



**DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY
& SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Act 1240 Waiver Request

District:	Mena School District
LEA Number:	5703000
Superintendent:	Dr. Lee Smith
Email:	Lee.smith@menaschools.org
Contact for Waiver:	Dr. Smith or Bridget Buckley
Contact Email:	Bridget.buckley@menaschools.org
Contact Phone:	479-394-1710
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
Schools, Grades or Classes the Wavier 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.

Some member school districts of the DeQueen-Mena 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 that 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 the equity afforded to Charter Schools.

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."

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.

Mena had an excellent fall semester for academics and would like to make the fall of 2024 just as successful by keeping the calendar as close as possible to this year's.

The advantages of this waiver are several:

- 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. The more unbalanced the semesters are, the greater the 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 instruction will result in higher test scores,**
- **Activities such as football will begin next fall 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. In addition to students who play football, this would include students who participate in groups such as golf, tennis, cross country, volleyball, band, cheer, dance, ROTC, Student Council, and National Honor Society, as well as others.**
- **More inclement weather days may be built in with an earlier start date allowing for make-up days to be in line with the scope and sequence of the curriculum rather than tacked onto the end of the year after Memorial Day.**
- **More embedded teacher work days for student data disaggregation will enhance planning and development of both lesson plans, pacing guides, and interventions.**

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.

**Resolution to Seek a Waiver from the Arkansas State Board of Education for the
2024-2025 School Year Start Date**

WHEREAS, Mena Public Schools is committed to providing the highest quality education to its students and believes that the structure of the academic calendar is integral to achieving this goal; and

WHEREAS, the current state law requires the start of the school year for public schools in Arkansas on or after the Monday of the week in which August 19 falls; not earlier than August 14; and, not later than August 26.

WHEREAS, Act 347 (formerly Act 1240) grants any public school the right to request waivers for any rules or laws that apply to traditional public schools but not to charter schools, thereby allowing for increased flexibility and innovation in public education; and

WHEREAS, Mena Public Schools seeks to optimize the academic calendar for the 2024-2025 school year by starting the week of August 12, 2024, in place of the state-mandated date of August 19, 2024; but not before August 14, 2024.

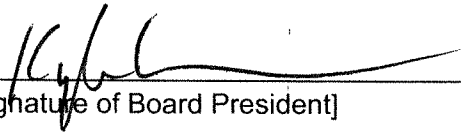
BE IT RESOLVED, that Mena Public Schools hereby requests a waiver from the Arkansas State Board of Education to commence the 2024-2025 school year on the week of August 12, 2024, for the following reasons:

1. **Enhanced Academic Balance:** Starting the school year earlier allows for an even distribution of school days across both semesters, improving the academic balance and consistency for students and teachers.
2. **Increased Instructional Days:** An earlier start date provides more instructional days before state assessments, offering students additional learning opportunities and preparation time.
3. **Flexibility in Calendar Design:** This change would enable the incorporation of more Mondays for breaks and make-up days, offering greater flexibility to address unexpected school closures and maintain academic continuity.
4. **Teacher Collaboration:** The adjusted start date affords additional opportunities for teacher collaboration, utilizing current student performance data for better planning and intervention strategies.
5. **Meeting Educational Goals:** The proposed start date aligns with Mena Public Schools' commitment to improving attendance, reducing absenteeism, and meeting the district's academic performance targets.


THEREFORE, be it further resolved, that the Board of Education of Mena Public Schools, in accordance with the powers granted by Act 347, formally submits this request for a waiver to the

Arkansas State Board of Education, affirming its commitment to the educational welfare and academic success of its students.

Adopted this **22nd** day of **January 2024**, by the Board of Education of Mena Public Schools, Arkansas.



[Signature of Board President]



[Signature of Secretary]

Engagement Summary

Lee Smith, Mena School District
January 19, 2024

What are the most important priorities we should consider as we develop our school calendar for next year?



PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



313
Participants



173
Thoughts



7,714
Ratings

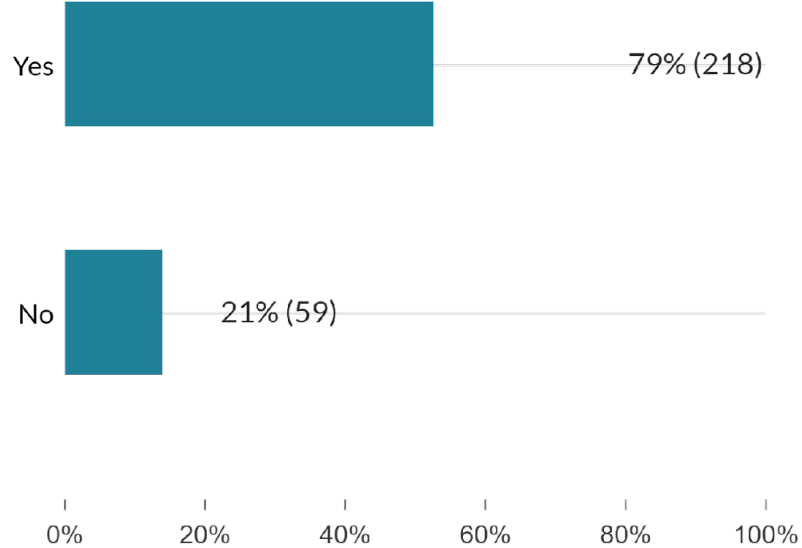


PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation



Do you support the school district requesting a waiver from the state board to start school during the week of August 12, 2024?





PARTICIPATION

Breakdown of Participation




Please check all that apply to your school relationship status:



275

Responses

%		Answer (Multi-select)
27%	(75)	Employee
89%	(246)	Parent/Guardian of a current student
1%	(2)	Student
12%	(32)	Concerned community member



WORDCLOUD
Top Rated





THOUGHTS

Key Thoughts



The students' education and well-being are the top priority Its the entire reason we have a public school system

4.4  (52 )

Ranked #1 of 173

Continuing with built-in "snow days" for inclement weather. Students/staff should enjoy snow days and not feel punished for inclement weather by being given AMI or made to go longer unless too many missed days.

4.2  (62 )

Ranked #2 of 173

Days off throughout the year is AMAZING Having the Mondays off throughout the year allows everyone to get into various appointments. It also allows us to have a mini brain break.

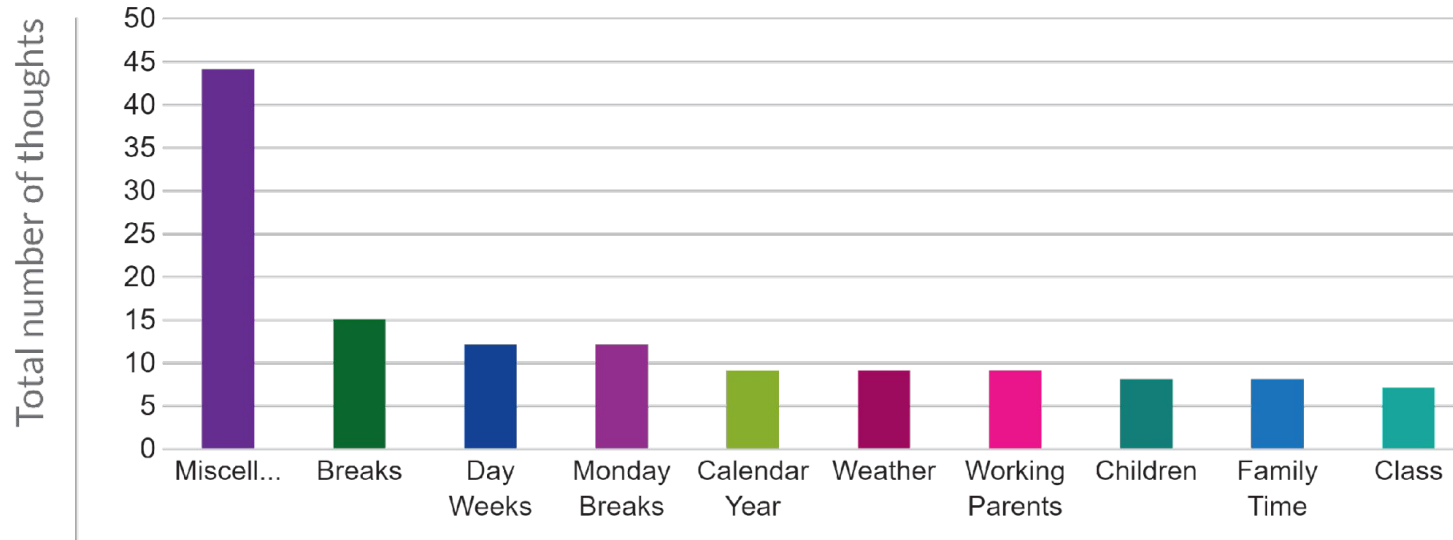
4.2  (51 )

