



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Representative Kitchens Column on Earlier School Start Date

A bill is currently circulating in the state legislature that would allow school districts to begin classes earlier than September 1st. I am opposed to this legislation. The current start date, which has been in place for 17 years, is a perfect balance between educational and economic priorities.

As a father of three Wisconsin public high school graduates and a former school board president, I understand the importance of an exceptional education. Education is the key to success for our young people and I have spent my career in public service fighting to expand their opportunities. This legislation does nothing to enhance student achievement and has the potential to do great harm to our economy.

Proponents of this bill argue that an earlier start date would have a positive impact on student success. They say that Wisconsin students are put at a disadvantage in Advanced Placement testing because students from other states have additional class time to prepare for the spring tests. There is no evidence to support this. Wisconsin AP scores have steadily risen over the past 17 years since our current start date was implemented. Indeed, we have some of the highest AP test scores in the nation.

Wisconsin boasts a robust tourism industry, thanks in large part to the enthusiastic leadership of Department of Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett, and small business owners around the state. In the last five years alone, Wisconsin Tourism has grown 30%, representing a \$19.3 billion impact statewide. Minnesota and Michigan, two major tourism competitors to Wisconsin, have state laws requiring schools to start after Labor Day, even later than Wisconsin. It is both irresponsible and irrational to harm our tourism industry for no reason.

Like many places around the state, the first assembly district relies on tourism. It is an economic force that helps support many family run small businesses. The impact of an earlier school start date would be catastrophic for small businesses. These businesses not only rely on young employees, but crucial tourism dollars flood in during the month of August. In just the month of August, visitors spent \$130 million more when compared to the month of June. These are not inconsequential numbers- they are the difference between success and failure for many businesses.



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As Vice-Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Education, I will continue to support the success of our schools in measurable ways. Until I am given proof that our current system is negatively impacting our children, I will not support this attack on our tourism industry.