



**DRAGAS CENTER FOR
ECONOMIC ANALYSIS
AND POLICY**

Contact Dr. Robert M. McNab
Telephone 757.683.3153
Email rmcnab@odu.edu
Website <http://www.ceapodu.com>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2018

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING? VIRGINIA'S "KINGS DOMINION LAW"

Labor Day is a glorious holiday because your child will be going back to school the next day. It would have been called Independence Day, but that name was already taken.

– Bill Dodds, children's poet and novelist

For more than 30 years, it has been a polarizing debate between exhausted parents, and trying-to-squeeze-a-bit-more-out-of-summer parents.

In 1986, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law that requires public elementary and secondary schools not open until after Labor Day, unless these schools are granted a waiver. Popularly known as the Kings Dominion Law – named after the amusement and theme park north of Richmond – the statute becomes a source of contention every August.

Proponents of the law argue it provides a late-summer boost for tourism in Virginia. Advocates of repealing the law suggest that starting school later puts Virginia schoolchildren behind their peers in districts that have obtained a waiver.

With Virginia's General Assembly set to examine the law again in its 2019 session, researchers who assembled Old Dominion University's fourth State of the Commonwealth Report analyzed the King's Dominion Law to answer a central question – does the law have any significant impact on students or tourism?

Proponents AND opponents of the law are likely to be let down by the findings, which show scant benefits and drawbacks to each side's arguments.

"Our analysis reveals that the Kings Dominion law has not significantly impacted school graduation rates, student retention or test scores," the report notes. "Further, repealing the law would not have a very large negative impact on Virginia's travel and tourism industry."

The chapter on the King's Dominion Law is one of six in this year's State of the Commonwealth Report, produced by ODU's Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy, and edited by professor of economics Bob McNab. The 172-page report, released Dec. 15, is available ([link to report](#)).

The ODU researchers pointed out the law was not created based on research about student performance, or the need for farm labor during the late summer harvest. "Instead, it reflects strong and persistent advocacy by the Commonwealth's travel and tourism industry, which believes the legislation is important to its financial welfare."

What the State of the Commonwealth team found was that the economic ripple effect of tourism spending for all of Virginia is only about \$40 million, or only one-sixth of 1 percent of total tourism expenditures.

On the other hand, arguments that later school openings negatively impact on-time graduation rates are also not supported by data. "There is little or no evidence that early school division starting dates harm academic performance. If anything, the evidence leans in the opposite direction," the authors note.

Finally, the emotional arguments that underpin support or opposition to the Kings Dominion law frequently omit the fact that many schools do not have to adhere to the law. Private educational academies are exempt from the Kings Dominion Law, and many school divisions have a waiver allowing them to open early as well. In fact, of the 2 million Virginia households in 2016, only about 20 percent were impacted by the Kings Dominion Law.

"Our conclusion is that the squabbles over the repeal of the Kings Dominion Law ultimately involve arguments over very small stakes. We find almost no evidence that revoking this law would harm the Commonwealth," the report notes. In the end, the sound and fury about the law appears to have little basis in empirical fact.

The full State of the Commonwealth Report is available at [ceapodu-2018SOC](#)

###

The Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy in the Strome College of Business at Old Dominion University undertakes a wide range of economic, demographic, transportation and defense-oriented studies. For eighteen years, the Center and its predecessors have produced the highly regarded State of the Region Report for Hampton Roads and economic forecasts for the region. If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Dr. Robert M. McNab at 757.683.3153 or email at rmcnab@odu.edu.