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Hurt when young workers return to school in August, tourist industry pushes bill this week to delay school openings to after Labor Day See you in September?

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Reading, writing and arithmetic never go out of scholastic fashion.

Nor, apparently, does the debate over when to begin classes in the fall.

The issue will rise again in Harrisburg on Tuesday, Tourism Day, when local tourism leaders will reinforce the importance of their industry during meetings with state legislators.

Many issues are on the table at this year's event, which is part of National Tourism Week (see related story, A5). But foremost among them is the start-up time, which varies among school districts.

In a related hearing on Wednesday, the House Tourism & Recreation Committee will discuss House Bill 258, a proposal by Montgomery County Republican Robert Godshall to prohibit year-around education and mandate post-Labor Day school start-ups.

The state requires 180 days of academic instruction annually, a ratio long unaltered.

But the launch date has inched forward days or even weeks since the 1970s, said Andy Quinn, an amusement park point man on the school-start issue.

That's fine by some educators and school boards.

Early-start supporters say they need more time to compensate for snow cancellations and teacher in-service days and to prepare for standardized testing mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind law.

But more than a few business leaders contend that shrinking the summer vacation period has wreaked economic havoc and eroded quality family time.

A study prepared last year for the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee found that early start-up costs the state $378 million annually.

According to the research by Tripp Umbach consultants of Pittsburgh, that figure includes $17.7 million in lost state tax revenue.

Local tourism officials also point out that a uniform September start-up would snip from the calendar one of the most expensive school cooling months.

In fact, shortened summers especially strain the tourism industry, which in Lancaster County employs 29,000 people and brings in more than $1.2 billion a year.

When student workers quit before summer does, said Christopher S. Barrett, president and chief executive officer of the Pennsylvania Convention & Visitors Bureau, "It's a major labor burden. It's draining."

Barrett should know. He worked many years at Dutch Wonderland and Hersheypark.

The former taps "friends of friends" and friends of relatives to stay open in late August, said Herb Brooks, assistant general manager of the park and president of PAPA.

"It's a struggle," according to Brooks, who said most schools in the county open their doors pre-Labor Day.

Late summer visitors to Kennywood are also left hanging, said Quinn, an executive at the amusement park outside Pittsburgh.

State tourism officials encourage people to patronize the park, he said, and "then, lo and behold, the last week of August people do come and visit us and go, 'whoa, there's nobody here.' "

Bitter-enders would find a bigger reception in New Jersey, for example, where the seashore economy and post-Labor Day school start-ups are firmly intertwined.

Wisconsin, North Carolina, Texas and Minnesota have passed laws in recent years tying school start-up dates to the holiday.

Pennsylvania is one of several states weighing similar measures.

Those on both sides of the issue acknowledge that a uniform school start-up date would buck tradition.

"We support the ability of local school boards to determine the school calendar," said Wythe Keever, spokesman for the Pennsylvania State Education Association. Start-up "has always been a locally established date."

Quinn said the proposed legislation would allow for early-start exceptions, such as in districts that traditionally give kids time off for an autumn fair.

PAPA has led the fight to move back the school startup date in Pennsylvania, according to Quinn, who first testified on the matter in 1988.

This time around, he said, the issue "has gotten a lot of legs."

Also on board besides amusement parks, which Quinn said are more numerous here than anywhere else in the country, are the hotel, campground, restaurant, whitewater rafting and skiing industries.

However, said Janet Wall, vice president of the visitors bureau, the return to a later school startup is "really a family issue as much as an economic one."

Fed-up parents loosely affiliated by the Save Our Summer banner are also pushing the agenda nationwide.

Tina Bruno of the Coalition for a Traditional School Calendar will testify at Wednesday's hearing.

Bruno spearheaded the move to post-Labor Day school start-up in Texas, according to Quinn.

Achieving consensus in Pennsylvania will take work, admitted Barrett, who said the visitors bureau is pledging to reach out to school board members and municipal officials in the community.

"It's a local control issue" for many school districts that have historically resisted mandates from Harrisburg, he said.

But Harrisburg pays the education bills, he added.

"It's not an easy issue. There aren't simple answers."