

Task Force to Study the Advisability of Starting the School Year After Labor Day
Thursday, May 21, 2014 (9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.)
DEDO Large Conference Room
Dover, Delaware
MINUTES

Attendance:

Glenn Byrum, Grotto Pizza
Mervin Daugherty, Red Clay Consolidated School
Karen Field Rogers, Department of Education
Susan Francis, Delaware School Boards Association
Rep. Ronald Gray
Sen. Gerald Hocker
Adele Jones, Sussex Central High School/DSEA board member
Phyllis Kohel, Milford School District
Paul Kuhns, entrepreneur
Allen F. Lathbury, Jr., Ed.D., Sussex Tech District Office (via phone)
Keith Martin, Hotel Rehoboth
Kendall Massett, Delaware Charter School Network
Linda Parkowski, Delaware Tourism Office
Rep Stephen T. Smyk

Absent:

Dorothy A. Linn, Ed.D., Colonial School District
G. Scott Reihm, Delaware Association of School Administrators
Ronald Steen, Steen's Beach Service

The meeting of the Task Force was called to order by Chairperson Linda Parkowski at 9:33 a.m.

Motion made by Rep. Smyk to approve minutes of 4/17/14 meeting. Seconded by Sen. Hocker.
Approved unanimously.

Chairperson Parkowski reminded members that Task Force had agreed at the prior meeting to work toward a recommendation and a vote at this meeting, while keeping in mind the need to consider the effects on education, the economy and tourism. She referred members to written comments submitted by Delaware PTA, then opened meeting for discussion.

Rep. Smyk noted the importance of generating tourism revenue, and noted that in districts where late start was in effect (Cape, Indian River), it works very well.

Mr. Kuhns said that local students are crucial to the success of his five restaurants. In addition to being beneficial for resort communities, late start would preserve local jobs now taken by foreign

students. In the districts where it is in place, it works very well. There are not sufficient educational incentives to force schools to start before Labor Day.

Mr. Lathbury noted proven viability (Cape, Indian River) of starting post Labor Day, and raised the importance of keeping tourism dollars in the country instead of going to foreign students. He would like to see more data on potential impact of a later start.

Ms. Rogers said the Dept. of Education wants decision left with districts, due to difficult schedules, need for flexibility. Parents also face scheduling complexities, and it's important to consider the impact it would have on them.

Ms. Kohel agrees that districts need flexibility to choose their own start date, and says the majority of superintendents agree. Staffers prefer pre-Labor Day start, in part because of testing and snow days.

Mr. Daugherty said the school chiefs and the DSEA voted in favor of the issue not being decided by the state or the legislature. New Castle County district now work together to coordinate calendars, and current system works best.

Ms. Francis noted her understanding as a parent and business owner of the economic challenges of a pre-Labor Day start, but said the DSBA believes local districts should have the power to decide schedules. In some states with late starts (e.g., Virginia), many already are calling for return to local control. If late starts are implemented, districts must have a waiver option. A late-start law without waivers (as suggested in Maryland) is not acceptable. Federal education mandates already burden local districts, which don't need more mandates.

Mr. Byrum believes late start would be good for state. He notes that Virginia studied issue for two years and approved late starts – Virginia's time and effort should be considered. If local control is an issue, a waiver exception could be included.

Ms. Jones notes that executive board of DSEA hasn't voted on the issue yet – of those who have voiced an opinion, it's a 2-2 split, so she is torn on how to vote. Her experience in past as Sussex County educator found late starts to be helpful.

Mr. Gray said he has letter of support from Indian River Superintendent Susan Bunting in support of late start. Late starts are crucial for Indian River, and to keep the work force needed to keeps economy strong from mid-August through Labor Day. Late start would strengthen economy, raise tax revenue.

Sen. Hocker disagreed with letter sent by Delaware PTA, saying two districts currently using late start do not feel ill educational effects. He noted that waivers will work only if district has a legitimate hardship. He noted that last four weeks of August are most critical time for beach revenue, and reminded members that impact is felt not just in beach districts, but entire state economy, at a time when dollars are short. He reminded members that revenue supports school

programs – PTA’s claims that late starts are “not in best interest of students” fail to consider that budget shortfalls could potentially be even worse for students.

