



**DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY
& SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Public School Waiver Request

District:	Alma
LEA Number:	1701
Superintendent:	Bryan Duffie
Email:	bduffie@almasd.net
Contact for Waiver:	Bryan Duffie
Contact Email:	bduffie@almasd.net
Contact Phone:	479-632-4791
Date Received by DESE:	

The following documents must be submitted with the waiver request:

- 1. Board resolution approving the waiver request**
- 2. Evidence of stakeholder involvement, including teachers and student families**

Waiver Request #1

Topic:	School Start Date
Standards/Statutes/Rules:	A.C.A. 6-10-106
Duration Requested:	5 years
Name of Open-Enrollment Charter Holding the Waiver	Arkansas Virtual Academy and AR Connections Academy
Schools, Grades or Classes the Waiver Will Apply To	K-12
PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER (Must check at least one)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhance Student Learning Opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Promote Innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Increase Equitable Access to Effective Teachers

1. Provide a **DETAILED RATIONALE** explaining how the waiver will enhance student learning opportunities, promote innovation, or increase equitable access to effective teachers. Include information about the problem or obstacle, if any, the waiver will help the district overcome.

The member school districts of the Guy Fenter Education Service Cooperative are collectively and separately requesting a waiver from A.C.A. 6-10-106, which establishes the first allowable day of class as the Monday of the week that contains August 19. For the 2024-2025 school year, the start date will be Monday, August 19. We would appreciate approval for the early start date for the listed schools in our region giving public schools this flexible option for the school calendar.

The specific waiver being requested is to allow the applying school districts to set their individual district's first day of class to be no earlier than Monday, August 12, 2024.

The law as presently constructed results in a wide swing in the allowable opening date of school. At the earliest, it can be August 14, which was the case this year— fall of 2023. The latest possible first day is August 20 which, under the law will be — the fall of 2029. This waiver would allow the school to open next year and years to follow on the same relative date as this year.

There are several advantages to this waiver:

- The fall and spring semesters would be closer to the same length. Without this waiver, the fall semester will be 84 days while the spring semester will be 94 days, a difference of 10 days. With the waiver the fall semester will be 91 days and the spring semester 87 days, a difference of only 4 days. Unbalanced semesters cause an issue for classes that are one semester in length.
- The alternative solution for unbalanced semesters is to not end the fall semester until after Christmas break. This results in final exams shortly after two weeks out of school, and the possibility of exams being repeatedly postponed due to winter weather.
- This waiver will give greater assurance of school ending in late May rather than extending into June. Some research indicates a decrease in learning past the Memorial Day Holiday.
- Beginning school earlier automatically results in more days of instruction before spring testing. More days of quality instruction enhances student learning and student achievement results.
- Student activities each fall will begin on the same relative date as they did this fall, with or

without the waiver. Therefore, a large number of students will already be on campus to practice and prepare for their activities, regardless of the opening date of school. Students who participate in fall activities that include football, golf, tennis, cross country, volleyball, band, cheer, dance, JROTC, Student Council, National Honor Society, as well as several other groups would benefit from the early start date option.

2. Provide a detailed explanation of how the services being waived will be provided for students.

The school districts will create a calendar with an earlier start date which will provide them with more flexibility throughout the school year. The school year will remain the same length. It simply allows a district to continue with a school calendar structured as closely as possible to the current one and avoids the dramatic change to the calendar which must result without the waiver.

3. Provide a detailed explanation of how the district will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the waiver.

The district will monitor student assessment results and student attendance data related to the earlier start date to determine the effectiveness of the early start date.

Stakeholder Survey

The results of our survey are attached to this waiver request. 1205 responses were received as follows:

550 Parents

429 Students

222 Faculty and Staff

4 Community Members

Of the responses submitted, 73.4% support Alma's request for an early start date waiver.



