does not demonstrate that mandating later school start dates would significantly increase in-state tourism or significantly reduce labor costs.

However, because practices currently differ in the extent to which parents and businesses are involved in setting school calendars, the Legislature may wish to ensure that school calendars reflect the needs of the broader local community in addition to the concerns of local educators. One method would be to require all school boards to establish calendar committees empowered to recommend or adopt calendars. These committees could be required to include local business and community representatives in addition to parents and local education representatives. Another possible method to increase community involvement would be to require school districts to survey parents and businesses periodically on preferences for school start dates.

If the Legislature desires further study of the issues, it could follow the lead of some other states and create a temporary commission to hear the concerns of educators, students, parents, and businesses and report its findings. The commission's charge could include: attempting to isolate sociological factors that may produce higher in-state tourism expenditures from late-August through Labor Day by families with school aged children; determining whether agreements are possible between high schools in high-tourism areas and labor dependent businesses which will satisfy both labor and educational needs; evaluating community satisfaction with school calendars and the process by which they are adopted; and suggesting methods to increase community involvement in the adoption of school calendars, if warranted.

Lastly, the Legislature could provide for the Office of Economic and Demographic Research or another entity to conduct a survey of families with school-aged children to determine their preferences for school calendars. This survey could also ask whether these families would increase tourism expenditures as a result of later school start dates.