

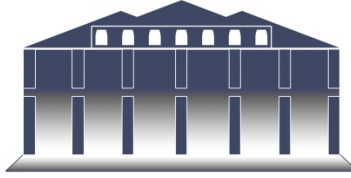
**No Modification to North Carolina's School  
Calendar Law Satisfies Multiple Competing  
Interests**



**Final Report to the Joint Legislative  
Program Evaluation Oversight Committee**

**Report Number 2017-01**

**February 13, 2017**



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**NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
Legislative Services Office

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*John W. Turcotte*  
Director

February 13, 2017

Members of the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee

North Carolina General Assembly  
Legislative Building  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601

Honorable Co-Chairs:

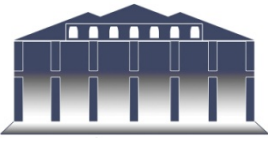
The Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee's 2015–17 Work Plan directed the Program Evaluation Division to examine the effects of the state law designating when public schools in North Carolina start and end the school year.

I am pleased to report that the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education cooperated with us fully and were at all times courteous to our evaluators during the evaluation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Turcotte".

John W. Turcotte  
Director



# PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

## NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

February 2017

Report No. 2017-01

# No Modification to North Carolina's School Calendar Law Satisfies Multiple Competing Interests

## Summary

The 2015–17 Work Plan of the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee directed the Program Evaluation Division to examine the effects of the state law designating when public schools in North Carolina start and end the school year. North Carolina is 1 of 14 states that currently prescribe when public schools begin the school year. The start dates for these 14 states range from August 1 to after Labor Day.

**Opinions differ on when North Carolina public schools should start and end the school year, and no modification to the State's school calendar law satisfies multiple competing interests.** This issue attracts diverse stakeholders including organizations representing state government, education, parents and citizens, and travel and tourism. The timing of summer break during August is an important concern. The school calendar law currently satisfies the travel and tourism industry preference for a summer break that includes most of August, which is why these stakeholders prefer the current law be maintained. Organizations representing education interests want more school calendar flexibility and prefer that summer break ends in early August because this schedule would allow high school exams to be scheduled before winter break and also allows alignment with the community college calendar. Public opinion favors local control of the school calendar.

**Allowing school calendar flexibility as a mechanism for low-performing schools to address summer learning loss provides an opportunity to increase student performance.** Peer-reviewed literature demonstrates that low-income students disproportionately suffer from summer learning loss in comparison to their middle and higher income peers. The literature shows low-income students could benefit from a modified school calendar with shorter breaks throughout the school year and targeted intervention during the breaks.

**The disagreement among stakeholders regarding when North Carolina should start and end the school year cannot be reconciled.** Any decision will be perceived as favoring the interests of some stakeholders over others. As a result, this report makes no recommendation for changing the school calendar law. To address the needs of low-performing schools the General Assembly should

- provide school calendar flexibility for schools and districts identified as low-performing by the State Board of Education, and
- direct the Department of Public Instruction to evaluate whether a modified school calendar increases student performance in low-performing schools and districts.

## Purpose and Scope

The 2015–17 Work Plan of the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee directed the Program Evaluation Division to examine the effects of the state law designating when public schools in North Carolina start and end the school year. The directive requested that the Program Evaluation Division study how the limitations on school calendar flexibility have affected local school administrative units, school operations, students, and the tourism industry during the past 10 years. Local school administrative units are commonly and hereafter in this report referred to as local education agencies (LEAs.) Throughout this report, the state law directing how local boards of education develop and manage their school calendars will be referred to as the school calendar law.

Three research questions guided this evaluation:

1. What are the intended goals of the school calendar law that directs when public schools start and end the school year?
2. What are the educational, operational, familial, and commercial effects of the school calendar law?
3. How can the current school calendar law be changed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of school operations?

The Program Evaluation Division collected and analyzed data from numerous sources, including

- a review of North Carolina’s school calendar law including how the law has changed since its enactment in 2004;
- a review of 2015 legislation that proposed modifications to the school calendar law;
- a review of peer-reviewed literature investigating the effects of the school calendar on student performance;
- interviews with Dr. Harris Cooper, the Hugo L. Blomquist Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience in the Trinity College of Arts and Sciences at Duke University, who has conducted comprehensive research on the effects of the school calendar on student performance;
- interviews with representatives from the following tourism industry organizations:
  - Hospitality Alliance of North Carolina,
  - NC REALTORS®,
  - North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association,
  - North Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition,
  - North Carolina Travel Industry Association,
  - North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Association, and
  - North Carolina Youth Camp Association;
- interviews with officials from the Department of Public Instruction;
- interviews with representatives from the following North Carolina public education organizations:
  - North Carolina Association of Educators,
  - North Carolina Association of School Administrators,
  - North Carolina School Board Association, and
  - Professional Educators of North Carolina;
- interviews with parent and citizen organizations including the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association and Save Our Summers – NC;

- interviews with representatives from the following stakeholder organizations interested in the school calendar law:
  - Freedom Works,
  - John Locke Foundation, and
  - North Carolina Justice Center;
- teacher focus groups conducted by the North Carolina Teacher Voice Network involving 70 teachers from 10 local education agencies across the state;
- a survey of the 115 superintendents of local education agencies conducted by the Program Evaluation Division;
- a survey of 46,139 North Carolina parents and school personnel conducted by the Program Evaluation Division with assistance from the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association;<sup>1</sup> and
- two citizen polls conducted by the Elon University Poll (n = 660) and High Point University Poll (n = 404).<sup>2</sup>

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## Background

**The nine-month school calendar currently used by most school districts throughout the United States originated in the mid-to-late 1800s.** During that era, states began to assume more authority over education policy, with school districts becoming more organized and localities beginning to tax citizens to support schools. Some historians theorize that a blend of the longer urban school calendar and the six-month rural school calendar used at that time led to the development of today's nine-month calendar with three months of summer break.

**North Carolina's Constitution and state law establish the parameters of the school calendar for public schools.** The North Carolina Constitution requires the General Assembly to provide a general and uniform system of free public schools, "which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year".<sup>3</sup> The constitutional requirement of nine months is interpreted to mean at least 180 days based on 20 school days per month. State law provides further direction to local boards of education on the adoption of the school calendar for their schools including the required number of instructional days and hours, limitations on developing the calendar, designation of the start and end dates for the school year, and other aspects of school calendar development.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Program Evaluation Division conducted an online survey of North Carolina parents and school personnel on September 19–25, 2016. The survey link was originally sent via email to the 84,689 members of the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association (NC PTA) located in 69 North Carolina counties representing 967 public schools. The Program Evaluation Division is aware that the survey link was distributed to a wider audience of parents and school personnel than intended because the survey received 49,139 responses from parents (n = 25,187) and school personnel (n = 19,952) representing all 115 LEAs (i.e., responses were received from some districts that do not have PTAs). Because the survey was conducted online, the Program Evaluation Division cannot verify whether all respondents were parents or school personnel. Nevertheless, the Program Evaluation Division decided that the large response to the survey warranted reporting its results to the General Assembly.

<sup>2</sup> The Elon University Poll was conducted through live interviews of North Carolina likely voters (cell phones and landlines) on September 27–30, 2016 with a +/- 3.8% margin of error. The High Point University Poll was conducted through live interviews with North Carolina likely voters (cell phones and landlines) on September 17–22, 2016 with a +/- 4.9% margin of error.

<sup>3</sup> NC Constitution, Article IX, Section 2.

<sup>4</sup> N. C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-84.2.

**Prior to 2004, local boards of education had authority to determine start and end dates for public schools.** During the early 2000s, many local education agencies (LEAs) used this authority to start the school year earlier than the current law permits. Based on school calendar information provided by school superintendents, Exhibit 1 shows most LEAs starting the 2002–03 and 2003–04 school years before mid-August. As a result of starting the school year in late July and early August, LEAs also ended school earlier. Exhibit 1 shows most LEAs ending both school years in May.

**Exhibit 1**

Before the Current School Calendar Law Was Enacted, Most Schools Started Before Mid-August and Ended in May

	2002–03 School Year	2003–04 School Year
<b>Start Dates</b>		
Last week of July	2%	2%
First week of August	67%	65%
Second week of August	15%	15%
Third week of August	8%	9%
Last week of August	1%	1%
Data unavailable	8%	9%
<b>End Dates</b>		
May	77%	73%
June	16%	20%
Data unavailable	8%	7%

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.

**In addition to adjusting the start and end dates of the school calendar, some LEAs shortened the length of summer break between school years.** During 2003 and 2004, school superintendents reported lengths of summer break that ranged from 8 to 13 weeks among the 115 LEAs. As seen in Exhibit 2, most LEAs maintained a summer break equal to or greater than 10 weeks. However, about a quarter of LEAs scheduled summer breaks that were less than 10 weeks.

**Exhibit 2**

Before the School Calendar Law Was Enacted, Almost a Quarter of LEAs Reduced the Length of Summer Break to Less Than 10 Weeks

Local Education Agency Length of Summer Break	2003	2004
Less than 10 weeks	24%	24%
Greater than or equal to 10 weeks	69%	71%
Data unavailable	7%	4%

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.

**The General Assembly debated mandating when public schools should start during the 2003 and 2004 legislative sessions.** Legislation was introduced in 2003 that required local boards of education to set the first day of school for students after Labor Day. The proposed legislation was similar to a Virginia state law that prohibited public schools from starting

the school year prior to Labor Day. The General Assembly did not act on this legislation during 2003, which meant the legislation was ineligible for consideration during the 2004 session.

The Joint Select Committee on Small Business Economic Development recommended legislation for the 2004 session requiring all public schools, other than year-round schools, to open no earlier than August 25 and close no later than June 10. The proposed legislation received support from the tourism industry and Save Our Summers – North Carolina, a parent and citizen group that advocates for a traditional school calendar with a long summer break. Public education representatives including State Board of Education members, Department of Public Instruction officials, school superintendents, and local board of education members opposed the legislation because they believed mandated start and end dates would hinder school calendar flexibility. After considering several versions of the school calendar law, the General Assembly enacted legislation that public schools start no earlier than August 25 and end no later than June 10. The legislation exempted year-round schools and included a good cause waiver related to school closures caused by inclement weather as well as an education purpose waiver for specific schools.

**Since 2004, the school calendar law has been amended several times to address concerns from legislators, the tourism industry, parents, and educators.** Changes include

- moving the start and end dates from fixed dates to floating dates that vary across a seven-day time span,<sup>5</sup>
- increasing instructional time requirements from 180 days **and** 1,000 hours to 185 days **or** 1,025 hours,<sup>6</sup>
- eliminating the education purpose waiver,<sup>7</sup> and
- allowing LEAs qualifying for a good cause waiver to start school one week earlier.

