



## **POLICY PRIORITY: SCHOOL START DATE**

### **SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATOR**

Dear Rep. Van Doe,

My name is Jackson Taxpayer, and I live in Cityville, Iowa. I am a parent of three children (ages 5,8 and 13), all of who attend the Cityville-Township School District. As parents, we highly value the education of our children, and want our schools to be the best in the world. However, I think it is important to balance that education with real-world experience, the type of experience that children get from summer jobs, attending the Iowa State Fair, and learning more about our cultural traditions by traveling the state.

Iowa law requires schools to start after Labor Day, but nearly all schools get a waiver from this requirement, without ever having to prove the late start negatively affects learning. In fact, no studies show that starting school earlier in the year has any effect on learning. This year our schools started on August 13, and dismissed early a total of 15 times. How is that a good use of our taxpayer funds?

Schools continue to fight for additional state funds, yet by starting early Iowa misses out on the very revenues that could help fund them. In fact, Okoboji alone loses \$1 million for each day school starts before Labor Day. Statewide that is a considerable loss at the very time we need additional dollars.

This year, our kids were unable to go to the State Fair, and we had to eliminate a trip to the National Mississippi River Museum. Both would have been excellent learning opportunities. We could have taken them out of school, but we didn't want them to start off the year behind. We couldn't go earlier because as a farmer we had to get the crop in the ground and spring sports weren't done until the end of June.

The State Fair is an incredible learning opportunity for our children; our state should value its agricultural tradition and encourage every Iowa child to visit the fair. As a parent of young children, we understand the importance of Iowa travel in educating our children. Travel gives our kids the time to explore and learn about our cultural heritage.

Please pass legislation that enforces Iowa's post-Labor Day start date by eliminating the waivers that are given out freely by the Iowa Department of Education. Iowa needs these additional travel-related revenues to support education and other state priorities, and our children need the time to explore our state with their families.

Sincerely,  
Jan Taxpayer  
1700 Street Avenue - City, Iowa  
515-555-5555

## TIPS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

- **Keep you letter brief & to the point.** Legislators are very busy and have little “desk time” while they are working at the Capitol. If they want more information from you, they’ll ask.
- **Identify yourself as a constituent.** You can do this subtly, by adding your address, or noting that you live in XYZ city. Legislators pay attention to constituent emails first and foremost.
- **Focus on local impacts.** The impact of an issue on communities in your legislator’s district will be his/her main concern. Putting that local spin on an issue will help your legislator decide what to do, and how to vote. They get lots of facts and figures from lobbyists, but they won’t get the “real story” from anyone but you!
- **Stay positive, no matter how frustrated you might be.** Your legislator may be adamantly opposed to enforcing Iowa’s current school start date, but may be equally supportive of increased funding for tourism marketing. You don’t want to burn that bridge.
- **Ask for something** - a vote, follow-up/response, sponsoring a bill, talking to colleagues, investigating the issue further, coming to a local board meeting to give the legislative perspective on the issue. Ask them to take some sort of action for you.
- **Make sure to thank them.** You’d be surprised how many people forget this step, and legislators remember those who remember to say thank you.
- **Additional Tips on School Start Date LTEs:**
  - Tourism creates revenue for Iowa, including critical funding for the schools’ annual allowable growth increase.
  - School boards claim they need to end the fall semester before Christmas break for testing reasons. However, there is no evidence that this practice is beneficial to the students. Plus, education needs to be teaching our children for a lifetime, not simply for a test.
  - Iowa spends millions of dollars investing in Vision Iowa and CAT projects. These projects will continue to drain property taxpayers if they are not allowed a reasonable season to generate funding to pay for themselves.
  - Check with your community colleges – many started after Labor Day. If we want to explore options for more dual credit courses, doesn’t it make more sense for schools to be aligning their calendars with Community Colleges?
  - Many businesses rely on working teenagers during the summer months – should businesses suffer because schools start early? Isn’t this once again taking revenue from the state?
  - We don’t want our state to be “closed for business” when out of state folks come to visit – and this is what happens when the school start date is too early.