



Contact:

Monica Ackerson Ware, APR

517.749.2322 (cell)

517.624.2911 (office)

monicaackersonware@gmail.com

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Early Start for Schools Takes a Bite Out of Michigan's Tourism Industry
75 Percent of Michigan Voters Think Local Voters Should Decide School Start Date

OKEMOS, Mich – The Michigan Lodging and Tourism Association today released the results of a new survey finding that 75 percent of Michigan voters believe voters should get to decide if their schools start before Labor Day.

“As a record number of schools start before Labor Day, both the tourism industry and families are feeling the pinch,” Deanna Richeson, president/CEO of the Michigan Lodging and Tourism Association (MLTA) said. “The landslide results of this survey show both a steady support for post-Labor Day school start and a clear indication that voters want to have a say in the decision-making process.”

Recognizing the importance of July and August to the tourism industry, the Michigan Legislature passed a law requiring schools to start after the Labor Day weekend beginning in the 2005 school year. A report issued by the Anderson Economic Group found that in just two short years, hotel revenue levels had increased over \$20 million. The tourism industry has benefited significantly as families seized the opportunity to vacation in the warmer August weather.

Since 2006, the Michigan Department of Education has issued an increasing number of waivers allowing schools to start before Labor Day. This year 99 school districts plus 24 intermediate school districts – each of which encompasses multiple school districts – were granted waivers, with many schools back in session by mid-August.

“Voters deserve to have a voice on something that impacts both our children and families and the tourism industry— a vital segment of Michigan’s economy,” Richeson said. “The tourism economy is hit hard as families are forced to cut their summer vacations short, and families miss the opportunity to build lasting memories.”

Kent Wood, director of government relations for the Traverse City Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, supports starting schools after Labor Day because of the positive economic impact for tourism-centered industries in Northern Michigan and across the state.

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2175 Commons Parkway, Okemos, MI 48864

Ph: 517.267.8989 ♦ Fax: 517.267.8990 ♦ deannar@milodging.org ♦ www.milodging.org

“As a region, we have seen an increase in thousands of additional room nights, and millions of dollars in additional room revenues. One area noticed a 116 percent increase over a ten-year period since the law’s enactment – a period of time which includes the challenging recession years,” Wood said.

The survey conducted in August of likely Michigan voters clearly shows that Michigan voters support a post Labor Day school start, and they want to have a voice in that decision-making process.

- Seventy percent support the law requiring that all public-school districts start after Labor Day; and
- Seventy five percent support giving the voter, not the school board, local control over when their schools should start.

“Parents are the true local control when it comes to their kids’ education, and whether to start before or after Labor Day,” Richeson said. “It is clear voters want and deserve to have their voices heard on this issue.”

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The Michigan Lodging and Tourism Association has a 112-year tradition of working to promote lodging, travel and tourism in Michigan.