The current version of the school calendar law has been in effect since the 2013–14 school year. The timeline shown in Exhibit 3 highlights the major changes to the school calendar law since its enactment.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2012, the start date was changed from no earlier than August 25 to no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and the end date was changed from no later than June 10 to no later than the Friday closest to June 11.

<sup>6</sup> The required amount of instruction time was increased in 2011. Initially, the law directed LEAs to meet both requirements of 185 days and 1,025 hours of instruction, but the requirement was modified in 2012 to 185 days or 1,025 hours of instruction to offer more flexibility to LEAs.

<sup>7</sup> Prior to 2012, LEAs seeking a waiver had to establish a need to adopt a different calendar for (i) a specific school to accommodate a special program offered generally to the student body of that school, (ii) a school that primarily serves a special population of students, or (iii) a defined program within a school. The State Board of Education could then authorize educational waivers for specific schools or defined programs that it deemed reasonable or necessary, and for which the request did not represent an attempt to circumvent the opening and closing dates set forth in the school calendar law.



### Exhibit 3

#### Timeline for the School Calendar Law Establishing Start and End Dates for Public Schools

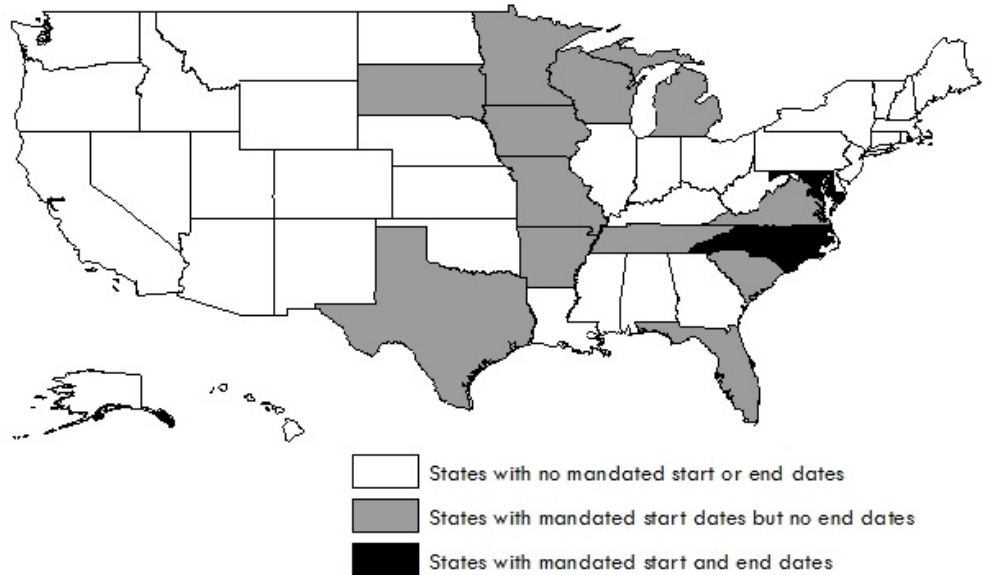
<b>2004</b>	Legislation enacted stipulating public schools set start date no earlier than August 25 and end date no later than June 10. Year round schools exempted. Good cause (school closings) and educational purpose waivers authorized.
<b>2005</b>	School calendar law effective beginning in 2005–06 school year.
<b>2011</b>	Instructional time requirement increased from 180 days and 1,000 hours to 185 days and 1,025 hours.
<b>2012</b>	Start date changed to no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and end date changed to no later than the Friday closest to June 11.  Local boards of education allowed to start school no earlier than the Monday closest to August 19 if schools were closed 8 days in 4 of last 10 years.  Educational purpose waiver eliminated.  Instructional time requirement changed to 185 days <u>or</u> 1,025 hours.
<b>2013</b>	Revised school calendar law effective in 2013–14 school year.

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on legislation enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly.

**Laws in 14 states, including North Carolina, currently prescribe when public schools begin the school year with start dates ranging from August 1 to after Labor Day.** State law in North Carolina and Maryland also stipulates a date when public schools must end the school year. Thirty-six states allow local boards of education to determine the start and end dates for their schools. The map displayed in Exhibit 4 shows which states and regions have school calendar laws.

## Exhibit 4

North Carolina is 1 of 14 States with School Calendar Laws



Source: Program Evaluation Division based on a 50 state review of laws related to school calendars.

Exhibit 5 provides more information about the school calendar laws in the 13 other states and compares them to North Carolina's school calendar law. In 1983, Missouri became the first state to enact a school calendar law by establishing a school start date. More than half the states with such laws enacted them during the 2000s. The laws among the 14 states are similar in that they specify a school start date but differ in their allowances for year-round school exemptions or waivers.

Some notable highlights from the Program Evaluation Division's 50-state review of school calendar laws include the following state actions:

- **Florida.** In 2015, the Florida legislature changed the school calendar law by moving the school start date from no earlier than 14 days prior to Labor Day to no earlier than August 10.
- **Maryland.** The Governor, not the legislature, required all Maryland public schools to start after Labor Day and end by June 15 by issuing an executive order in August 2016.
- **Mississippi.** The Mississippi legislature enacted a school calendar law in 2012 that required public schools to start on or after the third Monday in August beginning with the 2014–15 school year. After superintendents argued for keeping the school start date a local decision, the Mississippi legislature repealed the law in 2014 before it became effective.
- **Missouri.** The school calendar law in Missouri allows local boards of education to establish an earlier school start date if the board follows an annual public hearing process and votes to have an earlier date. Most Missouri school districts (518 of 519 districts) use this procedure to start school earlier than the date set in state law.

- **Virginia.** In Virginia, a school district that is entirely surrounded by another school district that has received a good cause waiver for a start date prior to Labor Day may also receive a waiver to start school on the same date as the surrounding school district.

## Exhibit 5: Descriptions of Laws in Other States That Mandate Statewide School Calendars

State (Law Enacted)	Start Date	End Date	Year Round Exemption	Waivers
<b>Arkansas</b> (1993)	On or after Monday of the week in which 8/19 falls, no earlier than 8/14, and no later than 8/26	✗	✗	Emergency waivers from Department of Education
<b>Florida</b> (2006)	No earlier than 8/10	✗	✗	✗
<b>Iowa</b> (1985)	No earlier than 8/23	✗	✓	✗
<b>Maryland</b> (2016)	After Labor Day	No later than 6/15	✓	State Board of Education may issue annual waivers
<b>Michigan</b> (2001)	After Labor Day	✗	✓	✗
<b>Minnesota</b> (1985)	After Labor Day	✗	✗	School construction projects and agreements with other districts
<b>Missouri</b> (1983)	No earlier than 10 calendar days prior to first Monday in September	✗	✓	School boards may use a public hearing process to set an earlier start date
<b>North Carolina</b> (2004)	No earlier than Monday closest to 8/26	No later than Friday closest to 6/11	✓	Good cause waivers
<b>South Carolina</b> (2006)	No earlier than the third Monday in August	✗	✓	Educational purpose and good cause waivers
<b>South Dakota</b> (1993)	No earlier than the first Tuesday after first Monday in September	✗	✗	School boards may initiate a referendum process to set an earlier start date
<b>Tennessee</b> (1990)	No earlier than 8/1	✗	✓	✗
<b>Texas</b> (2001)	No earlier than fourth Monday in August	No earlier than 5/15	✓	✗
<b>Virginia</b> (2001)	After Labor Day	✗	✗	Good cause and innovative or experimental program waivers
<b>Wisconsin</b> (2004)	No earlier than 9/1	✗	✓	✗

Notes: The school calendar laws in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia allow good cause waivers for earlier start dates if school districts are closed a varying number of days in previous years due to severe weather, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations.

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on school calendar laws for other states.

**North Carolina's school calendar law prescribing when public schools start and end has been in effect for 10 years.** This evaluation provides an opportunity to examine how the limitations on school calendar flexibility specified in state law affect LEAs, school operations, students, and the tourism industry.

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## Findings

**Finding 1. North Carolina law restricts the flexibility of the school calendar by mandating statewide start and end dates for the school year, and school superintendents report that this limited flexibility impedes effective development and management of their school calendar.**

**Local boards of education adopt a school calendar as directed by state law.** Boards must consult with parents and public school personnel in the development of the school calendar. Most local education agencies (LEAs) have school calendar committees with parents and school personnel as members. These school calendar committees develop their school district's calendar by following the guidelines established in state law. These guidelines include the following requirements and limitations:

- a total of 215 days falling within a fiscal year,
- a minimum of 185 days or 1,025 hours of instruction covering at least nine calendar months,
- a minimum of 10 annual vacation days,
- a minimum of 9 teacher workdays,
- the same or equivalent number of legal holidays occurring within the school calendar as those designated for state employees,
- a total number of teacher workdays for teachers employed for a 10-month term that does not exceed 195 days, and
- 42 consecutive days when teacher attendance is not required.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to these requirements, state law prohibits school on Sundays and requires that Veterans Day be a holiday for all school personnel and students enrolled in public schools. The school calendar must also include a plan for making up days and instructional hours missed when schools are closed due to inclement weather.

**State law authorizes local boards of education to determine the start and end dates for public schools within the parameters of the school calendar law.** However, the same state law restricts their authority by limiting how early and late the school year can start and end. The opening day of school for students cannot be earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and school must end no later than the Friday closest to June 11. As shown in Exhibit 6, these restrictions on the school calendar cause the earliest start date for the school year to float between August 23 and August 29. The latest end date for the school year floats between June 8 and June 14. In a Program Evaluation Division survey of school superintendents, 80% of respondents reported that current school calendar

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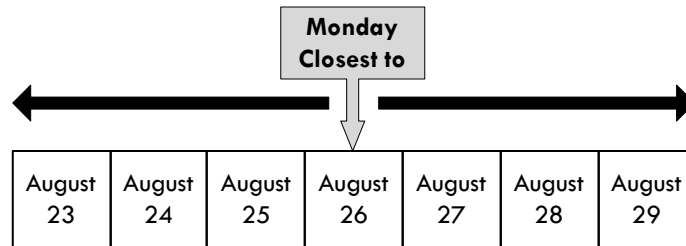
<sup>8</sup> The number of required teacher workdays varies depending on how many days of instruction are scheduled by the LEA. If an LEA chooses to schedule fewer than 185 days of instruction, the number of workdays must increase so that the total number of days in the school year equals 215.

law makes scheduling the start and end dates of the school year somewhat or very difficult.

