



OVER THE BACK FENCE

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Robert G. Rogers, Executive Director
219 North Branch, Bluffs, IL 62621

E-mail rrogers@adams.net

Phone: 217 754-3726

Web address: www.airssedu.com

Fax: 217 754-9966

Please duplicate and send to members in your district.

"Pursuing Excellence in Small and Rural Schools"

A NEW START FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR

After a swing toward starting the school year earlier, sometimes as early as the first week of August, momentum has grown in several states to begin school later in August or after Labor Day according to an article in USA Today.

Parental pressure and that of the tourism industry has pushed 11 states to limit how early school may begin. This year, new laws took effect in Florida, where the 67 public school districts may not begin classes earlier than 14 days before Labor Day, and Texas, where the 1,033 public school districts may not begin until the fourth week in August.

In Michigan, a law enacted last year said the 838 school districts must begin classes after Labor Day.

Other states, including Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Alabama and Kentucky, are debating the start date.

Administrators and school boards still want local control stressing more time is needed to prepare students for state mandated tests, but the number of days in the school year hasn't changed.

Will we see a push to increase the number of days schools are in session? The U.S. government doesn't require a certain number of school days per year. Each state determines school-year length on its own.

According to the Department of Education, the average school year, which each state determines, is 180 days. That figure includes public and private schools at both the elementary and secondary levels.

A July 2004 report from the Education Commission of the States lists each state's school-year requirements. Thirty states have 180-day school years, two have school years longer than 180 days, and 11 have school years shorter than 180 days. Minnesota is the only state that doesn't require a set number of days or instructional hours for schools. Each district can dictate its own school year.

Many countries have longer school years than the U.S. According to a study of 43 countries, 33 of them have school years longer than 180 days. Some go as many as 220 days per year. Whether or not the number is nationally mandated varies from country to country.

In Illinois, we must adopt a calendar of 185 days to ensure attendance of at least 176 days. We have 4 days for Institutes and 5 days for emergencies. Schools can also use 2 days for Parent-Teacher Conferences instead of attending classes. The first day and last day of school is about 2 hours. Think about it, with the demands placed upon schools and teachers and testing results, will there be a push, at the federal level, to standardize the number of days students will attend classes?

99TH ANNUAL NREA CONVENTION

The 99th Annual NREA Convention will be in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma from November 10-14, 2007. The convention will be held in the Hilton Garden Inn Hotel and the Clarion Convention Center. For more information or to obtain registration forms, go to the NREA (National Rural Education) Website at www.nrea.net.

NREA WRITING CONTESTS

The deadline to submit entries for the 2008 NREA Essay Contest is February 4, 2008. The writing prompt for the NREA Essay Contest will be: "How My Rural School Will Change in the Next Twenty-Five Years".

Prizes for the elementary division (grades 3 through 5) will be \$250 for 1st and \$100 for the Runner-up; Middle School (grades 6 through 8) winners will receive \$400 for 1st and \$200 for the Runner-up; and the same amount will be awarded the winners and runner-up at the High School division (grades 9 through 12). This is a good way to recognize those talented individuals in your schools. Visit the NREA website <www.nrea.net> to find detailed information. Go to EVENTS and Essay Contest.