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Article published May 11, 2007

## Educators not sold on bill to start school after Labor Day

By EMILY BABAY
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Business leaders and educators are on separate sides as the Pennsylvania House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee considers a bill that would mandate Pennsylvania school districts to begin their school year after Labor Day.

Business leaders see lost opportunity -- and lost cash -- in having classes resume before the holiday.

Educators, however, wonder whether starting school earlier would be in the best interest of students.

"What I find disturbing is that it's not being talked about from an education perspective," said Robert Oliver, Erie School District assistant superintendent. "All kinds of factors drive our calendar."

Harbor Creek Superintendent David Smith added a later school-year end date could be harmful to some students.
"It's an effort to help a few amusement parks, but not in the best interest of most kids and most families," he said. "What about the people in the summer who want to leave right away on vacation? What about the student who wants to join the army right after graduation? The longer you delay that graduation in June, the more you hurt other people."

Nevertheless, it is an issue being taken up in Harrisburg.

John Oliver, president of the Erie Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, testified at a committee hearing Wednesday, advocating for House Bill No. 258.

"I think it's a bill that would certainly have a positive impact on tourism, not only in Erie, but throughout the entire commonwealth," he said in an interview. "Some of our tourism attractions are either closing the week before Labor Day or curtailing operations because of a lack of visitors and staffing."

Oliver used a 2006 study to support his contention. That report estimated that Pennsylvania loses about $378 million a year due to schools starting prior to Labor Day.
Local developer Nick Scott said pushing back the start of the school year would give the tourism industry an extra week to 10 days of business during prime vacation season.

"July and August are the two biggest tourist months. In places where you go back to school in August, it ends the family vacations early," he said.

Paul Nelson, owner of Waldameer Park and Water World, said the park currently closes the week before Labor Day, but is open for Labor Day weekend.

Staying open for the extra week, Nelson said, would benefit his employees, who could work for a longer season, and provide extra revenue to invest in park development.

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