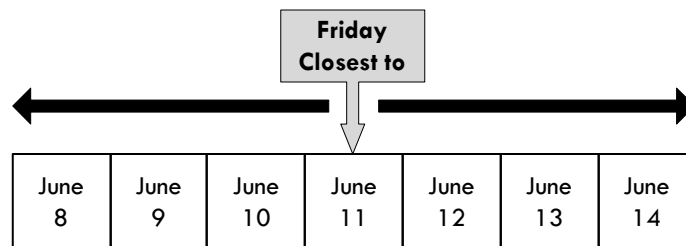
### Exhibit 6

State Law Requires Earliest School Start and Latest End Dates to Float Across a Seven-Day Time Period

Earliest school start date floats between August 23 and August 29



Latest school end date floats between June 8 and June 14



Source: Program Evaluation Division based on Gen. Stat. §115C-84.2(d).

**The start and end dates required by state law determine the length of the school year.** Most start and end date combinations under the school calendar law produce a 42-week school year with a 10-week summer break. A 42-week school year provides 210 weekdays to meet the school calendar requirements mandated by state law. However, three start and end date combinations periodically reduce the school year by one week and subsequently increase the summer break by one week:

- start on August 28 and end by June 8,
- start on August 29 and end by June 8, and
- start on August 28 and end by June 9.

Under these date combinations, the school calendar has only 205 weekdays to meet the school calendar requirements.

Two of these date combinations arise during the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years, meaning LEAs have two consecutive school years with five fewer weekdays to meet school calendar requirements.<sup>9</sup> During the next 35 school years, date combinations resulting in a shorter school year will occur eight more times. The shorter school calendar occurs every five to six years. Exhibit 8 identifies those school years with only 205 weekdays. In years when LEAs only have 41 weeks to schedule the school year, they struggle to meet the requirements and limitations imposed under the school calendar law.

<sup>9</sup> The 2016-17 school year started on August 29 and must end by June 9. The 2017–18 school year starts on August 28 and must end by June 8.

### Exhibit 8

Date Combinations Resulting in a Shorter School Year Will Occur Eight Times During the Next 35 years

School Year	Start Date	End Date
2017-18	08/28/2017	06/08/2018
2022-23	08/29/2022	06/09/2023
2028-29	08/28/2028	06/08/2029
2033-34	08/29/2033	06/09/2034
2034-35	08/28/2034	06/08/2035
2039-40	08/29/2039	06/08/2040
2044-45	08/29/2044	06/09/2045
2050-51	08/29/2050	06/09/2051

← Two consecutive school years with only 41 weeks.

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on applying the school calendar law requirements through the 2050-51 school year.

The school calendar law requires LEAs to provide 185 days **or** 1,025 hours of instruction each school year. The required amount of instruction time was increased in 2011 from 180 days and 1,000 hours. Initially, the law directed LEAs to meet requirements of 185 days **and** 1,025 hours of instruction, but the requirement was modified in 2012 to 185 days **or** 1,025 hours of instruction to offer more flexibility to LEAs. The change was made after LEAs reported difficulty in meeting both requirements within the constraints imposed by school start and end dates.

### Exhibit 9

Most LEAs Do Not Schedule More Than 180 Days of Instruction to Meet Time Requirements

Days of Instruction	Number of Local Education Agencies	
	2015-16	2016-17
< than 180 days	23	36
180 Days	66	63
> than 180 days	23	13
Data unavailable	3	3
Range	164 to 185 days of instruction	

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.

The Program Evaluation Division survey of school superintendents found most LEAs do not schedule more than 180 days of instruction and instead choose to meet the time requirement of 1,025 or more hours of instruction. Exhibit 9 shows the number of days of instruction scheduled by LEAs for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. A majority of LEAs scheduled 180 days of instruction during both school years; however, the number of LEAs with less than 180 days of instruction increased 57% from 2015-16 to 2016-17, when the school calendar law reduced the school year length by one week. Nine LEAs scheduled 185 days of instruction during the 2015-16 school year, but only three LEAs scheduled 185 days of instruction for the 2016-17 school year. The Program Evaluation Division survey found that 62% of school superintendents reported the school calendar law

makes scheduling the required amount of instructional time somewhat or very difficult.

**The school calendar law exempts year-round schools from the mandated school start and end dates but does not define a year-round school.** The Department of Public Instruction provides the following guidance on school calendar types and requires LEAs to identify a calendar type in the school information system:

- **Traditional.** A school has one track in operation for at least 185 days, with a long summer break (approximately 10 weeks).
- **Year-round.** A school that remains in session for the entire calendar year.

For the 2016–17 school year, LEAs identified 104 schools as year-round schools. Wake County has 52 (50%) of the year-round schools; the other year-round schools are located in 24 LEAs.<sup>10</sup> The Lexington City board of education voted to adopt a year-round calendar for the district’s seven schools beginning with the 2017–18 school year; as result, all Lexington City schools will be exempt from the start and end dates required by state law.

The law also exempts schools that were designated by their local boards of education as having a modified calendar for the 2003–04 school year, so long as these schools continue to operate under a modified calendar. These restrictions prevent any other schools from opening with a modified calendar or converting to one. Again, the law does not define a modified calendar, but five schools in Wake County had modified calendars in 2004 and continue to maintain a modified calendar for the 2016–17 school year.<sup>11</sup>

**The school calendar law authorizes the State Board of Education to waive the start date requirement for good cause.** The “good cause” designation is applied to any LEA that has been closed 8 or more days per year during any 4 of the last 10 years due to severe weather conditions, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations. Receiving a good cause waiver allows qualifying LEAs to start school no earlier than the Monday closest to August 19 (or one week earlier than typically mandated) and is intended to provide sufficient days to accommodate anticipated makeup days due to school closings. For the 2016–17 school year, 13 LEAs, all located in Western North Carolina, requested and received good cause waivers to start school earlier because they had closed schools for 8 or more days during at least 4 of the last 10 years.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The following LEAs have one or more year-round schools: Alamance-Burlington, Asheville City, Bertie County, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City, Cumberland County, Durham County, Franklin County, Granville County, Haywood County, Henderson County, Johnston County, Lee County, McDowell County, Charlotte Mecklenburg, Moore County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Orange County, Pender County, Rockingham County, Rutherford County, Union County, Wake County, and Warren County.

<sup>11</sup> The Wake County modified calendar schools have a shorter summer break (6 to 7 weeks) with longer fall, winter, and spring breaks (about 2 weeks).

<sup>12</sup> The following LEAs received a good cause waiver to start school one week earlier for the 2016–17 school year: Alleghany County, Ashe County, Avery County, Clay County, Graham County, Haywood County, Jackson County, Madison County, Mitchell County, Swain County, Watauga County, Yadkin County, and Yancey County.

**Since the school calendar law was enacted in 2004, school superintendents and local boards of education have continued to request that local control of the start and end dates be restored.** Both statewide and local bills proposing various modifications to the school calendar law have been introduced every biennium since 2005. During the 2015 Session, 44 local bills were introduced requesting school calendar flexibility for 70 of the 115 LEAs. Most bills exempted specified LEAs from the start and end date requirement, but some bills specified that first semester exams be given before winter break or authorized LEAs to align start and end dates with the community colleges serving their area.

**School superintendents report that limited flexibility impedes effective development and management of the school calendar.** The Program Evaluation Division survey of school superintendents asked them to rate their perceptions of how the school calendar law affects different aspects of the development and management of the school calendar for their LEA. As shown in Exhibit 10, most school superintendents reported the school calendar law makes several tasks associated with developing and managing a school calendar somewhat or very difficult.

**Exhibit 10**

Most Superintendents Perceive State Law as Making School Calendar Scheduling More Difficult

School Calendar Scheduling Task	Made Somewhat or Very Difficult
Scheduling make-up days	96%
Scheduling teacher workdays	94%
Aligning high school schedules with the schedule for the community college serving your LEA	94%
Scheduling professional development for teachers and other certified school employees	92%
Scheduling final exams for high school students	92%
Scheduling the opening and closing day of school	80%
Developing alternative school calendars to meet community needs	77%

*Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.*

The Program Evaluation Division survey also asked school superintendents to rate the importance of having more flexibility to develop and manage different aspects of the school calendar. As shown in Exhibit 11, most school superintendents responded that having more flexibility over tasks associated with developing and managing their LEA’s school calendar was very or extremely important.



**Exhibit 11****Most School Superintendents Want More Flexibility to Develop and Manage Their LEA's School Calendar**

How important is it for your LEA to	Very or Extremely Important
Schedule first semester exams for high school students before winter break	94%
Have more flexibility to schedule make-up days	91%
Have more flexibility to schedule teacher workdays	89%
Have more flexibility to schedule professional development for teachers and other certified school employees	89%
Have flexibility to start and end the school year on any weekday	88%
Have board of education determine school start and end dates	86%
Align the school calendar with the calendar for the community college serving your LEA	85%
Have more flexibility to schedule instructional time required by state law	75%

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.

**School superintendents report that school personnel and parents complain about scheduling restrictions due to the school calendar law.**

The Program Evaluation Division survey of school superintendents asked them to describe how frequently they receive complaints from school personnel and parents about the school calendar. As shown in Exhibit 12, school superintendents received complaints most frequently from school personnel and parents about scheduling exams before winter break, scheduling makeup days, and aligning the school calendar with the community college calendar. Specifically, school personnel complained most frequently about scheduling exams before winter break, whereas parents complained most frequently about scheduling makeup days. In short, school personnel and parents complain most frequently about the same scheduling issues that plague school superintendents when they are managing their LEA's school calendar.

## Exhibit 12

School Superintendents Report that School Personnel and Parents Frequently Complain About Scheduling Restrictions Due to the School Calendar Law

How frequently do superintendents hear complaints about	Often or Always	
	From School Personnel	From Parents
Scheduling final exams for high school students	83%	57%
Scheduling make-up days	78%	70%
Aligning high school schedules with the schedule for the community college serving your LEA	77%	55%

Note: A majority of school superintendents also reported receiving a high frequency of complaints from school personnel about scheduling professional development (70%) and teacher workdays (63%).

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of school superintendents of the 115 local education agencies.

Throughout this evaluation, the Program Evaluation Division heard from stakeholders about why more local flexibility to develop and manage the school calendar is necessary. The issues that were discussed most frequently include the following:

- Exams before winter break.** Currently, public schools start in late August, which means that high school exams cannot be scheduled before winter break because the first semester would be too short and therefore not meet instructional time requirements. Superintendents commented that scheduling final exams before winter break is better for high school students because students are tested immediately after learning material.

The Program Evaluation Division survey of school superintendents asked them to rate how the school calendar law affected student performance, and 91% perceived the law somewhat or significantly decreased high school student performance. Teacher focus groups conducted by the North Carolina Teacher Voice Network reported perceptions that giving exams after winter break lowered student scores and caused high school students to lose focus and be more anxious about testing.

