

# Senator Jesse Bjorkman

*Alaska State Legislature*

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## **SB 178 School Terms Sponsor Statement**

The creation of a school calendar that supports the character and culture of Alaska is essential to building thriving communities surrounding our public schools. A commonsense calendar should allow students and families to take advantage of everything that summer has to offer. SB 178, "An act relating to school terms," would establish the earliest start time for K-12 public schools in Alaska as the first Tuesday in September.

In recent decades, school calendars have shifted earlier into August to maximize the number of instructional days before high stakes testing occurs in April. With more flexibility in testing dates, the time is right to realign school calendars. August in Alaska is a time of abundant economic and outdoor opportunities. Starting K-12 classes in August severely reduces a family's ability to fish, hunt, pick berries, and travel within Alaska. Going back to school in September will allow families to meaningfully engage in subsistence activities and pass down our cultural heritage of natural harvest to the next generation of Alaskans.

Currently, many students are forced out of summer employment because of August school start dates. High school students are less desirable job candidates when they can only work for part of the season before needing to be replaced. Beginning school in September would allow high school students to remain at their summer jobs during the peak construction and tourism season. States such as Michigan have implemented similar school start date laws based on studies of the economic benefits to their intrastate tourism industry.

September school start dates allow for families to go to state and local fairs with 4H projects and Junior Market Livestock animals, travel, hunt, hike, camp, fish and take in the beauty of late August and the first few days of September. Moving the start date to September does not mean that school would have to be in session after Memorial Day. Districts have the flexibility within state law to meet the required amount of student contact time between Labor Day and Memorial Day.