



## **Student-Centered Calendar Issue Brief**

### **Issue Overview**

School districts across North Carolina have varying needs and, therefore, varying methods to best serve their students. What works in Gates County might not work in Macon County. Yet, a state law passed in 2004 established a one-size-fits-all calendar for traditional public schools – a law that practically puts the Tar Heel State in a class of its own. Currently, North Carolina is one of only two states in the country with state-mandated start and end dates to the school year.

### **NCSBA Position**

NCSBA believes the General Assembly should give local boards of education more authority in setting local school calendars that maximize student outcomes and best meet the needs of local communities. The state’s rigid calendar law has negative repercussions on students. As a result of the later start to the school year, first semester exams are taken after winter break. According to a 2017 study of the school calendar law by the Program Evaluation Division (PED) of the North Carolina General Assembly, 91% of North Carolina’s local superintendents perceive that taking exams after the break decreases student performance.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, high school calendars are misaligned with the calendars for community colleges and universities whose first semesters end in December. Hence, it is difficult for students or mid-year graduates to enroll in higher education courses in the second semester.

As a practical matter, in the fall, high school extracurricular activities, such as athletics and band, report for practice the first week of August. In fact, multiple games/matches are played before the first day of class. Meaning, those students’ families are likely not taking an August vacation, which is often the argument against having an earlier school start date.

Local school boards are in a position to determine the most appropriate school calendar for their district by weighing the unique factors of a community’s demographics, climate, culture, local needs, and economy.

### **Issue Background**

State lawmakers seized the authority to set school calendars in 2004. The current law requires school districts to begin on the Monday closest to August 26 and end on the Friday closest to June 11.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Final Report to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, Report Number 2017-01, North Carolina General Assembly Program Evaluation Division, February 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> S.L. 2021-145

Among the most vocal opponents to changing the current school calendar law is the travel and tourism industry. They argue that allowing an earlier start date to the school year significantly hurts tourism. However, a 2017 study of the school calendar law by the PED of the North Carolina General Assembly brought to light several important findings:

- July is the most preferred month of vacation by North Carolina parents; June ranks second.
- 75% of North Carolina parents believe local school districts should determine their own calendars.
- 72% of North Carolina parents and school personnel say having final exams before winter break is very or extremely important.
- Travel and tourism industry assertions of profit loss from local school calendar flexibility could NOT be independently verified.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Final Report to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, Report Number 2017-01, North Carolina General Assembly Program Evaluation Division, February 13, 2017.