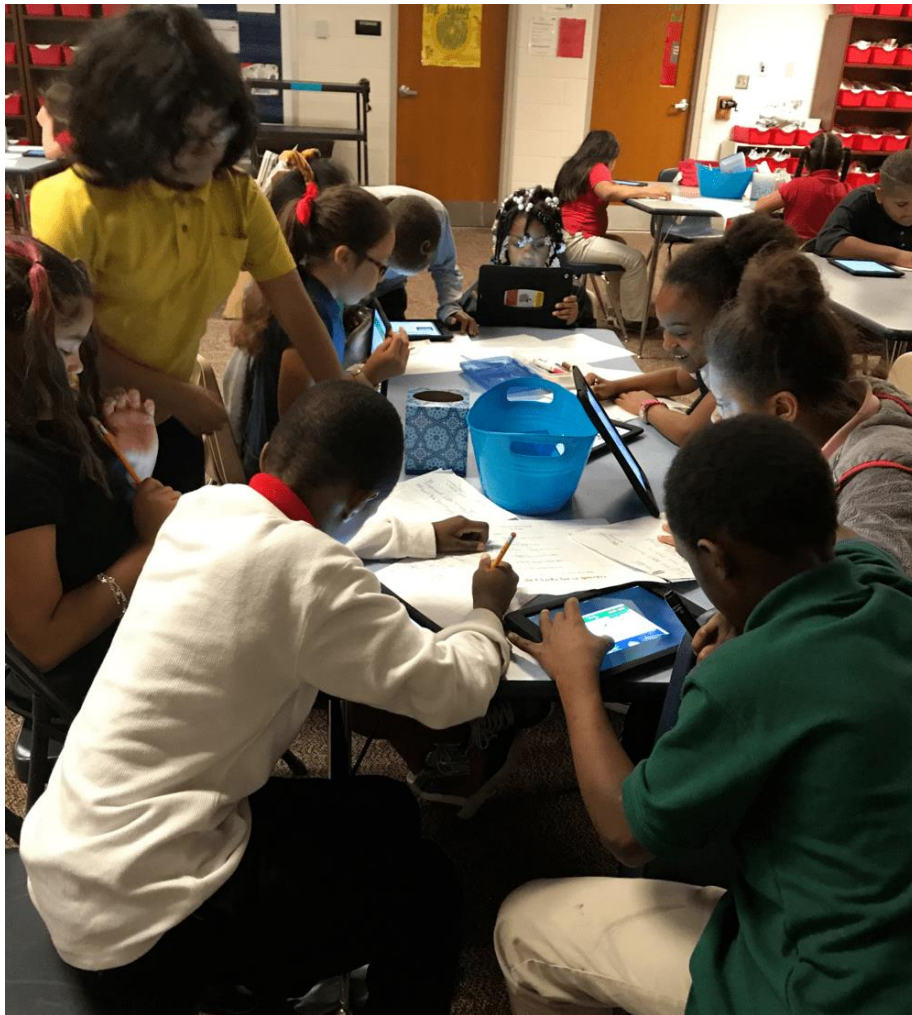


Should All Indiana Schools Have the Same Start Date?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – August 24, 2017



When I attended school as a child in Indianapolis, the Indiana State Fair would take place and shortly afterwards, I would return to school. Today, in Indiana, many students are returning to school before the state fair takes place – returning as early as the end of July. Some lawmakers do not believe this should be the case and

they would like to mandate the start of school for all Indiana schools. If you have lived in Indiana for some time, you know this debate is not new.

Students in Indiana are required to attend school for at least 180 days. Many Indiana schools have moved to a balanced calendar. Those students still attend school at least 180 days, but they have longer breaks throughout the year which means a shorter summer. Republican State Senator Jack Sandlin wants all Indiana schools to begin the last week of August. When this issue was last considered, it failed to pass; 25 lawmakers voted for it and 25 voted against.

Because some schools start before the fair begins, Indiana code had to be updated to allow students who participate in fair competitions to be excused from school. Previously, some of these students received unexcused absences. In the article, "Later start? School superintendents grimace at Senate Bill 88," published earlier this year, the last time this issue was raised, Wadesville Sen. Jim Tomes told the Evansville Courier and Press, "My constituents are concerned about the impact of summer jobs, specifically those at Holiday World & Splashin' Safari."

Whether it is the state fair, having more family time in the summer, having students available for summer jobs, I wonder if a state mandate is the answer. I also wonder why lawmakers are suggesting the last week of August be the date? Why not go with previous tradition and choose the day after Labor day? Better yet, let's put a few dates into a hat and draw out a date.

Don't get me wrong, varying school calendars has had a direct impact on my life. My sons attend school in the MSD of Washington Township (MSDWT) and I work for Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). Although both districts use a balanced calendar, they distribute the days differently. For example, MSDWT has one week off for fall break, the week of Thanksgiving, and for spring break, but IPS has two weeks off for fall break and spring break and three days off for Thanksgiving break. This means my sons' last day of school is before Memorial Day, but my last day is two weeks later. I have to find someone to watch them while I work which is an inconvenience. I don't like the differences in our schedules, but I could also choose to work elsewhere, if my July start date and June end date is something I can no longer bear.

When asked about the potential legislation, Indianapolis parent Bianca Thomas stated, “It sounds good at first, but when you think about the number of days students have to attend school, this means some schools won’t end until the end of June.”

Jamie Campbell, Highland, Indiana parent shared, “As long as schools meet the 180 days mandate, they should have the flexibility to decide their own school schedule. The school start date should be left to local government.”

Chaunda Sumara Fabio, special education teacher at Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School in Indianapolis, had a few concerns, “I came from New York where we went back to school the Tuesday after Labor Day, so when I moved to Indianapolis, I was a little shocked. One concern I have is the inconsistency across the state. It makes it hard when you work in one township and you live in another part of the city, but you know educators across the border and you want to attend professional development with them, but your charter school, your township or your district returns a month earlier. Also, educators are continually expected to do more and more and one of the benefits of being an educator is having my summers off. Here lately, even the time allocated for me to renew and reset my mind is getting shorter and shorter and I don’t think it’s right.”

Indiana is a state where there are lots of choices and families can choose the school that best fits their needs which includes considering the calendar. This choice would be lost if this legislation is passed. I would be surprised if it passes in Indiana, since it has failed previously. Then again, it is Indiana, so you never know.