Daily Courier

SCHOOL START DATES

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Should Pennsylvania schools be mandated to start classes after Labor Day?

Those in the tourism industry say yes.

But school officials and those in other areas of business have questions.

According to a study commissioned by the state's Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, starting the school year after Labor Day would add about a half billion dollars and 2,300 jobs to the state's economy, including $30 million in state and local tax revenue.

Tourism leaders say parks and tourist attractions could remain open later in the season -- mainly because the many high school students who are employed during the summer would not have to quit to return to the classroom as soon.

Sounds like a legitimate reason.

School officials aren't entirely against the idea. But they do have several questions. Currently, law mandates that schools be in session 180 days. And the school year can only go until June 30.

State officials have said they will consider legislation extending the school day by eight minutes. This would add about three days during the year, meaning graduation dates could remain virtually unchanged. This could also mean a savings to the districts in food, transportation and utility costs.

But if the state does not approve an increase in the school day, that means students would get out of school later in June and could delay summer employment for high school students.

School officials also worry how their unions will accept the idea. It could become a matter that may affect union bargaining.

On paper, the idea sounds like a sound one. But we urge the Legislature to work closely with not only the tourism industry but with the educators. After all, we know they want what is best not only for our state and local economy but for our education system as well.

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