

**Opinion Editorial  
Written by Lane Holt**

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Changing your point of view is often difficult, but I'm proud Georgia has a State Schools Superintendent who has looked at the data and is now willing to change her mind about the benefit of a uniform, third week in August school start date.

Research clearly shows that when the school year begins does not impact academic performance. Yet, allowing our children to begin the school year at different times, knowing all children take our state-standardized test on the same day, puts some students at a disadvantage. Would you want to start a running race 100 yards behind your competition?

Not only would all students have the same amount of time to prepare for the state-standardized test, if all schools began instruction on the same day, but educators would have more time to review the results of the standardized tests and make use of the data.

Currently, many districts are beginning the school year the day after Adequate Yearly Progress Reports are issued. If we are going to put our children through this stressful testing, shouldn't the results benefit their future education? If teachers have the information weeks before the start of the school year they can analyze the data and see which areas need review and which need more through re-teaching.

Principals can also review the data and see if an entire class fell short on one sub-topic. And if so, that classroom teacher can be paired with a teacher who excelled in that sub-topic for peer-to-peer mentoring. Again aiding the education of all of our children. We give our teachers several days a year for professional development, yet are we gearing the training to areas in which they really need help or coaching?

As I have read the No Child Left Behind Act and read comments from the authors of the powerful legislation, I have yet to read anything about testing to be testing. Testing is suppose to ensure all our children are learning each year and making the needed advancements. Testing is also suppose to help identify areas in which curriculum or instruction can improve.

A school start date of the third week in August will allow the first semester to be finished before the winter break and allow the school year to finish in May – with all the traditional holidays still in tact.

A later school start date will not impact athletics, as a separate body governs athletics and practices can certainly begin before the school year. Actually, as one coach pointed out, athletes find it easier to practice before the school year begins, because they can practice early in the morning before it gets too hot and the option for two-a-day practices not available once the school year gets under way.

Starting school later will also save on utility costs for the school districts, as they will have less time to cool the building in the August heat, with 20 plus hot bodies in each classroom.

In 2002, Tulsa, Oklahoma public schools pushed back the start of its school year by three weeks and saved almost a half a million dollars. Texas schools changed start dates this year from the week of August 21 to the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday in August and schools there are also realizing a great energy savings.

It's just as hot in Georgia as it is in Tulsa and Texas! Everyone knows how much more we are paying for electricity these days and the savings can go directly into small group tutoring or hiring more teachers.

Public opinion polls in neighboring states show parents strongly support a later school start date for their students. Many states have already passed laws prohibiting the early-August starts and they continue to see increases in academic performance.

Regardless of when the school year begins our students receive the same number of days of instruction. Why not start those days after our children have received a full summer vacation and are bored at home and excited about the return to school. After all, isn't excitement the key to learning?

**Editor's Note:** Lane Holt is the mother of two boys and a co-founder of Georgians Need Summers.com, a grassroots group of parents supporting a later start to the school year, a substitute teacher and the president of the Sope Creek Elementary School Foundation