My name is David McGuire and I am the principal at Tindley Summit Academy in Indianapolis, Indiana as well as a Teach Plus Alumni Fellow. I am writing in opposition to SB124 which proposes prohibiting public schools to begin student instructional days until after Labor Day.

Early in my teaching career, I would have loved to have ended the school year with the knowledge that I wouldn’t have to return until after Labor Day. Having up to eleven weeks of paid summer vacation would have been great for me as a young professional. Yet as I’ve matured as an educator and seen the needs and circumstances of my students over the years, my enthusiasm at this idea fades. The prospect of being away from school for an extended period of time would not be joyous or helpful to many of the students I serve.

School and education exist to serve students. I believe a school schedule and purpose should benefit first the students, second the parents, and teachers third. Studies have already shown that students struggle with knowledge retention over summer break - to extend that time away from instruction by another month would exacerbate the challenges teachers already face when working to establish their students’ foundational understandings at the beginning of each year. My school begins in the first few days of August, nevertheless, at the end of the year I still feel like we are running out of time to cover all that is needed. I serve a demographic of students who, by their birthright alone are starting the race at a disadvantage. Education, which can be the ultimate equalizer in life, is their key to success and opportunity. If we limit the time they can spend in the classroom, we limit their opportunity.

If a school begins their school year on August 3, and they end their school year on June 7. That is roughly 200 to 205 instructional days. If they keep that same year-end date of June 7, but move their start date to after Labor Day and that will cost that school roughly 27 school days, taking the instructional days to between 173-178. If I am to give my students a fighting chance to be successful, I cannot afford to give back 27 school days.

The threat of learning loss should be enough to not move forward on SB124, yet I also reflect on the circumstances and family lives of the students I serve. I know some of our students love school, not because of the instruction or learning they receive, but because of the food, the hug, or the peace and calm that greets them when they are in the school building. Many of our students are facing traumatic or tumultuous home lives and keeping them away from school for a longer period of time, robs some of their safe place away from home or cuts them off from meals and services.

I recognize the economic benefits this type of legislation might bring to our state regarding tourism. Leveraging the seasonal work of teachers and high school students is a mainstay for our tourism industries and the revenue it brings in, but to be quite clear, when schools adjust their operations and focus to accommodate adult schedules and agendas, and not student learning, that is detrimental to the overall success of our students across the state and hurts the potential of our future generations.

In conclusion, the students each district and school serve have unique needs and scheduling decisions and determining start dates should be made at the local level by people familiar with the demographics and needs of the local student populations. Superintendents and principals should be the ones to make these decisions in concert with the local community and I encourage you to not support this bill. Thank you.