



Issue Brief: School Calendar

School districts across North Carolina have different needs and, therefore, varying approaches to best serve their students. Nevertheless, the General Assembly established a rigid one-size-fits-all calendar law in 2004 for traditional public schools that is still in place to this day. Despite Article 9 of the North Carolina Constitution requiring that “equal opportunities shall be provided for all students,” traditional public school students are not provided with equal opportunities as other students in schools where local calendar control is allowed.¹

NCSBA Position & Recommendations

Local school boards are in the best position to determine the most appropriate school calendar for their district by weighing the unique factors of a community’s demographics, climate, culture, and economy. NCSBA recommends that the General Assembly ***provide public school units which lack authority to determine school start and end dates with more local control to do so*** in order to maximize student outcomes and best meet the needs of local communities.

Background

The **current school calendar law** requires school districts to begin on the Monday closest to August 26 and end on the Friday closest to June 11,² yet roughly 20% of NC’s public school students now attend a school that is authorized by law to set start and end dates (including charter schools and traditional schools, such as Cooperative Innovative High Schools, lab schools, Restart schools, Renewal districts (Rowan-Salisbury), and regional schools).³ *This figure doesn’t include students attending year-round schools, students in districts with other approved waivers, and students receiving an Opportunity Scholarship to attend a private school, which would otherwise dramatically increase the percentage.*

Among the most vocal of those against changing the current school calendar law is **the travel and tourism industry**, despite no independently verifiable report of a negative impact. The industry argues that allowing an earlier start date to the school

¹ North Carolina Constitution, Article 9, accessed January 2025.

² North Carolina General Statutes, G.S. 115C-84.2, accessed January 2025.

³ Report on School Start and End Dates, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, June 2024.

year significantly hurts tourism, yet in 2024, the NC tourism economy reached its highest level ever, hitting \$35.6 billion, even as eligible public schools increasingly set their own school calendar.⁴ Further, changes to the school calendar may impact the timing of an in-state family’s vacation, but not necessarily the overall amount they spend.

As it stands, the state’s rigid calendar law continues to have negative repercussions on students. As a result of the required later start to the school year, **first semester exams are taken after winter break**, despite the common understanding that this decreases content retention and student performance. Additionally, **high school calendars are misaligned with the calendars for community colleges and universities**. As a result, many institutions of higher education begin their 2nd semester 2-3 weeks before K-12 schools, thus making it difficult or impossible for students to enroll in higher education courses in the second semester.

Further, many institutions of higher education in surrounding states, including but not limited to the University of Tennessee, the University of Virginia, James Madison University, the University of South Carolina, and Clemson University, require that all supplemental application materials be submitted by mid-January, including what could be GPA-boosting first-semester grades. Under the current calendar law, **traditional public high school students in NC will not receive their final grades for first-semester courses in time** to submit them, potentially **putting them at a disadvantage to other college applicants around the country**.

As a practical matter, in the fall, **high school extracurricular activities, including athletics and band, report for practice the first week of August** and multiple games/matches are played before the first day of class. This means those students’ families are likely not taking an August vacation.

⁴ “N.C. Extends its Growth Spurt in Visitor Spending, Rises to No. 5 In U.S. Visitation,” NC Department of Commerce, May 2024.