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SFA**BILL ANALYSIS**

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Senate Bill 300 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Walter H. North
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 11-4-97

RATIONALE

The Revised School Code requires the board of a school district or of a public school academy to determine the length of a school term and to ensure a minimum number of pupil instruction days in a school year, if a board does not want to have its State school aid payments withheld. The establishment of a school calendar, including the starting date of a school year, is not addressed in the Code but is left to local school districts. A majority of school districts in the State reportedly convene their school years in late August, prior to the Labor Day holiday, which traditionally marks the end of the summer season. Some people believe that starting school before Labor Day limits travel opportunities for families, and that school districts should be prohibited from starting school before Labor Day to maximize the summer vacation period.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to provide that, beginning in the 1998-99 school year, for any year in which Labor Day occurred on or before September 4, the board of a school district, local act school district, public school academy, or intermediate school district would have to ensure that the district's or academy's school year did not begin before the Tuesday after Labor Day. The bill would define "Labor Day" as the first Monday in September.

Proposed MCL 380.1284b

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Because tourism is the second largest industry in the State, the start of the school year must be considered an economic issue. Tourism annually brings in a reported \$8.5 billion in revenues. If school districts were required to start school after Labor Day, an additional \$50 million in tourism revenues could be generated, according to State tourism officials. Starting school in August shortens an already limited summer tourist season, which some people in the State's tourism industry say does not get under way until late June or early July. August school openings, for example, have been blamed in part for the struggling attendance at the Michigan State Fair in Detroit, which runs the two weeks prior to Labor Day. Furthermore, a shortened tourist season hurts students who are employed in the tourism industry during the summer and are working to earn money for school. Michigan should join the 11 other states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which mandate post-Labor Day start dates for schools, so that tourists can enjoy the maximum opportunity to vacation in the State.

Response: None of the states that border Michigan (meaning Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio) mandates that its schools start after Labor Day. The closest state to do so is Minnesota.

Opposing Argument

The general powers provisions of the Revised School Code are designed to empower local school districts by minimizing the number of State requirements that districts must meet. The bill would run counter to this philosophy by prohibiting local school districts from setting the start date of their school year prior to the Labor Day holiday. Currently, 82% of the school districts in the State started the 1997-98 school year before Labor Day. Local school officials should be permitted to continue determining when school begins in their communities. Furthermore, there appears to be

no educational reason for the bill, which intrudes on school districts, students, and their families merely to help a particular industry.

Response: Some local school districts that share services with their intermediate school districts (ISDs) already have relinquished to the ISDs the decision on setting a school start date. For example, schools in Frankenmuth, which is a major tourist destination in the State, start before Labor Day along with the other school districts in the ISD. Although tourism is a major industry in the Frankenmuth area, the local schools cannot start after Labor Day because a majority of the districts in the ISD prefer an earlier start date.

Opposing Argument

Just as starting school before Labor Day might interfere with August vacations, delaying the start of school could interfere with early-summer travel, as well as make it difficult for high school students to find summer jobs. With new State requirements to extend the school year from 180 days to 190 days by 2006 and to lengthen the school day, a post-Labor Day opening of school could force some children to attend school until late June. This already occurred in the Flint School District where schools open after Labor Day. Students reportedly did not complete the 1996-97 school year until June 20 because of snow days and other complications. It also is not clear how a mandatory post-Labor Day start would affect students who attend specially designed year-round schools or certain special education students who are required by administrative rules to have an extended school year.

Legislative Analyst: L. Arasim

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State government. A school district with an established school calendar could incur additional costs in changing its schedule to conform to the bill.

Fiscal Analyst: E. Pratt

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.