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## High school sport dates, higher education review discussed by Joint Committee on Education

ETHAN MAY Sep 13, 2016

JEFFERSON CITY — Changing the start date for high school sports could boost the state's tourism economy but also could put athletes at risk of injury. State lawmakers discussed the impact of the start date during a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education on Tuesday.

The committee also heard an update from the state commissioner of higher education about the progress of a task force reviewing public higher education institutions.

Kerwin Urhahn, executive director of the Missouri State High School Activities Association, gave the committee a presentation on how the practice start date for fall high school sports is determined and the implications that has on the sports schedule, student athlete safety and tourism.

Urhahn gave two reasons that the beginning of the fall sports season has been moved up — this year the first date teams could practice was July 31, next year it will be July 30 — and both reasons are related to safety of the student athletes. An earlier start means coaches can prepare students to compete. The director explained how athletes require conditioning to become accustomed to the heat before competition begins.

In addition, an earlier start allows football playoffs to be spread out. In previous years football teams would be forced to play three varsity football games in 11 days during the playoffs. Urhahn said the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee determined this was unsafe.

Moving up the start date has consequences. One criticism is that the earlier start date shrinks the summer of both the coaches and student athletes, allowing less time for tourist activities and for students to work within the industry.

Rep. Steve Cookson, R-Poplar Bluff, said he has observed a trend of retirees being hired in tourism rather than school-age workers and said the major impact of an earlier start date is that families have less time to travel.

Another unintended consequence of the earlier start, Urhahn said, is students not being able to attend the Missouri State Fair.

Rep. Mike Lair, R-Chillicothe, said students in many districts do not attend the fair, so local school boards do not consider it when planning classroom start dates.

"There's no reason we should make any kind of a rule that makes them reserve their start until after that state fair," Lair said. "The decision should be made at the lowest level possible. And that, in this case, is the school board."

When asked by the committee's chairman, Sen. Gary Romine, R-Farmington, if there was a connection between the fall sports start date and the classroom start date, Urhahn said that the two dates are completely independent.

"Whenever we moved our (fall sports start) date, we didn't think anything about the school start date being impacted by this," Urhahn said.

One way to avoid moving up the sports start date while also decompressing the football playoffs would be to remove a game from the regular season schedule. Urhahn said this is often an unpopular option among parents and students.

"This is what you have to deal with because you have to look at what is best for your kids," Urhahn said. "Does giving up one football game, is that what's best? Or is simply redoing how we do our playoff system the best?"

The earliest the sports schedule could change would be the 2018-2019 school year. To change the schedule, a majority of the 590 member schools of the activities association must vote in favor of the change.

### Reviewing the higher education landscape

The committee also was given a presentation on the progress of the Missouri Higher Education System Review Task Force, which is reviewing the state's public higher education institutions.

The task force, comprised of presidents and other representatives from each of the state's public 2- and 4-year universities, was created at the recommendation of Rep. Cookson and Speaker of the House Todd Richardson.

This task force is also a way for the Coordinating Board for Higher Education to fulfill one of the goals within its strategic plan, according to Liz Coleman, a spokesperson for the Department of Higher Education.

The task force is working with a consulting firm on the following items:

- Complete an environmental scan of higher education in Missouri. The task force will look at the number of institutions, the programs those institutions are offering, as well as the state's demographics and economy, among other items.
- Study the state's current work force and project what it will look like in the future. The task force will collect data that can be used to determine if the state's institutions are capable of producing graduates that can fill gaps in work force supply and demand. Part of this analysis will include examining which degree programs are available at which universities.
- Review the missions of each state university. The task force will look at each university's mission on paper and then study how the performance of each university meets its mission on paper.

The information gathered will then be compiled into a final report to be presented in December.

While the scope of the task force is similar to that of the UM System Review Commission, created by a bill sponsored by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, it is operating separately and is looking at issues beyond the University of Missouri System.

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