SCHOOL CALENDAR EARLY START DATE WAIVER RESOLUTION
Personnel Policies Committee
January 31, 2024

Whereas, current Arkansas law requires the first day of school for 2024-25 school year can be no earlier than Monday, August 19, 2024, and

Whereas, current Arkansas law requires the earliest any school can have the first student day is on the Monday of the week where August 19 falls, and

Whereas, the Alma School District needs the flexibility of an earlier start date in order to have:

More balance in the number of days per semester,

A consistent start date for each school year,

An ending date for the first semester before Christmas Break that will align the concurrent credit courses, virtual courses, and technical centers ,

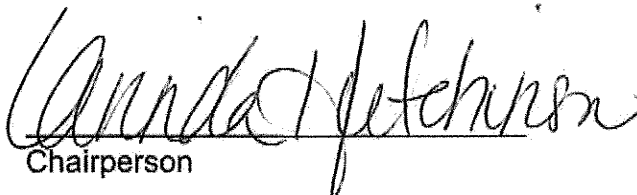
Greater assurance of ending school in May by Memorial Day,


More days of classroom instruction prior to state testing, and

Whereas, the Personnel Policies Committee supports these goals for the school calendar, so

Be it Resolved that the Personnel Policies Committee of the Alma School District supports the submission of a state waiver allowing an earlier start date for school.

Signed this 31st day of January, 2024


Chairperson


Secretary



SCHOOL CALENDAR EARLY START DATE WAIVER RESOLUTION
Alma School District Board of Directors
February 8, 2024

Whereas, current Arkansas law requires the first day of school for 2024-25 school year can be no earlier than Monday, August 19, 2024, and

Whereas, current Arkansas law requires the earliest any school can have the first student day is on the Monday of the week where August 19 falls, and

Whereas, the Alma School District needs the flexibility of an earlier start date in order to have:

More balance in the number of days per semester,

A consistent start date for each school year,

An ending date for the first semester before Christmas Break that will align the concurrent credit courses, virtual courses, and technical centers ,

Greater assurance of ending school in May by Memorial Day,

More days of classroom instruction prior to state testing, and

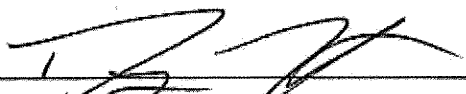
Whereas, the Board of Directors supports these goals for the school calendar, so

Be it Resolved that the Board of Directors of the Alma School District supports the submission of a state waiver allowing an earlier start date for school.

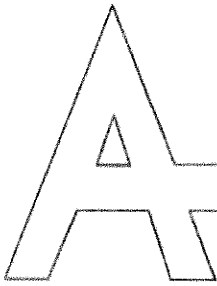
Signed this 8th day of February, 2024



President



Secretary



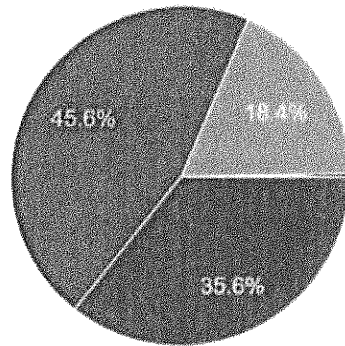
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
ALMA SCHOOL DISTRICT

916 HIGHWAY 64 EAST PHONE: (479) 632-4791
P.O. BOX 2389 FAX: (479) 632-4793
ALMA, ARKANSAS 72921



Please select the role that describes you.

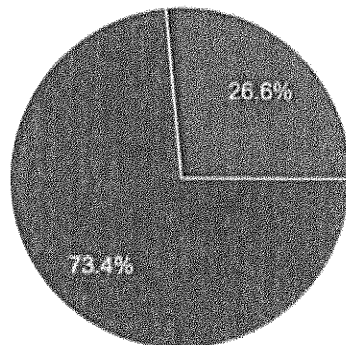
1,205 responses



- Student
- Parent
- School Faculty or Staff
- Community Member

Do you support the Alma School District having a state waiver to start school a few days earlier than allowed by current Arkansas law?

1,205 responses



- Yes
- No