Ranked #3 of 173



KEYWORD THEMES

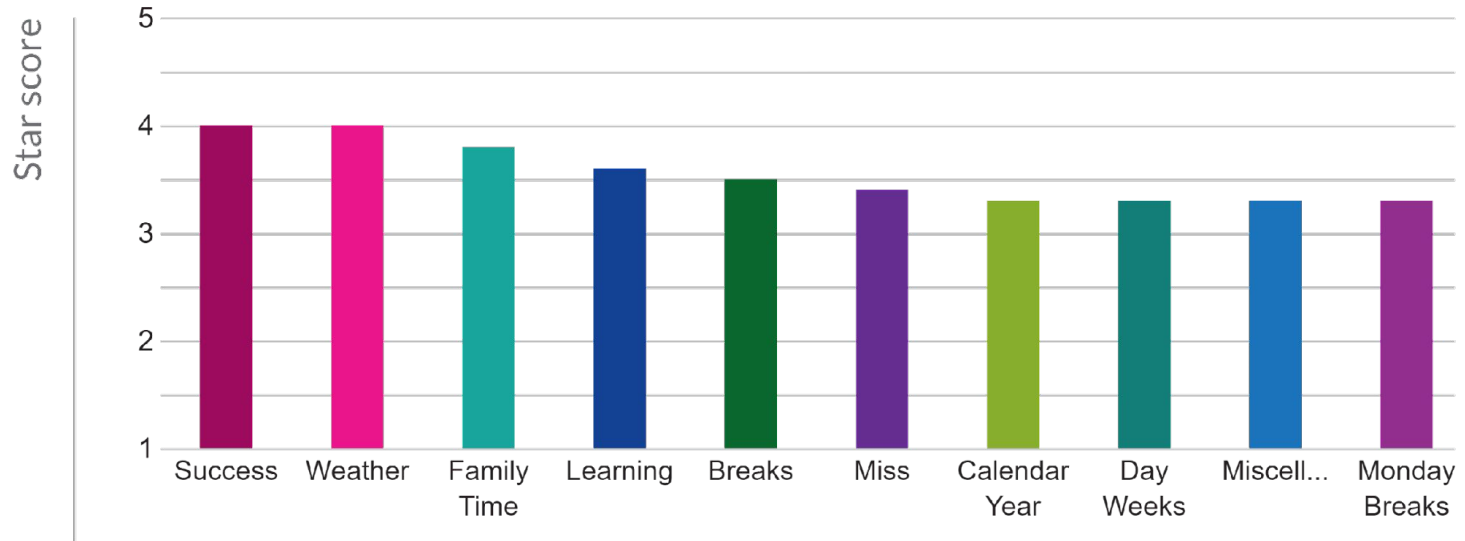
Top Themes by total thoughts





KEYWORD THEMES

Top Themes by star score





THOUGHTS

Success



Student learning Make student's successful

3.9  (63 )

Student academic success

3.9  (51 )

Student success

3.9  (50 )



THOUGHTS Weather



Continuing with built-in "snow days" for inclement weather. Students/staff should enjoy snow days and not feel punished for inclement weather by being given AMI or made to go longer unless too many missed days.

4.2  (62 )

Have built in days in case of bad weather We don't want to go to school in June

4.1  (42 )

Incorporate weather days to not extend the calendar past mid May

4.0  (69 )



THOUGHTS

Family Time



The current calendar has worked well for my family this year. We get a little break each month to go to appointments or have long family weekend time. It prevents my child from being absent for appointments and just gives them a little mental health break.

4.2  (39 )

We as a family have liked the way the Christmas break has been done the last couple of years. The schedule of the holiday has allowed our family time to take full advantage of the time. We have been able to enjoy the holiday and free time.

4.1  (42 )



3 day weekends To plan more family time to travel. We hardly get to see distant family members



4.0  (69 )





THOUGHTS Learning



Student learning and outcomes. The first goal of the education system is the education of our students. Everything must align to reach and enhance that goal. 4.0  (44 )



The student learning. Student learning is important because if they don't learn what is expected it makes our job ineffective. 3.6  (43 )



Learning 1st priority should be education, not sports/extracurricular. When first days back to school start off with out of town games/events it hinders that. 3.5  (10 )





THOUGHTS Breaks



Days off throughout the year is AMAZING Having the Mondays off throughout the year allows everyone to get into various appointments. It also allows us to have a mini brain break. 4.2  (51 )

I believe having short, frequent breaks throughout the year is very beneficial for students and staff. Having days off each month gives time for students to rest, it stops the spread of illness, and gives staff a chance to breath and get caught up! 4.0  (56 )

First and foremost should obviously be what will help student learning. I think that has always been the top priority with our district. Frequent short breaks like we have had this year and built in snow days have been wonderful for both teachers and students alike! 4.0  (49 )



THOUGHTS

Miss



Breaks throughout the entire year, to reduce student and teacher burn out. It allows for appointments to be scheduled without missing a day of school.

