

Re-thinking Legislative Strategies for Achieving School Calendar Flexibility

Problem:

Minnesota restricts a local school district's ability to begin school before Labor Day. Variances to this restriction are difficult to achieve, but can be accomplished through Flexible Learning Year applications. However, those applications are burdensome and are controlled by the state Department of Education.

Large special interests at the state legislature, i.e. the State Fair, the Resort Industry and other business interests vehemently oppose legislation that would repeal the post Labor Day start requirement. These interests have opposed attempts at compromise measures that would allow school to start before Labor Day, but prohibit school on week days leading up to Labor Day weekend.

Legislators are conflicted between pressure from school groups asking for calendar flexibility and immediate economic concerns from the interests listed above. Legislators are always more attentive to immediate concerns than future or potential options.

A new tactic:

Instead of school advocacy organizations asking for a statewide solution, which has been routinely denied at the Capitol, perhaps individual ISD requests are a more strategic approach to getting calendar flexibility where it's locally desired.

If legislators knew that their local communities have discussed and desire an earlier school start and that their local school boards wish to set calendars as such – in other words, school calendar flexibility isn't just an option for some hypothetical, future conversation – but is a real option people are ready to take, then perhaps they would be willing to support ISD-specific legislation in their own legislative districts allowing calendar flexibility without going through an MDE FLY process.

Recommendation:

If calendar flexibility is a real option in your district, meaning your board would vote yes today on a new school calendar that begins before Labor Day, then ask your board for a resolution seeking local, ISD-specific legislation, to achieve this goal. Perhaps the board resolution would include a time period for flexibility, i.e. 3-5 years so the community can truly experience life with a new school calendar.