

## The Birmingham News

# Some officials want start of school pushed later

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As children make their way to school in the sweltering August heat, some educators say starting school during the hottest month of the year is cruel, and they are pushing later start dates.

"I'm going to petition to the state that we start the last week of August next year," Birmingham city schools Superintendent Stan Mims said Thursday. "Maybe other systems don't have any problems, but we have a lot of old schools that aren't very energy efficient, and it just doesn't make sense."

State Rep. Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, said starting school this soon is irresponsible, and he will sponsor a bill in the next legislative session mandating that schools start after Aug. 25.

"It's killing us in power bills," he said. "We're taking money out of the classroom and spending it on keeping our schools' cool."

Gone are the days of starting school after Labor Day. Some systems started as early as Aug. 2 this year. Vincent schools in Shelby County, the only Alabama schools on a year-round calendar, began classes July 16. Most schools started between Aug. 8 and Aug. 13.

"This is the earliest I've ever started back to school, and it's ridiculous," said Mims, who came to Birmingham from schools in Illinois and New York. "Some of our buildings are 80, 90 and 100 years old, and the air conditioning problems here have been horrible. Folks have been working around the clock to fix them, but every time we fix one, another goes out."

Legislators in Michigan passed a law in 2005 mandating that no public school could begin classes until after Labor Day. Virginia, Minnesota and Wisconsin also require September starts.

"In Tulsa, Oklahoma, they did this, too, and saved \$400,000 on their power bill," Ford said, who extensively researched the issue.

Some educators say, however, that an early start date ensures that students have more instructional time before standardized tests are taken in April and allows systems to get an entire semester finished before students break for winter holidays.

Cindy Warner, who serves on Shelby County schools' calendar committee, said school must start in early August for systems to finish the first semester and mid-year exams before Christmas break.

"One of the things we try to do is have an equal number of days in the first and second semester," she said. "If we came back in September then we wouldn't be able to get mid-term exams in before Christmas break. We don't want exams hanging over their heads during their break."

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