

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations  
Legislative Program Issues Evaluation Form

**Issue ID:** 17E03-School Opening Date

**Date Submitted to Legislative Committee:** October 18, 2016

**Issue:** Local school boards are generally not permitted to set their own opening date of the school year

**Background:**

The “Kings Dominion” Law was adopted by the Virginia General Assembly in the 1980s to help amusement parks and other tourism attractions staff their businesses with a summer labor pool of high school age workers. Today’s economy has changed; the tourism industry is attracting various workers in other age groups. But now the tourism industry contends that a change of law would hurt tourism. Almost all states allow schools to start before Labor Day, including states whose economies are heavily dependent on tourism such as Florida and California. As Virginia Beach Public Schools said in supporting a change in law, “If a pre-Labor Day start was really damaging to a state’s economy, it would have been banned across the country a long time ago.

**Existing Conditions/Impacts:**

The Code of Virginia mandates under the so-called “Kings Dominion” Law that schools open after Labor Day. As a result, FCPS students have less classroom time before standardized tests such as Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, and nationwide Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests. The AP and IB tests figure substantively in college admissions, scholarships, course selection and advanced standing. The current law puts our students at a competitive disadvantage as almost all states allow schools to start before Labor Day. There is a limited waiver that FCPS normally cannot qualify under. Due to all the snow days over the last several years FCPS will qualify for the waiver for the next 3 school years.

**Preferred Position:** Support legislation permitting local school boards to set the opening date of the school year without need for the limited waiver.

**Benefits:** It would help our FCPS students as it would most likely provide more instructional time before standardized tests such as the SOL, AP and IB.

**Potential Supporters (Community leaders, Public/Private Partnership Opportunities, Organizations):**

FCPS and about 120 of the 130+ school districts in Virginia, the Virginia PTA and Fairfax County PTA

**Lead Federation Committee:** Education

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