Chair Parkowski cautioned members that PTA’s letter was a compilation of comments from their members, not an official position statement from PTA leadership.

Ms. Francis noted that schools must cope with the demands of professional development training, and cautioned that schedules must now accommodate March testing. Sen. Hocker countered that training seems to not have improved educational results, and that testing is not working. More revenue is a solution, he said.

Mr. Daugherty noted that colleges play more of a role than public schools in late-season beach employment issues, which are partially a result of universities changing their schedules. He sees the concerns of beach businesses, but it’s not all public education’s fault. Waiver system has a flaw – all 14 districts will likely seek it, so it must be in an acceptable form. Task Force must also be ready for parental concerns over its actions.

Ms. Massett noted that the many underserved children in schools would be better served by local districts deciding what’s best for them. There are other ways of addressing revenue concerns.

Sen. Hocker noted that tourism is #2 economic driver, and reminded members that state revenue is shrinking. Rep Smyk noted that society benefits when economy is robust enough to support education.

Mr. Byrum disputed notion that this is a local control issue – the local districts are free to adjust scheduled within the school year – all this does is mandate when school year starts.

Ms. Massett warned of “mutiny” from parents if Christmas Break and other breaks were adjusted because of this. “Mandates” from government are hurting public schools.

Mr. Daugherty asked about the Task Force’s next step. Sen. Hocker responded that the Task Force’s recommendation will go to Legislature. Ms. Parkowski responded that the Task Force is mandated to have its recommendation done by September, but that members have agreed to have it completed by the end of June. The earliest its recommendations could be implemented is the 2016-2017 school year.

Members noted that the potential elements of a waiver system would be important to the overall recommendation.

Sen. Hocker made a motion that the Task Force recommend to the General Assembly that public schools in Delaware start the school year after Labor Day, and the only waivers offered are to the school districts that can show a hardship or those that are open year-round. Seconded by Mr. Kuhns.

The roll call was taken:

Glenn Byrum, Grotto Pizza	Yea
Mervin Daugherty, Red Clay Consolidated School	Nay
Karen Field Rogers, Department of Education	Nay
Susan Francis, Delaware School Boards Association	Nay
Senator Gerald Hocker	Yea
Ronald Gray, state representative	Yea
Adele Jones, Sussex Central High School/DSEA board member	Abstain
Phyllis Kohel, Milford School District	Nay
Paul Kuhns, entrepreneur	Yea
Allen F. Lathbury, Jr., Ed.D., Sussex Tech District Office	Nay
Dorothy A. Linn, Ed.D., Colonial School District	Absent
Keith Martin, Hotel Rehoboth	Yea
Kendall Massett, Delaware Charter School Network	Nay
Linda Parkowski, Delaware Tourism Office	Yea
G. Scott Reihm, Del. Association of School Administrators (by email)	Nay
Ronald Steen, Steen's Beach Service (by proxy through Sen. Hocker)	Yea
Rep Stephen T. Smyk	Yea

Ms. Massett asked if minority would be able to write a dissent. Chair Parkowski said they could.

Rep. Smyk noted that Task Force would need to meet to determine language of recommendation. Chair Parkowski stated that the draft language for the recommendation would be circulated by email to Task Force members.

Public Comment

Mr. Ronald Pierce, Delaware School Boards Association, noted that as a retired educator, start of year doesn't make much difference from an educational perspective. His associates on DSBA believe local control should be retained.

Mr. Mike Hanlon, retired educator, said a pre Labor Day start hurts family schedules. Also, the change in the University of Delaware summer schedule made it near impossible for any educator at any level to attend the free courses. The university changed summer school starting date in the 90's from the end of June to one week after graduation of its students. The loss of free courses to educators was a reason for districts to want to begin the school year before Labor Day. Task Force would benefit from more research/data on economic impact before considering waivers.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 10:51 a.m.