

Jean Ann Jacobs
Testimony to the Texas Senate Committee on Public Education
April 18, 2006

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, my name is Jean Ann Jacobs and I am a mother of two children in Wylie Independent School District. I am here today representing SeptStart, Inc.

I am one of many parents across our great state who is calling for a return to a traditional school year that begins after Labor Day and concludes shortly after Memorial Day. During the school year, my children's long weekends and school holidays are filled with UIL games, band contests, car washes, speech tournaments and all the other activities that don't stop just because school is out. The only opportunity that I have to spend real family time with my children is during the summer. Given the mandatory summer camps and practices for athletics and band, the summer is even shorter for families than it appears on the school calendar.

This year when I saw an article in my local paper showing two proposed calendar options for WISD that both started on August 10th, I decided that it was time to get involved. I went to the public hearing mentioned in the article to voice my concern about such an early school start date.

I found that I was not alone. At the hearing, there was a general consensus for a third calendar option because the majority of the parents in attendance wanted school to start later. I decided to stay involved in the process and attended the next School Board meeting. At this meeting, the school board decided to delay voting on a school calendar until the District Wide Educational Improvement Council (DWEIC) reviewed the third calendar option.

You should know that DWEIC is made up of teachers, administrators and parents (parents makeup one-third) and that it never discussed calendars options for the district at prior meetings. Not surprisingly, it recommended one of the School Board's original calendar options.

The TEA requires that a district demonstrate community consensus when seeking a waiver to start school before the week of August 21st. I can only suppose that this requirement is meant to keep school boards from ignoring taxpayers and pushing through their own agendas. Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened. Parents' questions were not answered by the Superintendent or members of the School Board and their wishes were ignored. Local control simply isn't working at Wylie ISD.

Three independent polls conducted last year found that more than 60% of parents support having all Texas schools start after Labor Day and parents attending WISD meetings overwhelmingly favored the same. Last year, the majority of Texas schools started on August 15th. I think it's safe to say school districts aren't listening.

A September school start date is truly about quality of life for Texas families and valuing our children's educational, emotional and social development. You have heard testimony from educators, parents and community members who attest to the fact that a uniform start date in September benefits all Texans through, transfer of family values and traditions from one generation to the next, savings for schools and brighter, happier children. Parents in my district presented much of the same information to my School Board and Superintendent.

As a parent and as a Texan, I am thankful that you are considering what is best for my children and families across Texas. I urge you to show your support for Texas families by valuing their time with their children and their united call for a return to a traditional school year.