

state news

Top states start school later, avoid winter break blues

Students in states that follow a more traditional school calendar rank among the best on college-entrance exams and standardized tests. Schools in these top-rated states also tend to administer end-of-semester exams after the Winter Break — a fact that stifles a major argument for early school start dates.

Proponents of starting school in early August often argue that students need to take end-of-semester exams before the Winter Break so they don't "lose" what they have learned before taking time off. But key education data suggests states that adhere to this philosophy are having little success in making promised academic progress.

A late August or early September school start date was observed in the majority of schools ...

■ ... in the top 10 states with students posting the highest average scores on the American College Test (ACT) in 2003.

■ ... in 8 of the top 10 states with the highest average 2003 Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores.

■ ... in the top 10 states in the American Legislative Exchange Council's "Report Card on American Education," which considers standardized test scores, expenditures per pupil and student-teacher ratio.

■ ... in the top 10 states in Morgan Quitno Press' "State and City Rankings." The annual rankings are based on 21 categories ranging from school

revenue per \$1,000 personal income, per pupil expenditures, class size, high school dropout rates and percent of students proficient or better in reading, writing and mathematics.

The majority of schools in these states also administered end-of-semester exams after the Winter Break.

Backers of the traditional school calendar — one that begins classes after or near Labor Day and that ends in late May or early June — contend that the shape of a school calendar has no impact on academic performance. This data also gives weight to a logical follow-up statement: Traditional school calendars don't hinder academic excellence.

Calendars do not teach children — teachers and parents do!

2003 ACT Scores

1. Oregon — Eighty-five percent of school districts returned August 30 or later. Sixty-eight percent of school districts began September 1 or later.

2,3,4 (all have same score)

Maine — Ninety-one percent of the school districts began classes August 30 or later. Sixty-six percent began September 1 or later.

Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin instruction the fourth week of August or later.

Washington — Seventy percent of school districts began instruction September 1 or later. Ninety percent began August 30 or later.

5,6 New York — One school district begins classes prior to September 1.

Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

7,8 New Hampshire — Eighty-two percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28.

Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

9 Connecticut — Eighty-three percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28. Earliest school start date was August 26.

10. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

2003 SAT Scores

1. North Dakota — Ninety percent of districts began the fourth week of August or later.

2. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

3. Illinois — Sixty percent of the districts began classes the 4th week of August or later. Ninety-nine percent of the districts began the 3rd week of August or later.

4. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

5. South Dakota — Eighty-six percent of schools began classes the 4th week of August or later.

6. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

7. Missouri — Ninety-three percent of school districts began classes the third week of August or later.

8. Kansas — Eighty-nine percent of districts began classes August 18 or later.

9. Michigan — Eighty-three percent of districts returned August 25 or later. Fifty-four percent opened August 30 or later.

10. Oklahoma — Eighty-three percent of school districts began August 12 or later.

The American Legislative Exchange Council

Report Card on American Education. A State-by-State Analysis: 1981-2003

1. Minnesota — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires.

2. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

3. Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

4. New Hampshire — Eighty-two percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28.

5. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

6. Montana — Seventy-three percent of school districts began class August 25 or later.

7. Vermont — Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin the fourth week of August or later.

8. Washington — Seventy percent of school districts began instruction September 1 or later. Ninety percent began August 30 or later.

9. Kansas — Eighty-nine percent of districts began classes August 18 or later.

10. South Dakota — Eighty-six percent of school districts began the 4th week of August or later.

Morgan Quitno Press

(Texas ranks 34th)

1. Massachusetts — Seventy-five percent of school districts began September 1st or later. Ninety-four percent of school districts began August 30 or later.

2. Vermont — Ninety-four percent of school districts begin the fourth week of August or later.

3. Connecticut — Eighty-three percent of school districts began classes on or after August 28. Earliest school start date was August 26.

4. Montana — Seventy-three percent of school districts began class August 25 or later.

5. New Jersey — One school district began classes before September 3.

6. Maine — Ninety-one percent of the school districts began classes August 30 or later. Sixty-six percent began September 1 or later.

7. Pennsylvania — Eighty-six percent of school districts begin classes on or after August 27.

8. Wisconsin — Classes began no earlier than September 1 — as law requires. Two percent of the school districts received a waiver to begin classes prior to September 1.

9. Iowa — Seventy-six percent of school districts began instruction the fourth week of August or later.

10. New York — One school district began classes prior to September 1.