

Later school start date good for children, families

By April McDonald (Updated: Saturday, August 23, 2008 8:21 AM CDT)

As I hurriedly did my back to school shopping and now see my children coming home with heat exhaustion from school, I can't help but feel jealous of our friends in other states who's children are not returning to school until the end of August and in some cases, early September.

Our children attend school the same number of days, yet our year ends in mid-May, when it is too cool to enjoy traditional summer activities. Why do we start so early?

Academic research clearly shows the school calendar configuration does not impact academic performance. While all students experience a small set back from being out of school in the summer, research shows the results at the end of the school year are the same among those children attending school under a traditional school calendar or the experimental year round school calendar.

Research also showed that the more days of instruction scheduled during August, the higher the non-instructional expenses and thus, less money for things our children need why, because we are wasting limited educational dollars on higher cooling bills.

Upon further investigation, I learned that most Mississippi school calendars are filled with one-day holiday and vacation days and thus, our children have a shorter summer vacation.

I pity the teachers who are challenged with teaching children who are hot, full of energy and thinking of the fun they could be having at the neighborhood pool, instead of sitting in a classroom.

I think the ever shorter summer vacation is robbing the excitement of learning from our children and the short summer vacation is also taking away valuable instructional time from our classrooms as it is more difficult to teach children who's minds are elsewhere.

I talked more to my friends in Texas and Florida about how the school start date change impacted their school schedule. This is what I learned:

The school year begins around the last week of August and ends in late May or the first few days of June. June is much cooler, traditionally, than August, so the kids suffered less hot bus rides home and inside recesses. And, the school district saved money on cooling costs allowing more funds to be directed towards student programming, classroom supplies and teacher salaries. The later school start date allowed students a full summer to play or work, depending on the age and be ready and anxiously awaiting the start of the school year. Teachers said they had few classroom disruptions and children more ready to begin the learning process again. Nothing really gets kids ready for a new school year better than boredom at home or working for minimum wage!

The later school start date also increased classroom attendance the first few weeks of school meaning more children are present to learn when the first lesson is presented, instead of trickling in and again, disrupting student instructional time.

While I strongly believe our schools should not be viewed as child care facilities, I also believe it takes a village to raise a family. And, when our children's vacation days are given a day here and a day there it is more difficult to give them educational experiences outside of the classroom. Not to mention ^ many more options are available during the summer months and at a more affordable price

A full summer vacation also makes finding child care easier and more affordable for families.

Knowing our schools are in desperate need of more money. Knowing energy demands are the highest in August and knowing children deserve to be excited about the return to school, isn't it time to push back our school start dates by a few weeks and demand a traditional school calendar for our children? Join me in signing an on-line petition to return our school start dates to late-August.

Sign the petition on-line at www.SaveMississippiSummers.org
<http://www.SaveMississippiSummers.org/>

April McDonald, SaveMississippiSummers@gmail.com