Department of Public Instruction staff and school superintendents also discussed how not offering exams before winter break affects military families with students who must withdraw from school when their parents are relocated. These students may be unable to take final exams before moving or may be rushed to take exams before completing a course; both situations may negatively affect their final grades. The Program Evaluation Division survey of North Carolina parents and school personnel asked them to rate the importance of having final exams before winter break, and 72% responded that it was very or extremely important.

- Aligning school calendar with community college calendar.** The current school calendar does not align with the community college calendar because community colleges complete their fall semesters before winter break, whereas public schools end their fall semester

in mid-to-late January.<sup>13</sup> This calendar misalignment results in community colleges starting the spring semester two to three weeks before high school students complete the fall semester. Superintendents reported this calendar discrepancy affects participation in the Career and Promise Program, which encourages high school students to take courses at community colleges during their junior and senior years. In survey comments, superintendents reported that students struggle to balance the different calendars for high school and community college courses and furthermore that the school calendar law creates difficulties for students who graduate early in order to start college during the spring semester. Most four-year colleges and universities start their spring semester before the fall semester ends for North Carolina high school students.

- **Make-up days.** State law requires that the school calendar adopted by local boards of education include a plan for making up instructional days and hours missed when schools are closed by inclement weather. A local board of education may revise the mandated end date if necessary in order to comply with the minimum requirements for instructional days or hours. As discussed earlier, most LEAs do not qualify for a good cause waiver to start school one week earlier to accommodate makeup days. LEAs must designate makeup days within the time constraints imposed by the school start and end parameters directed by state law. Superintendents reported that scheduling makeup days is challenging under the school calendar law because of these restrictions. LEAs are still required to meet instructional time requirements when inclement weather closes schools, but superintendents noted that parents and school personnel object to scheduling makeup days during spring break and on Saturdays. Superintendents commented that scheduling makeup days at the end of the school year means that students attend school after testing occurs. LEAs can reduce the number of instructional days and increase instructional time each day, but some superintendents expressed concern that increased instructional time per day does not produce learning gains equivalent to students attending school for more days.
- **Teacher workdays and professional development.** To meet instructional time requirements, superintendents reported the majority of teacher workdays and professional development opportunities are scheduled before students return to school or after their departure. Both superintendents and teachers want flexibility to allow scheduling teacher workdays during the school year to give teachers time to plan and be more responsive to student needs. Superintendents reported that scheduling professional development during the school year is important because teachers can immediately apply what they have learned

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<sup>13</sup> State Board of Community College regulations direct community colleges to start the fall semester no earlier than August 15 and end by December 31.

to benefit students, but they prefer not to pull teachers out of the classroom for training.

**Survey results reveal that a higher percentage of school personnel are dissatisfied with the calendar for their school district as compared to parents.** The Program Evaluation Division survey of North Carolina parents and school personnel asked them to rate their satisfaction with their school district’s calendar. Exhibit 13 shows that a majority (51%) of school personnel are dissatisfied with the calendar for their school district, whereas 36% of parents are dissatisfied. Even though a higher percentage of parents than school personnel reported satisfaction with their district’s school calendar, only 44% of parents were satisfied.

**Exhibit 13**

A Majority of School Personnel and 36% of Parents are Dissatisfied with Their District’s School Calendar

Satisfaction with their District’s School Calendar	Parents (N = 26,178)	School Personnel (N = 19,942)
Dissatisfied	36%	51%
Neither Dissatisfied nor Satisfied	20%	14%
Satisfied	44%	35%

*Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of parents and school personnel.*

**In summary, state law limits the flexibility of local boards of education to determine their school calendar.** State law restricts how early and late the school year can start and end for public school students. School superintendents and local boards of education have requested restoration of local control over the start and end dates for the school year because they perceive that limited flexibility impedes effective development and management of their school calendar to meet the needs of their communities.

**Finding 2: Opinions differ on when North Carolina public schools should start and end the school year, and no change in the State’s school calendar law satisfies the competing interests of stakeholders.**

The Program Evaluation Division sought a wide range of input about how North Carolina’s school calendar law affects public education, school operations, families, and businesses. To elicit this feedback, the Program Evaluation Division used a variety of data collection tools including interviews, surveys, focus groups, and citizen polls.

**A diverse array of stakeholders has opinions on when public schools should start and end the school year.** The Program Evaluation Division received information from 19 different stakeholder organizations and grouped the stakeholders into five categories (listed in Exhibit 14) based on why they are interested in when North Carolina public schools start and end the school year.

- **State government.** The State Board of Education and the Department of Public instruction provide oversight and policy direction for public education in North Carolina. Their

responsibilities include setting policies for the school calendar law and supervising local boards of education and school administrators in their implementation of the law's requirements.

- **Education.** These organizations represent local boards of education, school administrators, educators, and school employees. They are interested in how scheduling the start and end dates for the school year affects school operations, academic schedules, and student performance.
- **Parent and citizen.** These organizations represent parents, teachers, and other concerned citizens who are interested in how scheduling the start and end dates for the school year affects families and students including scheduling vacations and family time.
- **Travel and tourism.** These organizations represent travel and tourism-related businesses. They are interested in how scheduling the start and end dates of the school year affects their businesses including when and where families schedule vacations and tourism-related activities, availability of seasonal employees, and summer camp attendance.
- **Other interested stakeholders.** These limited government and social justice organizations are interested in how state and local government determines the start and end dates for the school year.

The competing interests of these stakeholders influence their opinions about the school calendar law. They have different views on how the law affects public education, school operations, families, and businesses.

## Exhibit 14: Stakeholder Groups Interested in School Calendar Start and End Dates

Stakeholder	Interest in the School Calendar Law
<b>State Government (2)</b>	
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction	This department implements the State's public school laws governing public education including the school calendar law.
North Carolina State Board of Education	The State Board of Education has the constitutional authority to lead and set policies for public education including policies related to the school calendar law.
<b>Education Organization (5)</b>	
North Carolina Association of Educators	This organization represents educators and school employees who are interested in how the school calendar affects students and academic schedules.
North Carolina Association of School Administrators	This organization represents school superintendents and other school administrators who are responsible for operating public schools and following the school calendar law.
North Carolina School Board Association	This organization represents the 115 local boards of education that are directed to adopt a school calendar that meets the requirements of the school calendar law.
Teacher focus groups conducted by the North Carolina Teacher Voice Network	This organization connects teachers with education policy through focus groups and surveys so they can identify teaching challenges and propose solutions to district and state policymakers including policies associated with the school calendar law.
Professional Educators of North Carolina	This organization represents educators and school employees who are interested in how the school calendar affects students and academic schedules.
<b>Parent and Citizen Organizations (2)</b>	
North Carolina Parent Teacher Association	This organization represents parent volunteers and teachers who are interested in how the school calendar affects students and families.
Save Our Summers – North Carolina	This organization represents parents, education professionals, and concerned citizens who are interested in protecting and maintaining a traditional school calendar.
<b>Travel and Tourism Organizations (7)</b>	
Hospitality Alliance of North Carolina	This organization represents hotel companies in North Carolina that are interested in how the school calendar affects their businesses.
NC REALTORS®	This organization represents over 37,000 realtors and their consumers who are interested in how the school calendar affects property owners and their representatives from an economic and free enterprise standpoint.
North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association	This organization represents over 18,000 restaurants and 1,700 hotels across the state that are interested in how the school calendar affects their businesses.
North Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition	This organization represents professional sports teams, resorts, attractions, convention and visitors bureaus, and other businesses that are interested in how the school calendar affects their businesses.
North Carolina Travel Industry Association	This organization represents destination marketing organizations, attractions, and tourism-related retail businesses such as hotels and restaurants that are interested in how the school calendar affects seasonal employment and tourism-related revenue.
North Carolina Youth Camp Association	This organization represents summer camp operators and is interested in how the school calendar affects their workforce and camper participation.
North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Association	This organization represents management companies and their affiliates specializing in vacation rental management that are interested in how the school calendar affects their businesses.
<b>Other Interested Stakeholders (3)</b>	
Freedom Works	This grassroots organization advocates for limited government and supports local government control of the school calendar.
John Locke Foundation	This organization promotes and researches transforming government through competition, innovation, personal freedom, and personal responsibility and supports local government control of the school calendar.
North Carolina Justice Center	This organization advocates for and provides research on economic and social justice issues and supports local government control of the school calendar to meet the needs of low-income students.

Source: Program Evaluation Division.

**Stakeholders have conflicting opinions on the issue of state versus local control of the start and end dates for the school year.** Enactment of the school calendar law shifted control of school year start and end dates from local boards of education to the State, and this change continues to be debated by stakeholders. As Exhibit 15 shows, organizations representing travel and tourism interests and Save Our Summers – North Carolina prefer state control. These organizations supported the school calendar law when it was enacted. They believe that if state control of school start and end dates is relinquished many LEAs would return to starting school in early August, which would potentially shorten summer breaks.

### Exhibit 15: Stakeholder Preferences for State Versus Local Control of School Start and End Dates

Favor State Control	Favor Local Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality Alliance of North Carolina</li> <li>• North Carolina Association of Realtors</li> <li>• North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association</li> <li>• North Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition</li> <li>• North Carolina Travel Industry Association</li> <li>• North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Association</li> <li>• North Carolina Youth Camp Association</li> <li>• Save Our Summers – North Carolina</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom Works</li> <li>• John Locke Foundation</li> <li>• North Carolina Association of Educators</li> <li>• North Carolina Association of School Administrators</li> <li>• North Carolina Department of Public Instruction</li> <li>• North Carolina Justice Center</li> <li>• North Carolina Parent Teacher Association</li> <li>• North Carolina School Board Association</li> <li>• North Carolina State Board of Education</li> <li>• Professional Educators of North Carolina</li> </ul>

Note: The teachers participating in the focus groups conducted by the Teacher Voice Network are not included because they did not discuss the issue of state versus local control of the school calendar.

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on stakeholder interviews.

Education organizations, the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association, and other interested stakeholders prefer local control. Since the school calendar law was enacted in 2004, these organizations have requested local flexibility be restored so that local boards of education can determine school start and end dates for their districts. In addition, most school superintendents (90%) reported in survey responses that they want the General Assembly to restore local control for determining school start and end dates instead of maintaining or modifying the school calendar law. Their preference for local control is based on the view that, as discussed in Finding 1, the current school calendar law hinders their ability to effectively develop and manage the school calendar.

