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New Calendar Would Improve Educational Climate in Classrooms

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New Calendar Would Improve Educational Climate in Classrooms

By Dick Crepeau
UCF Forum columnist
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Growing up in Minnesota, I thought it was sensible to be in school while the frigid winters took their toll on outdoor life. Now in Florida, it would make the same kind of sense to be in school while the broiling summers take their toll on those brave enough to venture out into the heat, humidity, and the capricious lightning strikes so familiar to us all.

When the weather is mild, our children should not be stuck inside classrooms. They should be free to pursue the out-of-doors without suffering sweltering summers.

So why are we starting another academic year in the classroom now, when the weather soon will be easing up?

The answer is really fairly simple: It is nearing the end of the harvest in America's farm belt.

We traditionally start our school year after the harvest, and end it with the coming of summer, or rather the planting season. Our school calendar is attuned to the agricultural world of the 19th century so that the farm children can be a productive part of their farming families.

We are now in the 21st century and for most of us our annual life patterns have nothing to do with agriculture. Yet, we continue with a school calendar that in many places makes no sense whatsoever. We are held hostage to a calendar that is nearly uniform across a very diverse nation.

The variety of landscape, climate, and primary economic activity in our 21st century world in Florida has little to do with the needs of agricultural labor. Certainly agriculture

is important to the state, but it does not depend on our students to populate Florida family farms or big agri-business.

Here in Florida, as anyone who has been outdoors in the past month can attest, our climate is most severe between May and October. We should be sitting in our air-conditioned classrooms pursuing the major indoor activities of education during these months. The severe months are the perfect time to stay indoors.

Our outdoor activities would be more pleasantly pursued from November to April. We should be able to play sports, enjoy outdoor recreations such as fishing and swimming without running the risks of heat stroke in the short run and skin cancer in the long run. Our family picnics and all outdoor activity would be made considerably more pleasant with less sweat.

So let's change the academic calendar in Florida.

Let us begin a revolution of common sense by creating a new school year.

Let's start our first term about April 1, give or take a week or two. The term would end in mid-July. Then take a break for a week or two and push on to the second term of the year, which would end in November. What once was called our summer break would now run from mid-November through late March or early April.

This would have several major advantages for the residents of our state and especially for the students.

Our long break in the school year would coincide with the best weather that our climate can produce. Our outdoor activities and sports could be pursued in the most pleasant part of the year. Children would actually enjoy the outdoors and not feel a need to seek refuge in air conditioning every 20 minutes.

This break would also coincide with the strongest part of Florida's tourist season, a mainstay of our economy.

What this means for students is a much easier time finding what we now call "summer employment." What it would mean for the tourist industry is a larger employment pool. The tourist trade would have many openings for high school and college-aged students who now wilt during the summer months while suffering from less employment opportunities in our state.

You may say that this is not a major issue of our time – and I would agree. Changing the school calendar is not as important as world peace or global warming.

But it would be considerably more sensible than what we do now, as prisoners of the 19th century agricultural mentality.

And I would be willing to bet it would make for a better educational climate in our state.

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