

## **Granville students enjoy extended summer break**

**KRISTY STEVENSON, Special to the Ledger**

OXFORD - Break out the sunscreen and fire up the grill as it's going to be a long, hot summer – longer than usual for Granville County School students. Legislation passed allowing Granville County schools to begin the 2007-08 school year on August 27, eighteen full days later than last year's start.

This is not new legislation, however. In 2004, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that most public schools start classes no earlier than August 25 and end no later than June 10.

Then in 2005, a bill passed introducing a waiver which granted school systems the control to alter school start/end dates based on weather history in the county or accommodating a special educational program. Waiver requirements stipulated that a school system must miss more than eight days in a year, within at least four of the last ten years. Granville County qualified for the waiver in 2004-05 and 2005-06 as students missed up to 14 days of school in previous years due to snow, ice, and hurricanes. A mild winter saw the loss of only one day in 2005-06, however, and subsequently made the county ineligible for the waiver this time around.

Dr. Jodi Anderson, Assistant Superintendent of Granville County Schools who also chairs the calendar committee, explains that our county falls in that swash of weather systems with Person County, right on the Virginia border, that really produces a large amount of weather-related problems.

“If we have a bad year this year, and the law doesn't change, we will be starting *early* in 2008-09. So we have the possibility of a very *short* summer next year,” said Anderson.

And don't be fooled by that June 10 cutoff. Regardless of start/end dates, all North Carolina students must meet a minimum of 1000 hours of instruction and 180 days of school each year. Because of this, if an area on the new calendar is hit with a bout of bad weather, students could conceivably be required to stay in school through June 30 in order to make up missed days.

“I have mixed feelings about the change,” said parent Lori Burney of Franklinton. “One thing that I enjoyed about starting earlier is that by the time Christmas break came, school was halfway over. We've kind of always looked forward to that midpoint.”

“The calendar had always been a local school Board's decision (at a county level). It was by state statute that elected Boards of Education set the school calendar for their system. The

majority of those systems chose a calendar that would be in line with a college campus curriculum – where first semester ends prior to winter break. But this law changed all that,” Anderson continued.

“I am a fan of early in, early out,” said Creedmoor parent and school teacher Margaret Hernandez. “I like being finished in May.”

The change brings Granville County Schools more in line with Wake and other surrounding county calendars. For families who have vacations scheduled during the month of August, the news is a welcomed change.

Butner parent Jonathan D. Hoffman says, “I am in favor of the later start. August is predominantly a vacation time for families and it really cuts into planning when your starting school second week of the month.”

“I am all for a longer summer!” echoes parent Shannon Green of Wake Forest. “I actually enjoy spending time with my child that has nothing to do with homework!”

August temperatures and extra hours of daylight can also make it difficult for parents to transition students back into a regimented schedule. High school students, however, are frustrated by the change as it causes the semester break to fall in January and thereby makes them ineligible for spring internships and work programs.

“High school students want to take college courses, which is a huge initiative of our Governor, but they can’t do both as the current calendar has the second semester beginning January 23, 2008. Community college schedules begin the second week in January – creating overlap – and students can’t be in two places at once,” Anderson said. “Although this may not make much difference to your kindergartener, it has the potential to have a huge impact on older kids.”

“We have a lot of early graduates (because of the block schedule, i.e. graduating in December). This will increase in the future because the state is going to award high school credit to students who take high school courses (Algebra I or Geometry, for example) during middle school. So the potential to graduate at the end of their Junior year, or middle of their Senior year is high. But if they’re in school until January 23, they cannot be enrolling in college.”

Some have asked why Granville County doesn’t apply on a school-by-school basis for high schools and middle schools to be on a calendar of their own. Because of bus-sharing and the prospect of having to run buses an extra month, however, that is not financially feasible.

In April of this year, the State House approved bill 359 which is aimed at restoring flexibility to the school calendar. This bill enables local school districts to be exempt from the state-mandated school start date of August 25 if the district has a valid academic reason for needing an earlier start. The bill would allow districts to ask the State Board of Education for a system-wide waiver from the start date for reasons such as aligning the school district’s calendar with that of a college or university, adjusting the examination schedule to run a block schedule or allowing extra instructional time before Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams.

Currently, a school district may receive a waiver for only one school or program, thereby creating other scheduling problems and costs for the school district and the families it serves. The bill, if approved by the Senate and signed into law, would become effective with the 2007-08 school year.

Yes folks, you read that right: the 2007-08 school year. It would be a “tremendous challenge” for Granville County to put something like that into place at such a late date, Anderson assures. Remember, this bill is designed to restore flexibility, not mandate anything. The legislation is currently with the Senate Committee on Education/Public Instruction for further debate.

“It is important for parents to realize that the Granville County School System and its employees do not set the calendar,” said Anderson. “We merely work in collaboration with the Board and a district level committee to come up with options and get feedback – and then the Board makes the decisions.”

As a whole, the school system gets very few complaints. “We recognize this is not a win-win situation for everyone,” Anderson said, “but our purpose is to educate children. [The schedule] impacts families and their vacations, staff beach rentals, etc. It’s a dilemma, but the Board’s decision is always based on what’s educationally sound for kids.”

House Bill 359 could be approved as early as July. But amendments often get “tucked” in here and there and final wording may change before it gets signed into law ... so the best advice is *stay tuned*.