**Public opinion favors local control of the school calendar.** The Program Evaluation Division sought out public opinion on the issue of state versus local control of the school calendar using two methods: citizen polls conducted by the Elon University Poll and High Point University Poll and a survey of North Carolina parents and school personnel conducted by the Program Evaluation Division with assistance from the North Carolina Parent

Teacher Association.<sup>14</sup> Exhibit 16 shows the majority of respondents to the polls and the survey believe local school districts should determine school start dates.

### Exhibit 16: Public Opinion Favors Local School Districts Determining School Start Dates

Response Options	Elon University Poll (n=660)	High Point University Poll (n = 404)	Parent and School Personnel Survey (n=46,139)
State law should determine the start date for North Carolina public schools	25%	30%	15%
Local school districts should determine the start date for their schools	65%	62%	75%
No opinion/Did not respond	10%	9%	10%

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on polling and survey data.

**No change to North Carolina’s school calendar law satisfies all stakeholders.** To determine whether consensus existed around any one particular change to the school calendar law, the Program Evaluation Division created six options for modifying the school calendar law and presented them to stakeholders. In developing the six options listed below, the Program Evaluation Division considered how the current law affects the school calendar, the increased flexibility requested in bills introduced during recent legislative sessions, and concerns about the length of summer break.

- **Option A.** This option proposes that school starts no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 as required under current law, but it would discontinue the specified end date of the Friday closest to June 11. The Program Evaluation Division found that most other states with laws directing when the school year can start did not specify an end date.<sup>15</sup>
- **Option B.** This option proposes that school starts the Monday closest to August 24 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11. As discussed in Finding 1, the current school calendar periodically reduces the school year by one week, and this proposal would eliminate that issue.
- **Option C.** This option proposes that school starts the Monday closest to August 19 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11. Under current law, LEAs receiving a good cause waiver can start school one week earlier to allow for inclement weather make-up days, and this proposal would allow all LEAs to start school one week earlier to increase scheduling flexibility.

<sup>14</sup> The polls and the survey used the same question so results could be compared. Before responding to the question about state or local control of the school calendar, respondents received the following information: “Currently, state law requires public schools in North Carolina to start the last week of August. Previously, state law allowed local school districts to determine the starting day for their schools, and many districts started school in early August.” The Elon University Poll and High Point University Poll reported that 23% and 24% of their respondents had children in the public schools, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> As shown in Exhibit 5, Maryland is the only state other than North Carolina to specify an end date. The other 12 states with school calendar laws do not specify an end date.



- **Option D.** This option proposes that school starts no earlier than August 10 and ends no later than May 31. In legislation introduced during the 2015 session, 21 LEAs requested authority to hold fall semester exams before the winter break, and this proposal would allow schools to start early enough to meet instructional time requirements and complete the fall semester before winter break.
- **Option E.** This option proposes that school starts no earlier than August 15 and ends no later than May 31 to allow alignment with the community college calendar. Legislation introduced during the 2015 session would have authorized LEAs to align their school calendar with the community college calendar. The State Board for Community Colleges directs community colleges to start the fall semester on or after August 15, and this proposal would allow LEAs to align their school calendar with the community college serving their district.
- **Option F.** This option restores State Board of Education authority to approve a waiver to the school calendar law for an educational purpose for a specific school or defined program. Legislation introduced during the 2015 session proposed reinstating the educational purpose waiver that was eliminated in 2012.

Exhibit 17 provides further information about these options for modifying the school calendar law and compares the proposals to the current state law. In addition, the exhibit provides information about starting school after Labor Day—an option proposed by some organizations representing travel and tourism interests.

## Exhibit 17: Comparison of Proposed Options for Modifying North Carolina’s School Calendar Law

Description	Length of School Year	Length of Summer Break	Floating or Fixed Dates	Scheduling Flexibility	Exams before Winter Break	Align with Community College Calendar
<b>Current Law:</b> School starts no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11	41 or 42 weeks	10 or 11 weeks	Floating			
<b>Option A:</b> School starts no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 with no specified end date	41 or 42 weeks	10 or 11 weeks	Floating	✓		
<b>Option B:</b> School starts the Monday closest to August 24 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11	42 weeks	10 weeks	Floating			
<b>Option C:</b> School starts the Monday closest to August 19 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11	42 or 43 weeks	9 or 10 weeks	Floating	✓		
<b>Option D:</b> School starts no earlier than August 10 and ends no later than May 31	42 weeks	10 weeks	Fixed	✓	✓	✓
<b>Option E:</b> School starts no earlier than August 15 and ends no later than May 31 to allow alignment with community college calendar	41.5 weeks	10.5 weeks	Fixed		✓	✓
<b>Option F:</b> Restore State Board of Education authority to approve waivers for an educational purpose for a specific school or defined program						
			<i>Would vary based on the calendar authorized under the educational waiver and would apply only to schools covered by the waiver</i>			
<b>After Labor Day:</b> School starts no earlier than the Tuesday after Labor Day with no specified end date	42 weeks	10 weeks	Fixed	✓		

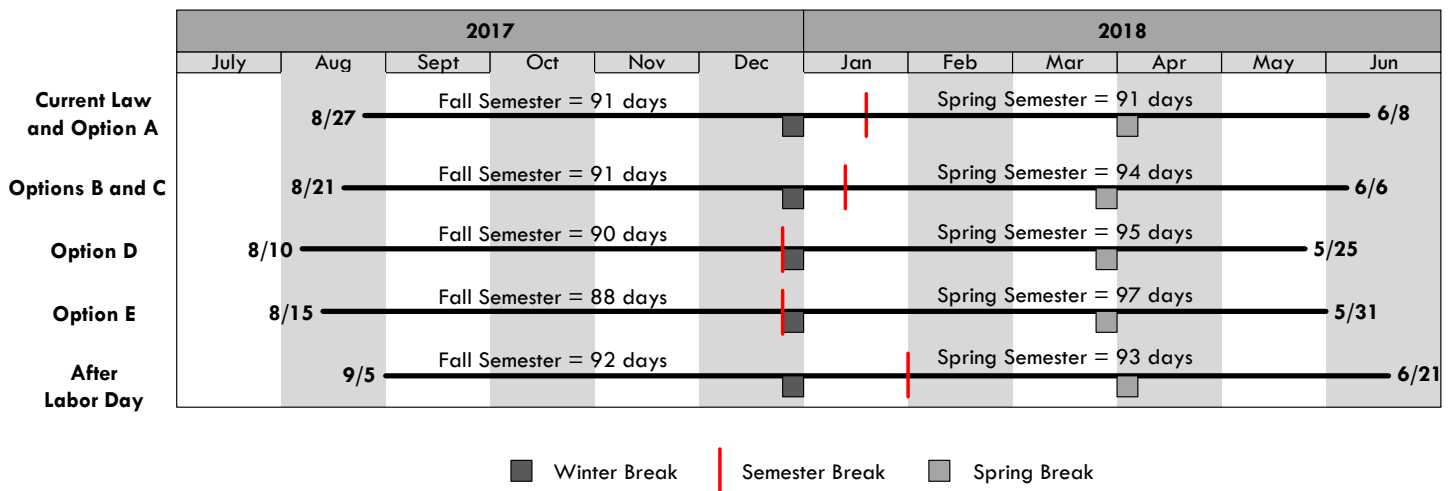
Notes: The floating or fixed dates designation is based on a determination of whether an option had a floating or fixed date for the start or end of the school year. Schedule flexibility is based on whether an option provides more flexibility than the current state law by having no end date or by providing more than 210 workdays to schedule instructional time. To determine whether exams could be completed before winter break, the number of instructional days available before December 23 was calculated and an option had to provide 88 or more days of instruction for the fall semester in order to receive a check mark. Alignment with the community college calendar was determined by considering whether an option started the school year no later than August 15 and ended the fall semester by December 23.

Source: Program Evaluation Division.

To illustrate how modifying the current law would change the school calendar, the Program Evaluation Division applied the scheduling requirements for the different options to the 2017–18 school year. For comparison purposes, Exhibit 18 provides the following information for how the current state law and each option would function during the 2017–18 school year:

- the school start and end dates,
- the number of instructional days for the fall and spring semesters,
- the timing of the semester break, and
- the estimated timing of winter and spring breaks.

**Exhibit 18: How the Proposed School Calendar Law Options Would Function During the 2017–18 School Year**



Note: Option F is not included in this illustration because any school authorized under an educational waiver would have a unique and yet-to-be determined calendar.

Source: Program Evaluation Division.

The current law and Option A have the same calendar because the only difference is that Option A does not have an end date. The floating start and end date feature for Options B and C cause these options to have the same schedule for the 2017–18 school year. Both Options D and E end the school year in May and result in the fall semester ending before winter break, with the fall semester having fewer instructional days than the spring semester. Starting the school year after Labor Day means that the semester break occurs at the end of January and the school year ends in late June.

**None of the proposed options for modifying North Carolina’s school calendar law satisfies the competing interests of stakeholders.** As shown in Exhibit 19, stakeholders do not agree on a preferred proposed option for modifying the school calendar law.

## Exhibit 19: Stakeholders Do Not Agree on an Option for Modifying the School Calendar Law

Stakeholders	Current Law	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E	Option F	After Labor Day
<b>Education Organizations</b>								
North Carolina Association of Educators					✓			
North Carolina Association of School Administrators					✓			
North Carolina School Board Association					✓			
Professional Educators of North Carolina					✓			
Teacher focus groups conducted by the Teacher Voice Network (See Note)					✓			
<b>Parent Organizations</b>								
North Carolina Parent Teacher Association				Does not have a position on these options				
Save Our Summers – North Carolina (See Note)	✓							
<b>Travel and Tourism Industry Organizations</b>								
Hospitality Alliance of North Carolina	✓							
North Carolina Association of Realtors	✓							
North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association	✓							✓
North Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition	✓							✓
North Carolina Travel Industry Association	✓							
North Carolina Youth Camp Association			✓		✓	✓		
North Carolina Vacation Rental Managers Assoc.	✓							
<b>Other Interested Stakeholders</b>								
Freedom Works					✓			
John Locke Foundation					✓			
North Carolina Justice Center					✓			

### Description of School Calendar Options

**Current Law.** School starts no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11.

**Option A.** School starts no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 with no specified end date to better align with other states that do not specify end dates.

**Option B.** School starts the Monday closest to August 24 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11 to prevent the reduction of a week of school during certain years.

**Option C.** School starts the Monday closest to August 19 and ends no later than the Friday closest to June 11 to increase scheduling flexibility by adding one week to the school year.

**Option D.** School starts no earlier than August 10 and ends no later than May 31 to allow exams to be held before winter break.

**Option E.** School starts no earlier than August 15 and ends no later than May 31 to align with the community college calendar.

