

School calendar should be changed to allow for later start to new term (an editorial opinion)

By:

December 03, 2007

[✉ Email to a friend](#) [🗨 Voice your opinion](#)

There are certainly selfish reasons for local legislators and others here to be pushing to change the public school calendar in Tennessee. Setting a later start date for resumption of classes would be a big help to the Sevier County tourist industry, allowing students in both secondary schools and colleges to keep their summer jobs longer and allow tourism-related businesses to remain fully staffed while the crowds keep coming. But that isn't the only reason this is a good idea.

Remember how hot it was last August when temperatures stayed in the upper 90s and low 100s day after day. Some schools in Tennessee simply closed their doors because they couldn't keep the classrooms cool enough to promote learning. That must have come as a shock to folks in their 40s and 50s and older who remember when a fan was a luxury in a classroom, and air conditioning was something for rich people, not school kids.

Times have changed. Our air-conditioned society has made all of us less tolerant of the heat, and when you try to cool down a school, it's difficult even in the best of conditions. It's expensive too. School systems would save thousands of dollars if classes started in late August or even after Labor day the way they used to.

The way things stand now, many school systems begin classes in early August and, with vacations and holidays, don't end until late May or early June. Students still go the required 180 days, but all of the breaks extend the school term so it just seems longer. It wouldn't be a surprise to know that many school systems begin classes in early August not because they want kids to be hot while trying to learn, but because all of the breaks and vacations and in-service days make it hard to finish the 180-day minimum without an early start and late finish.

This madness has got to stop. Many teenagers and college students need to earn money over the summer to pay for school expenses and help out at the house. But cut so many breaks, days off and extended vacations and you could easily begin in early September and finish by late May. The downside to a longer summer break is that a number of students forget what they've learned the past year and need more review at the start of a new term to catch back up. That is a real concern, especially for younger children. But comparing the pluses of a later start with the minuses of keeping things as they are now, and the later start wins out.

All of public education needs to be under constant review. American public education is lagging behind too many countries in test scores and aptitude comparisons. Everything should be on the table, including the calendar itself. Let's hope most legislators and school officials agree.