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Politics & Government

1:00 AM WED JUNE 26, 2013

Lawmakers Propose Changes in Mandatory School Start Law

By [MARTI MIKKELSON](#)

Debate over when the school year begins has resurfaced at the state capitol.

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A couple Republican lawmakers want public schools to set their own start dates.

Right now, Wisconsin law prohibits them from beginning before September.



Credit bcdxlt, flickr

School districts should decide when classes start, according to Rep. Jim Ott.

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He says the current state mandate means public schools hold classes well into June – when students can miss out, on jobs and camps. Then the fall semester doesn't begin until after Labor Day.

"Many schools have a lot of activities going on, in some cases it seems like half the students are already back in the middle of August, whether it's for football or some other sport or activity the schools do and there's no reason why they should wait until after September 1 to commence classes," Ott says.

Ott says superintendents in his district have requested flexibility. He predicts the idea will win bipartisan support. At least one Democrat already favors the Republican plan - Rep. Mandela Barnes of Milwaukee.

"It's good to see the boomerang in policy coming back to local control because this session my Republican colleagues have gone against the grain with the local control mantra," Barnes says.

Barnes could foresee urban districts opting to start classes in late August, after many summer activities end, while districts dependent on farming and tourism might select a later start date.

Ed Lump says that's the problem – changes in parts of the state could cut short Wisconsin's profitable tourism season. Lump is president of the Wisconsin Restaurant Association.

"It would eliminate two or three of the best weeks and best weather that Wisconsin usually has from the tourism calendar. There's no question this will put a damper on restaurant sales because when school starts, family vacations stop and families are a big part of the travel business in Wisconsin," Lump says.

Lump says he fought hard to get the mandatory September start date through the Legislature in 2000.

"And it really hasn't caused any problems that we can see and we know at that time and I think still today that

it's very popular with parents that school start after the first of September," Lump says.

Lump notes that a couple attempts to change the law since 2000 went nowhere. The soonest the Legislature could consider Rep. Ott's proposal is September, because lawmakers are on summer break.

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