**Option F.** Restore State Board of Education authority to approve a waiver to the school calendar law for an educational purpose for a specific school or defined program.

**After Labor Day.** School starts no earlier than the Tuesday after Labor Day with no specified end date.

**Note:** The majority of the teachers participating in the focus groups preferred Option D, but some teachers preferred Option E. Save Our Summers – North Carolina preferred the current school calendar law to options proposed by the Program Evaluation Division but also indicated that the organization was willing to discuss and consider other options not proposed in this report.

**Most of the organizations representing travel and tourism interests as well as Save Our Summers – North Carolina prefer the current law to the proposed options.**<sup>16</sup> Other than starting after Labor Day, the current school calendar law offers a later start date than any of the options the Program Evaluation Division presented to stakeholders. A start date in late August was preferred by these stakeholders, and several of these organizations also supported starting school after Labor Day. The one exception is the North Carolina Youth Camp Association. This organization preferred Options D and E and not the current state law. These options offer a schedule that matches the summer break for colleges (May 15 to August 15), and summer camps employ college students as counselors.

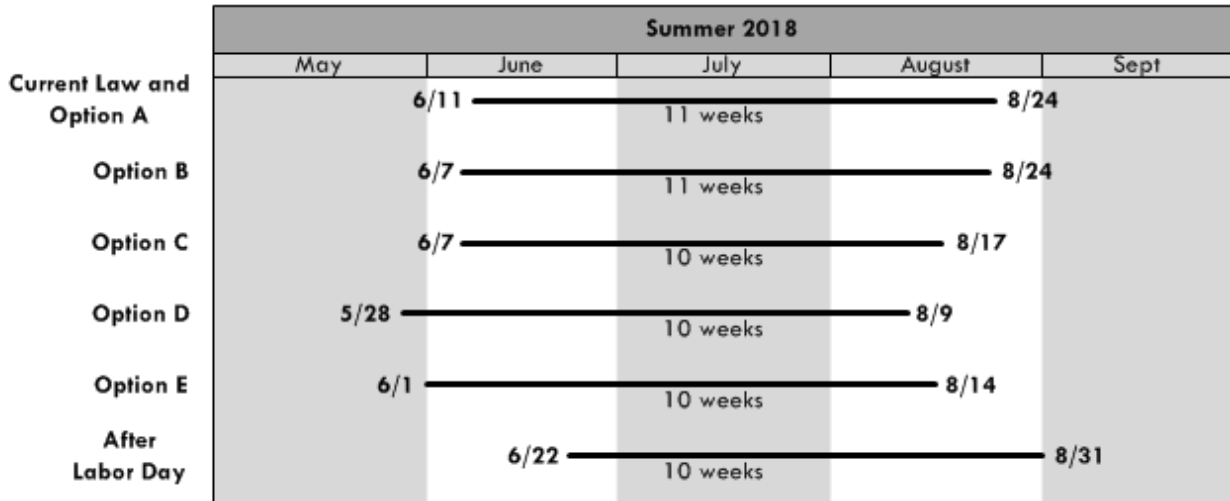
**The organizations representing education interests and other stakeholders prefer Option D, which proposes starting school no earlier than August 10 and ending no later than May 31.** In comparison to current state law, Option D offers the earliest start date in August and is similar to the school calendar that most LEAs were following prior to the enactment of the school calendar law. The Program Evaluation Division's survey of school superintendents asked them to rank Options A through F, and Option D received the top ranking. Most superintendents believe the school calendar under Option D would improve student performance and the satisfaction of school personnel and parents because exams could be completed before winter break and because the calendar would be aligned with the community college calendar.

**The timing of summer break affects stakeholder opinion about proposed modifications to the school calendar law.** The start and end dates for the school calendar determine the length and timing of the summer break between school years. As illustrated by Exhibit 20, the 2018 summer break under the current school calendar law and the various options would be either 10 to 11 weeks, but the timing of the break varies. The timing of summer break during August is an important concern for all stakeholders, and their competing interests cannot be reconciled.

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<sup>16</sup> Save Our Summers – North Carolina indicated that the organization was willing to discuss and consider other options not proposed by the Program Evaluation Division.

### Exhibit 20: Timing of Summer Break Affects Stakeholder Opinion of Proposed Changes to the School Calendar Law



Note: Option F is not included in this illustration because any school authorized under an educational waiver would have a unique and yet-to-be determined calendar.

Source: Program Evaluation Division.

**Most of the organizations representing travel and tourism interests as well as Save Our Summers – North Carolina prefer that summer break ends in late August or after Labor Day.** These organizations asserted in interviews with the Program Evaluation Division that August is an important time period for travel and tourism businesses and that starting school earlier than late August would negatively affect business revenue and would prohibit businesses from hiring high school students for the entire summer season. Two stakeholders representing tourism attractions noted they saw increased attendance during the second and third weeks of August 2005 and 2006 after the school calendar law was enacted and school could no longer start in early August or late July. Other stakeholders representing coastal tourism interests stated August is more popular than June for family vacations because the water is warmer, and they believe an early August school start date would reduce rental and hotel occupancy by North Carolina residents. The school calendar law currently satisfies the travel and tourism industry preference for a summer break that includes most of August, which is why these stakeholders prefer to maintain current law.

The Program Evaluation Division could not independently verify the assertions of tourism industry representatives that the school calendar affects their business revenue. The tourism-related economic data maintained by the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina does not distinguish between tourism-related expenditures for in-state and out-of-state residents and, therefore, it is not possible to determine the economic effect of the school calendar law. In addition, the Program Evaluation Division conducted a search for peer-reviewed academic studies on the effects of the school calendar on the tourism industry but found no comprehensive studies presently exist.

**Organizations representing education interests, youth camps, and other interested stakeholders prefer that summer break ends in early August.**

These organizations prefer a summer break schedule that begins in late May and ends in early August. This schedule allows LEAs to offer high school exams before winter break and to align their school calendar with the community college calendar. In addition, this schedule allows summer camps to more easily employ college students as counselors. As discussed earlier in this report, a summer break that includes most of August does not allow LEAs or summer camps to accomplish their goals, which is why they continue to be dissatisfied with the school calendar law and request that the law be changed or eliminated.

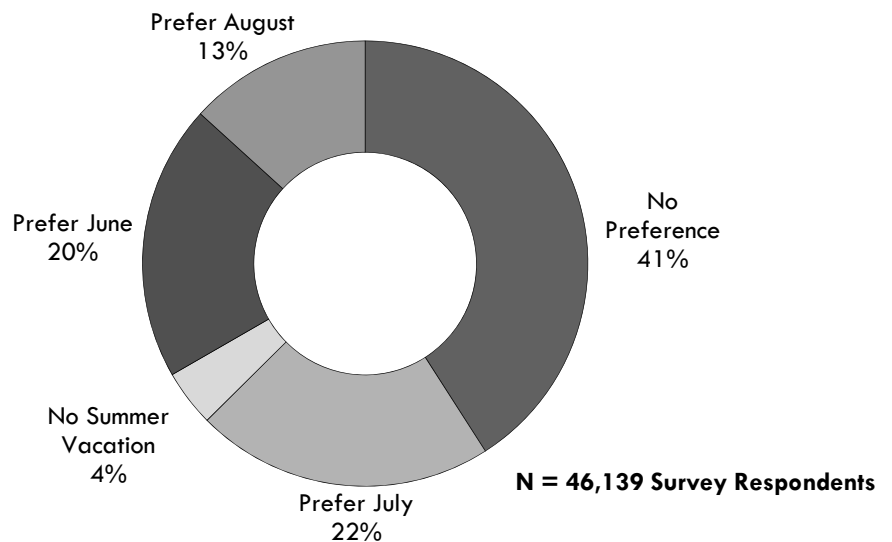
**Results from a survey of parents and school personnel show July is the most preferred summer month for taking a vacation and 41% of survey respondents had no preference.** The Program Evaluation Division’s survey of parents and school personnel asked them to indicate when their family prefers to take a summer vacation. The survey offered the following choices:

- My family prefers to take a vacation in June.
- My family prefers to take a vacation in July.
- My family prefers to take a vacation in August.
- My family takes a summer vacation but does not have a preference for which month it is in.
- My family does not take a summer vacation.

As shown in Exhibit 21, July was the most preferred month and August was the least preferred month for taking a summer vacation among the survey respondents who indicated a preference.

**Exhibit 21**

July is the Most Preferred Month for Taking a Summer Vacation; 41% of Respondents Had No Preference



Source: Program Evaluation Division based on data from a survey of parents and school personnel.

**Polling and survey results indicate a preference for starting school after Labor Day, but no option received a majority of public support.** The Program Evaluation Division sought out public opinion on when school should start by using two methods: citizen polls conducted by the Elon University Poll and High Point University Poll and a survey of North Carolina parents and school personnel conducted by the Program Evaluation Division with assistance from the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association.<sup>17</sup> As shown in Exhibit 22, the response options for starting school included each week in August and an option for after Labor Day. The Elon and High Point polling results revealed a stronger preference for starting school after Labor Day than the parent and school personnel survey results. The opinions of parents and school personnel responding to the survey were more divided—28% favored starting school after Labor Day and 25% favored starting school during the second week of August.

**Exhibit 22**

Survey and Polling Results Show Preference for Starting School After Labor Day, But No Option Received a Majority of Public Support

Response Options	Elon University Poll (n = 660)	High Point University Poll (n = 404)	Parent and School Personnel Survey (n = 46,139)
First week of August	6%	9%	11%
Second week of August	9%	9%	25%
Third week of August	15%	13%	16%
Last week of August	15%	16%	13%
After Labor Day	43%	38%	28%
No opinion/Did not respond	13%	15%	7%

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on polling and survey results.

**In summary, stakeholders have differing opinions on when public schools should start and end the school year.** Stakeholders also have conflicting opinions regarding state versus local control for determining the start and end dates for the school year; public opinion favors local control. No option for modifying the school calendar satisfies all stakeholders. The timing of summer break during August is an important concern for all stakeholders, and their competing interests cannot be reconciled.

**Finding 3. Allowing low-performing schools with high concentrations of low-income students to alter their school calendar in an effort to address summer learning loss provides an opportunity to improve student performance.**

**Research reveals that when a student experiences learning loss in a particular subject over the summer, the loss equals, on average, one month of regular instruction during the year.** Peer-reviewed studies examining summer learning loss measure the phenomenon by comparing a student’s standardized test scores from the end of one grade level to his or her test scores at the beginning of the next grade level. Summer learning loss describes the deterioration of a student’s academic knowledge and

<sup>17</sup> Both polls and the survey used the following question so results could be compared: “In your opinion, when do you think public schools in North Carolina should start?” The Elon University Poll and High Point University Poll reported that 23% and 24% of their respondents had children in the public schools, respectively.



skills that occurs when the student is not in school during the summer months. Conceivably, any long stretch of time a student spends out of the classroom could lead to learning loss, but summer vacation is the longest break in the school calendar. Therefore, students experience higher levels of learning loss in the summer than during any other school break.

