

Labor Day ought to signal start of school

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If state Rep. Don Lehe, R-Brookston, has his way, children across Indiana will return to school the day after Labor Day in 2009.

There is plenty to be said for what Lehe wants to accomplish.

It used to be that way a few decades ago. Labor Day marked the unofficial end of summer and the time for administrators, teachers and students to head back to the classrooms.

Lehe said one of the reasons for the shift to start school in the middle of August was due mainly to ISTEP testing in the fall. That argument no longer holds water as ISTEP tests have been moved to the spring.

Another reason schools began moving up the start date was a matter of competition. Over the years, school districts, one by one, started ending classes earlier in May so their students could get a jump on a limited number of summer jobs.

Lehe said there are solid reasons for resuming school the day after Labor Day. For instance:

-- Holding school the last two weeks in August -- when temperatures are generally in the 80s and 90s -- can be a drain on budgets as schools have to operate air conditioning.

And for those schools that lack air conditioning -- and there still are many in Indiana -- it is difficult to accomplish much in the classroom.

-- Convening before Labor Day hurts tourism statewide. Michigan found that out and moved the start of school to after Labor Day in 2005. And it is easier for families to plan vacations if school begins after Labor Day.

If this is going to work, Lehe said, all school districts will have to take part. It is a sound idea that should have been implemented years ago.