4.1  (48 )

Periodic Breaks Can Decrease Missed Time I enjoy our current calendar because it give us the felxiability to respond winter storm, miss less time for appointments, & feel refreshed throughout

4.1  (44 )

A designated day off each month It gives students/faculty/staff an opportunity to schedule appointments without having to miss instruction.

4.0  (13 )



THOUGHTS

Calendar Year



I trust what you're doing. This year's calendar has been great for doctor's appointments and family time.

3.9  (9 )

Non Instructional days at least once a month have been a great addition to this years calendar. It always gives teachers and students something to look forward to especially during months like October and February when there isn't a holiday.

3.8  (32 )

It is important to keep our school calendars as closely aligned as possible with surrounding schools. It allows for ease of transition for parents, employees and to help combat neighboring schools competing for our students due to a different calendar.

3.8  (3 )



THOUGHTS

Day Weeks



I would like to see evenly distributed days off. Student burn out.

3.7  (64 👤)

Teachers having days off as well as students Teachers need mental health days

3.6  (56 👤)

It would be nice to do once a month having a Monday off or going to 4 days a week school days More time 4rest-Mentally and Physically(my oldest is in sports and my youngest is a homebody) Doc appts. Teachers have time w/o disruption to plan.



3.5  (15 👤)







THOUGHTS

Miscellaneous



The students' education and well-being are the top priority Its the entire reason we have a public school system 4.4  (52 )

This year's schedule has been wonderful! I especially loved our time off for Christmas! Kids need their full summers off as well as MLK Jr. Day. I also enjoyed having off at least one day every month. It's also been nice being off with my children and not having to do PD every time. 4.0  (57 )

The purpose of school is to educate students, not to provide free babysitting for parents. 4.0  (37 )
The desire for some parents to get free (or, should I say, tax payer funded) child care should be irrelevant. School is not daycare.



THOUGHTS

Monday Breaks



As both parent and teacher, I really appreciated and took advantage of the Monday breaks in the fall semester for all prescheduled appointments. It really cut down on the amount of school missed by my kids with ongoing medical issues.

4.0  (65 👤)

I really like the once a month Mondays off. I like the winter break being 2&1/2 weeks off. It has been wonderful to get appts taken care of without taking days, and really beneficial in having rest and energy and excitement for going back.

4.0  (29 👤)

Make-up Mondays in Spring Semester Having one Monday off per month is beneficial for students and staff. Also in case of inclement weather, they can be used to make up missed days.

4.0  (24 👤)



DIFFERENCES

Time For Appointments | Parents Work [68 | 40]



A and B rated high

This summary is currently not available.



A rated high, B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



A and B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



A rated low, B rated high

This summary is currently not available.



DIFFERENCES

Start and Kids | Summer Vacation [53 | 44]



A and B rated high

This summary is currently not available.



A rated high, B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



A and B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



A rated low, B rated high

This summary is currently not available.



DIFFERENCES

Family Time [56 | 34]



A and B rated high

This summary is currently not available.



A rated high, B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



A and B rated low

This summary is currently not available.



WRAP UP Next Steps



Thanks for participating

We'll be carefully considering what we learned and sharing our actions back with you.

District Academic Update:

K-5:

Students in K-5 have completed part of their Middle of Year assessments with DIBELS and 3-5 have completed their STAR assessments. K-2 will complete their NWEA assessments in January.

In Reading, every student in K-5 showed growth! Average growth for the semester ranges from 51 points to 83 points with the overall average being 62 points. 60 points of growth moves students from one level to the next. An average of 62 points growth means as a whole, our students in K-5 pushed from one level to the next. Excellent growth! Highest growth in reading is in Kinder and 4th grade.

In math, 3rd through 5th grade had an average growth increase of 35 points and “7 months” of growth in this semester across the three grades.

6-12:

Teachers in 6-12 have implemented a strategic intervention schedule for working with students. In the fall semester:

Content Area	# Students In Intervention	# Students Showing Growth	% of Students Showing Growth	Next Steps
Math	129	102	79.07%	Students will STAR test in January. Summative ATLAS assessment is in April.
ELA	251	219	87%	In January all students will complete an oral reading fluency and comprehension check. Summative ATLAS assessment in April.
Science	117	53	45.3%	Students will take the second science interim in February and the summative ATLAS in April.

Students in 3rd grade through Biology completed the first round of ATLAS Interim Science assessment. That assessment did not generate a lot of data, but we do know that overall, our students scored above the state average. Highlights include 6th grade at 6 points above the state average and 8th grade at 5 points above the state average.