**The majority of students, regardless of income, gender, race or IQ, experience summer learning loss in math and spelling skills.** Students consistently lose math computation and spelling skills over the summer because both subjects require the use of procedural skills as well as the memorization of facts. These skills are more susceptible to loss than conceptually-based skills such as reading because they require continued practice. Due to the fact that math and spelling-related resources appear less frequently in home environments than reading resources, the ability of students to practice those subjects during the summer may be limited. A meta-analysis of 39 studies related to summer learning loss found students experience math-related knowledge loss equivalent to 1.8 months of instructional time during the school year, which is more than the average deterioration of one month that occurs for most other subjects.

**Learning loss related to reading occurs at lower levels than loss related to math and spelling, but this loss causes concern as well because it varies by income level.** As stated previously, summer learning loss related to math and spelling occurs for students regardless of their individual characteristics or demographic categories. However, when examining reading learning loss, students from low-income backgrounds tend to lose more than other income-level groups. During the summer, high-income students generally experience gains in reading, middle-income students stay the same, whereas low-income students experience a loss (see Exhibit 23).

**Exhibit 23**

The Effects of Summer Learning Loss Vary by Subject and Student Income Level

Income Level	Reading			Math			Spelling		
	Gain	Hold	Lose	Gain	Hold	Lose	Gain	Hold	Lose
High	✓					✓			✓
Middle		✓				✓			✓
Low			✓			✓			✓

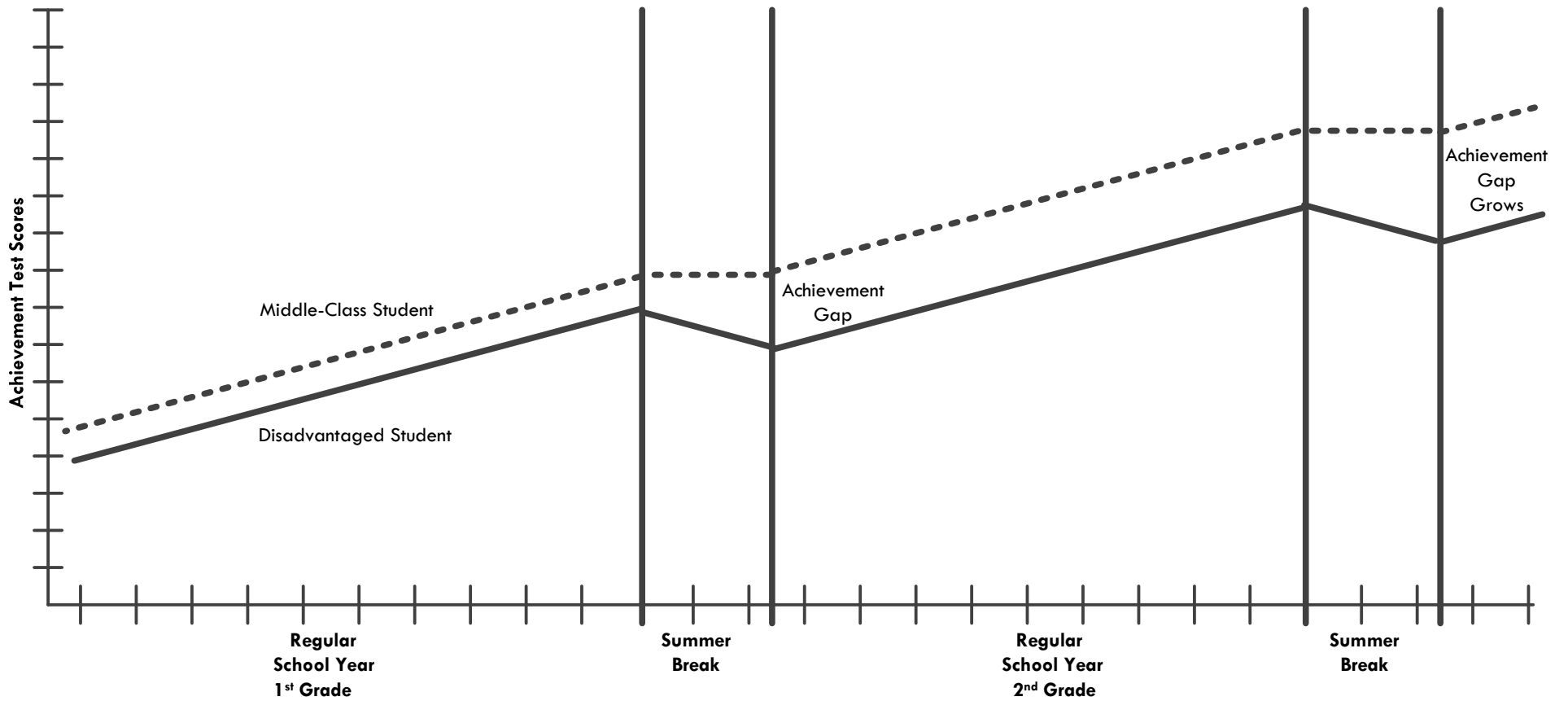
Source: Program Evaluation Division based on analysis of peer-reviewed studies on summer learning loss.

This disparity occurs because interventions that mitigate loss or improve skills require access to resources that facilitate additional practice and instruction. Aside from school, students spend most of their time in the home. Typically, disadvantaged students have less access to resources such as magazines, books, newspapers, or tutoring from adults who encourage reading or practicing related skills. One study observed that among children aged six months to three years old, low-income children hear 616 words per hour as compared to middle-class children hearing 1,251 words per hour and high-income children hearing 2,153 words per hour. These results suggest both written and verbal resources can vary by income.

**Low-income students experience greater disparities in learning due to the cumulative effects of summer learning loss despite the fact that they learn at the same rate as their peers during the school year.** Although home environments and the resources within them differ based on income level, peer-reviewed research suggests that schools offer a space of equalization. Students typically learn at about the same rate during the school year regardless of income level, which means that summer learning loss contributes significantly to the overall gap in learning between lower and higher income groups over time.

The first few years of learning are particularly important because they build the foundation for later learning; in other words, early summer learning loss contributes to greater losses later in a student's academic career. Without interventions, Exhibit 24 shows how these deficits accumulate over time and cause considerable issues as students get further behind each school year.

Exhibit 24: Summer Learning Loss Accumulates Over Time and Is More Pronounced for Low-Income Students



Source: Program Evaluation Division based on the research of and interviews with Dr. Harris Cooper, the Hugo L. Blomquist Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience in the Trinity College of Arts and Sciences at Duke University.

A peer-reviewed study conducted in Baltimore examining the influence of seasonal effects on student performance found that by the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade almost two-thirds of the socioeconomic achievement gap could be explained by differential summer learning loss.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, although all students may experience summer learning loss, it becomes more pronounced over time for students who are economically disadvantaged, particularly as it relates to reading.

**A modified (non-traditional) school calendar may address summer learning loss for low-income and struggling students.** A modified calendar addresses learning loss by shortening the summer break, which is the longest break students spend outside of the classroom. The literature suggests that the achievement gap may decrease between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds when students remain engaged in the school environment.

However, it will take a great deal of time to yield significant results from changing the calendar alone. Instead, peer-reviewed research suggests that modifying the calendar and also offering targeted interventions during breaks can aid in addressing gaps in student learning. Adding targeted interventions during breaks will decrease the amount of knowledge and skills lost, increasing a student's overall performance at a faster rate than would be achieved by solely changing the calendar configuration.

**The peer-reviewed literature related to school calendars and student performance is multifaceted and reveals different results depending on the intent of the calendar change and the way scholars approached the research.** Studies examining the effects of modified calendars on summer learning loss agree that low-income students suffer disproportionately from this phenomenon when compared to their middle and higher income peers. The research also agrees that low-income learning loss is particularly pronounced and problematic because it accrues over time. However, there are some disagreements between studies and some limitations in the research.

First, peer-reviewed research related to the topic of school calendars uses language and definitions that do not align with the language and definitions used by states or school districts. This discrepancy complicates findings and interpretation. Second, much of the research examines the influence of year-round calendars on student outcomes. However, the intent of year-round calendars may or may not reflect efforts to improve student outcomes. Therefore, comparing findings from these studies to those related to modified calendar efforts targeting low performing students may or may not be appropriate.

Some studies examining this topic find positive results associated with decreasing the length of summer break and implementing interventions, whereas other studies find neutral or minor positive influences. The Program Evaluation Division observed that studies showing a neutral or non-positive relationship between modified or year-round school calendars and student performance do not specifically address summer learning loss for low-

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olsen. (2007). Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72:167–180

income students. This conclusion was corroborated by Dr. Harris Cooper of Duke University, an expert on the topic, in interviews. However, the idea that modified calendars positively influence student learning for low-income students is supported by the literature. As stated in one of Dr. Cooper's peer-reviewed articles:

“Taken together, these findings strongly suggest, as proponents have argued, that the modified calendar has its greatest impact on students struggling in school or students from disadvantaged homes” (p. 37)<sup>19</sup>

**North Carolina already has a process for measuring school performance and identifying low-performing schools and districts.** The State Board of Education must identify low-performing schools and districts on an annual basis. As defined in state law, all North Carolina schools receive a School Performance Grade (A-F), which is based on student test scores, and, for high school students, other indicators related to college and career-readiness. School Performance grades are comprised of student achievement scores (80%) and student growth indicators (20%). Schools receive one of the following designations: “exceeded expected growth,” “met expected growth,” or “did not meet expected growth.” Schools designated as low-performing receive a school performance grade of “D” or “F” and a school growth score of “met expected growth” or “did not meet expected growth.” Low-performing school districts are those in which a majority of schools were identified as low-performing. Low-performing schools and school districts must develop improvement plans that include strategies for improving student performance each year.

**Performance data for North Carolina public schools and public charter schools for the 2015–16 school year show a clear correlation between low-performing schools and poverty.** Overall, 60% of North Carolina public schools and public charter schools have poverty rates at or above 50% of their student populations. All but 40 of the schools earning a grade of “D” or “F” for the 2015–16 school year have poverty rates at or above 50%. As required by state law, the State Board of Education identified 489 low-performing schools and 10 low-performing school districts. Fewer schools and districts were identified as being low-performing for 2015–16 than in 2014–15. However, the percentage of recurring low-performing schools increased from 69% to 85%.

