

# LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

## UNIFORM SCHOOL START DATE

### THE ISSUE

Currently Indiana law sets a 180 instructional-day minimum for K-12 school calendars but lets districts choose when to begin their school year. Some schools have started as early as July, without evidence that earlier start dates boost learning. In fact, a later school start date may benefit students more educationally, by aiding summer employment which can boost academic achievement.

### KEY FINDINGS

An initial study conducted by researchers at Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs with data from Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota, finds that:

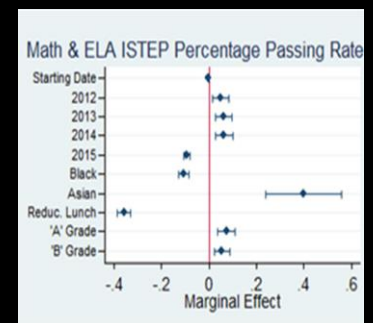
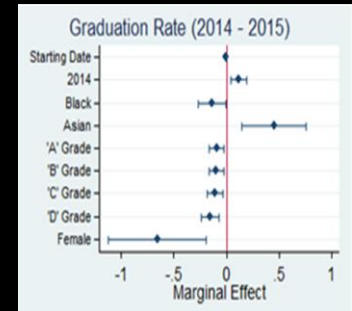
- **Schools that start earlier do not perform better than later-starting schools** on student achievement measures including ISTEP and ACT scores, SATs, AP exams, and graduation rates.\*
- **A later school start date may correlate positively with student achievement:**
  - Summer employment correlates with higher attendance and achievement and provides students with valuable “soft skills” needed for employment success
  - “Spaced learning,” where instruction is interrupted by breaks (e.g. holding exams after Winter Break) aids long-term retention of information; in an earlier study, high school students performed 35% better on an exam with spaced learning.

*\*Based on aggregated data; further research is needed to determine whether start date affects demographic groups differently regarding various achievement measures*

### CONCLUSION

Earlier school start dates do not appear to benefit student achievement, while moving to a uniform later start date may help students academically. Students gain valuable skills and habits through summer employment and may retain information better when learning is spaced, e.g. if a later start date results in exams being scheduled after Winter Break.

### START DATE LESS RELEVANT TO ACHIEVEMENT THAN OTHER FACTORS



*(Years [2012, 2013 etc.] show correlation of “year fixed effects,” or a variety of events in a given year, with achievement)*

### IN School Start Dates (August 15 midpoint)