**State law limits how local boards of education can use research on summer learning loss to alter the school calendar to improve high poverty and low-performing schools.** As discussed earlier in this report, local school districts no longer have an avenue to receive an educational exemption from the school calendar law to use the calendar to target improving student outcomes. Prior to 2012, LEAs seeking a waiver had to establish a need to adopt a different calendar for a specific school to accommodate a special program offered generally to the student body of that school, a school that primarily serves a special population of students, or a defined program within a school. The State Board of Education could then authorize educational waivers for specific schools or defined programs that it deemed reasonable or necessary and for which the

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<sup>19</sup> Cooper, Harris, Jeffery C. Valentine, Kelly Charlton, & April Melson. (2003). The Effects of Modified School Calendars on Student Achievement and on School and Community Attitudes. *Review of Educational Research*, 73:1–52.

request did not represent an attempt to circumvent the start and end dates set forth in the school calendar law. Ultimately, concerns about the use of calendar waivers and the burden placed on the State Board of Education to review waiver requests and determine whether the intent reflected an educational purpose led to the dissolution of the educational waiver option.

**The educational purpose waiver process had vague criteria that were unrelated to student performance.** The waiver language did not require the LEA to establish a connection between the calendar change and student performance. No evaluation was required to determine whether the allowed change to a given school calendar produced the intended outcomes. Subsequently, the role of approving applications became somewhat subjective. Some stakeholders suggested that schools took advantage of the vague language to change their school calendars without an educational purpose in mind.

**State law provides an option for recurring low-performing schools to operate with the same exemptions from statutes as a charter school, including exemption from the school calendar law.** The State Board of Education is authorized to approve a local board of education's request to reform any school identified as a recurring low-performing school. A recurring low-performing school must be identified as low-performing for two of the previous three years. Under the restart model, the State Board of Education authorizes a local board of education to operate the recurring low-performing school with the same exemptions from statutes and rules as a charter school. These exemptions allow school calendar flexibility for the recurring low-performing school. The school reform plan must outline the goals to be achieved, describe how operating the school with the same exemptions from statutes and rules as a charter school will facilitate accomplishing these goals, and how these exemptions will increase student achievement.

**North Carolina's school accountability system provides an opportunity to track schools using a modified calendar to assess the calendar's impact on improving student performance at low-performing schools.** Peer-reviewed literature clearly demonstrates that low-income students suffer from summer learning loss at higher rates than their middle- or high-income counterparts, and North Carolina's school performance data reveals a close correlation between low student performance and high poverty rates. The literature also shows low-income students could benefit from a school calendar with shorter breaks throughout the school year and increased intervention during breaks. North Carolina already has a process for granting school calendar flexibility to recurring low-performing schools that could be simplified and offered to all low-performing schools and school districts as a part of their improvement plan process. Broadening the school calendar flexibility authority to all low-performing schools would allow North Carolina to evaluate whether using a different school calendar than the one currently allowed by state law might improve student performance.

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## Recommendation

This report describes how state law limits the flexibility of local boards of education to determine their school calendars, which is why these boards continue to request restoration of local control over setting start and end dates for the school year. This report found that the timing of summer break during August is an important concern for the different stakeholder groups and that no option for modifying the school calendar law satisfies their competing interests.

**The disagreement among stakeholders about when North Carolina should start and end the school year cannot be reconciled.** This conflict poses a dilemma because no choice can satisfy all stakeholders and any decision will be perceived as favoring the interests of some stakeholders over others. As a result, this report does not make a recommendation for changing the school calendar law.

However, Finding 3 shows that school calendar flexibility can reduce summer learning loss for disadvantaged students, and this benefit can be addressed by the following recommendation.

**Recommendation. The General Assembly should provide school calendar flexibility for schools and school districts identified as low-performing by the State Board of Education and direct the Department of Public Instruction to evaluate whether a modified school calendar increases student performance in low-performing schools and districts.**

Throughout this recommendation, a school calendar with different start and end dates than allowed under current state law will be referred to as a modified school calendar. As discussed in Finding 3, peer-reviewed literature demonstrates that a modified school calendar with more frequent and shorter breaks throughout the school year than provided by a traditional calendar has the greatest benefit for low-income students. North Carolina already has a mechanism for measuring and identifying low-performing schools and districts that shows a clear correlation between low-performing schools and poverty. Furthermore, the 2016 legislative agenda for the State Board of Education included an action item requesting that low-performing schools be permitted to adopt a modified calendar.

**To assist local boards of education with increasing student performance at low-performing schools, the General Assembly should authorize school calendar flexibility for low-performing schools and districts.** This authority should begin with schools and districts identified by the State Board of Education as low-performing for the 2015–16 school year. School calendar flexibility would apply as follows:

- **Low-performing schools.** Local boards of education would have the flexibility to adopt a modified school calendar for only the schools identified as low-performing by the State Board of Education. Other schools within the district would continue to follow a school calendar with start and end dates mandated by state law unless otherwise exempted.

- **Low-performing school districts.** Local boards of education would have the flexibility to adopt a modified school calendar for all schools within districts identified as low-performing by the State Board of Education, regardless of each individual school's low-performing status.

Unlike the process authorized for recurring low-performing schools under the restart model, State Board of Education approval for school calendar flexibility would not be required. Local boards of education with low-performing schools or districts would include adoption of a modified school calendar as a part of the required improvement plan that is submitted to the State Board of Education. If a local board of education adopts a modified school calendar for low-performing schools, the improvement plan must

- outline goals to be achieved by operating under a modified school calendar;
- explain how operating under a modified school calendar will facilitate accomplishing these goals and increase student achievement;
- provide a description of the modified school calendar including the start date, end date, and scheduled breaks throughout the year;
- propose the targeted interventions to be offered during scheduled breaks or explain why targeted interventions are not being offered; and
- describe how the low-performing schools will measure student and parent satisfaction with the modified school calendar to determine how the modified calendar is affecting families.

To allow sufficient time to evaluate whether operating under a modified school calendar increases student performance, local boards of education should be granted the authority to maintain a modified school calendar for low-performing schools until three years after school performance has reached or exceeded a grade of "C." A low-performing school district should be granted the authority to maintain a modified school calendar for all district schools until three years after the percentage of low-performing schools in the district drops below 50%.

**To determine the effectiveness of a modified school calendar, the General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to evaluate on an ongoing basis whether a modified school calendar increases student performance in low-performing schools.** The improvement plan process would ensure DPI knows whether local boards of education have adopted a modified school calendar for their low-performing schools and districts. DPI should use the existing accountability system for all public schools to track low-performing schools following a modified calendar and compare performance over time to low-performing schools following the traditional calendar mandated by state law. Tracking the effects of a modified school calendar and use of targeted interventions during breaks would allow DPI to evaluate whether a modified school calendar increases student performance in low-performing schools.

The General Assembly should direct DPI to report annually on its ongoing evaluation of the effects of instituting a modified school calendar on



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improving student performance at low-performing schools. The first annual report should be submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by March 15 starting two years after the first low-performing school or district begins following a modified school calendar.

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## Agency Response

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A draft of this report was submitted to the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education to review. Their responses are provided following the appendices.

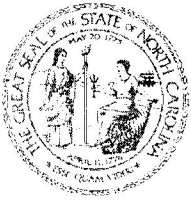
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## Program Evaluation Division Contact and Acknowledgments

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For more information on this report, please contact the lead evaluator, Carol Shaw, at [carol.shaw@ncleg.net](mailto:carol.shaw@ncleg.net).

Staff members who made key contributions to this report include Pat Madej and Emily McCartha. John W. Turcotte is the director of the Program Evaluation Division.



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Mark Johnson, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

WWW.NCPUBLICSCHOOLS.ORG

January 30, 2017

John W. Turcotte, Director  
Program Evaluation Division  
300 N. Salisbury Street, Suite 100  
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Mr. Turcotte:

As the newly-elected NC Superintendent of Public Instruction, I welcome the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) opportunity to respond to the Program Evaluation Division's (PED) final report. The responses in this letter are based on information provided to me by DPI staff as well as guidance from the State Board of Education (SBE), which reviewed the preliminary draft report.

The SBE and DPI were pleased that the 2015-2017 work plan of the PED in the NC General Assembly included a directive to examine the effects of the state law designating start and end dates for the school year. The PED final report provides three major findings. This response will comment on each. The SBE and DPI found no technical concerns with the report.

**Finding One. North Carolina law restricts the flexibility of the school calendar by mandating statewide start and end dates for the school year, and school superintendents report that this limited flexibility impedes effective development and management of their school calendar.**

North Carolina's current school calendar law restricts a local board's ability to develop a school calendar that may meet the needs of its district. For example, in a year with an unusually high amount of inclement weather incidents, a local board will have little flexibility to meet the minimum requirements while maintaining regular breaks. Parents expect a school system to protect regularly scheduled breaks from school. In addition, many parents are frustrated that the parameters of the current law create calendars that require first semester exams be administered following winter break.

Additionally, the current school calendar law limits professional development workday flexibility. Local school boards, superintendents, and teachers prefer flexibility in scheduling teacher workdays, which allows for more strategically placed professional development opportunities to respond to the needs of students and teachers during the school year.

**Finding Two. Opinions differ on when North Carolina public schools should start and end the school year, and no change in the State's school calendar law satisfies the competing interests of stakeholders.**

## OFFICE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA SUPERINTENDENT

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

The SBE and DPI accept the finding that many diverse opinions regarding school start and stop times exist. On July 7, 2016, the SBE passed a resolution supporting local control of school calendars. As NC Superintendent, I also support local flexibility for calendar development. The SBE and DPI believe that school calendars should be set by those elected officials closest to their communities, local school board members. Local board members can be accountable to their constituents if their district's school calendar does not meet local expectations.

**Finding Three. Allowing low-performing schools with high concentrations of low-income students to alter their school calendar in an effort to address summer learning loss provides an opportunity to improve student performance.**

The SBE and DPI are pleased that the PED's report acknowledges summer learning loss and recognizes the importance of continuous instruction for all students. The SBE and DPI appreciate the recommendation that low-performing schools be allowed calendar flexibility. Such flexibility could allow low-performing schools to provide more learning opportunities for students, and shorter summer breaks could decrease summer learning loss.

The SBE and DPI note that logistical challenges would exist if school calendar flexibility is granted only to low-performing schools as opposed to an entire school system.

In conclusion, both the SBE and DPI appreciate the level of commitment and sensitivity that the PED demonstrated in their evaluation of the school calendar law.

Sincerely,



Mark Johnson  
NC Superintendent of Public Instruction

MJ/rbg

c: Representative D. Craig Horn, Co-Chair, Program Evaluation Oversight Committee