

THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Accountability | World-Class Math and Science Standards | Meaningful Diploma/CORE 24

PILOT PROGRAM FOR WAIVERS FROM THE 180-SCHOOL DAY REQUIREMENT FOR THE PURPOSES OF ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY “FLEXIBLE CALENDAR”

SUMMARY OF POLICY ISSUE /STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (SBE) STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The 2009 Legislature created a new law that established a pilot program in which the State Board of Education (SBE) was given authority to grant waivers from the requirement for a one hundred eighty-day school year to school districts that propose to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for purposes of economy and efficiency (Substitute House Bill 1292). Only five school districts are eligible for these waivers, two of which have student populations under 150 and three of which have student populations between 150 and 500. The requirement that school districts offer an annual average instructional hour offering of at least one thousand hours cannot be waived. The new law goes into effect July 26, 2009.

BACKGROUND

Legislation

Under the new law, SBE will adopt criteria to evaluate waiver requests, which will include the criteria outlined in the bill (shown below as a-g) and other information that SBE may request to assure that the proposed flexible calendar will not adversely affect student learning. SBE will analyze empirical evidence annually from school districts with waivers to determine whether the reduction in days is affecting student learning. If SBE determines that student learning is adversely affected, the school district will need to discontinue the flexible calendar as soon as possible but not later than the beginning of the next school year after the determination has been made. SBE will examine the waivers granted and make a recommendation to the education committees of the Legislature by December 15, 2013, regarding whether the waiver program should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate. All waivers expire August 31, 2014.

The new law requires school districts seeking a waiver to submit an application that includes:

- (a) A proposed calendar for the school day and school year that demonstrates how the instructional hour requirement will be maintained.
- (b) An explanation and estimate of the economies and efficiencies to be gained from compressing the instructional hours into fewer than one hundred eighty days.
- (c) An explanation of how monetary savings from the proposal will be redirected to support student learning.
- (d) A summary of comments received at one or more local school district public hearings on the proposal and how concerns will be addressed.
- (e) An explanation of the impact on students who rely upon free and reduced-price school child nutrition services and the impact on the ability of the child nutrition program to operate an economically independent program.
- (f) An explanation of the impact on the ability to recruit and retain employees in education support positions.

- (g) An explanation of the impact on students whose parents work during the missed school day.

Other States

The idea of using a flexible or four-day school week calendar is not new and has been around for decades. In fact, some school districts in New Mexico started using a shorter week in the 1970's. Currently, about 100 school districts in 17 states, most west of the Mississippi, operate on four-day weeks. On average, the districts using four-day weeks are small and rural with enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students. The predominant reason for school districts to switch has been fiscal and the number of districts has slowly climbed with every fiscal crisis. The most recent fiscal woes have brought the issue to light in Washington State.

The procedure for school districts to propose and use a flexible or four-day school week calendar varies among the states. Eight states (DE, ID, MI, MT, NE, NM, OR, SD) do not have a minimum number of days as a requirement but do have a minimum number of instructional hours. In Colorado and Louisiana, school districts are allowed to switch after notifying and receiving permission from the state but still need to meet a minimum number of instructional hours. In California, school districts in a few rural regions have been given the authority to switch. In other states (AR, DE, VA), school districts can switch but choose not to use such a calendar. Recently in Colorado, 62 school districts used a four-day school week, which accounted for 34% of the school districts and 2.7% of the students. The largest district served 1,265 students. In Louisiana during the 2007-2008 school year, seven school districts used a four-day school week, which accounted for 10% of the school districts and 2% of the students.

The cost savings associated with making the switch is often not the expected twenty percent. In reality, many schools don't close on the fifth day and use the buildings for extracurricular activities, such as tutoring, supplemental programs, and professional development. In addition, there are fixed costs that cannot be reduced, such as the maintenance of vehicles involved in transportation. As an example, Webster County School District in Kentucky estimated its savings in the first year of using a four-day week (2003-2004) to be about 3% of its operating budget.¹

There is not a lot of research on the long-term effects of a flexible or four-day school week calendar on student achievement. The available information points to the difficulty of connecting an increase or decrease of test scores to any one factor. Although there are stories of success, many articles and studies summarize by saying a shorter week does not seem to affect student achievement either way. A 2004 review by the Colorado Department of Education, stated, "The jury is out on the question of student performance...the general feeling is that students do no worse on the four-day week than on the traditional schedule."² In New Mexico, districts have not seen a marked improvement in academic achievement. "It's been negligible," said Dr. Michael Kaplan, Director of the Alternative Education unit in the New Mexico Department of Education. New Mexico schools have seen other benefits, though; "It's been a morale booster; they know they have a day to catch up on personal errands," noted Kaplan, which helped to reduce staff absences. In addition, student attendance has increased and the number of discipline referrals has dropped slightly.³

¹ "Focus on the School Calendar: The Four-Day School Week," by Gale F. Gaines, 2008

² "The Four-Day School Week." by Ai Dam, 2004

³ "Could Four-Day Weeks Work for You?" by Ellen R. Delisio, 2002

POTENTIAL BENEFITS	POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS	UNKNOWNNS
Reduced transportation; heating and cooling; and food service costs.	Substantial savings may not result unless teacher pay is reduced.	Effects on achievement.
Decreased student and teacher absenteeism.	Increased demand for child care.	Effectiveness in non-rural areas or large rural districts.
Increased time for academic support and extracurricular activities.	Longer school day may be difficult for younger students.	<i>Table from: "The Four-Day School Week," By Molly Chamberlin and Jonathan Plucker, 2003</i>

POLICY CONSIDERATION

The new legislation is a pilot program. SBE will monitor and provide recommendations to the Legislature by December 15, 2013, regarding whether the waiver program should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate. The monitoring of the waivers will include annual analysis of empirical data from school districts to determine whether the waiver is affecting student learning. If SBE determines that student learning is adversely affected, it will notify the school district to discontinue the flexible calendar as soon as possible but not later than the beginning of the next school year. The pilot program ends August 31, 2014.

EXPECTED ACTION

Staff recommends that the Board consider, for adoption, the criteria included in the attached application form. The Board's committee created the document by using the criteria outlined in SHB 1292 (provided in the Background of this document) and by developing the following additional criteria:

1. Explain the effect that the waiver will have on the financial position of the district. (Item # 2 of the application).
2. Explain how content is being accommodated from the waived days to the remaining days for elementary and secondary grades levels. (Item # 8 of the application).
3. What assessments and observations will the district use to analyze student achievement over the course of the waiver? (Item # 9a of the application).
4. Provide a set of student achievement data for the two previously analyzed years (provide attachments, if preferred). (Item # 9b of the application).

REFERENCES

1. "Could Four-Day Weeks Work for You?" by Ellen R. Delisio. Education World, Originally published 09/03/2002 and updated 04/01/2004; http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin279.shtml
2. "Focus on the School Calendar: The Four-Day School Week," by Gale F. Gaines. Southern Regional Education Board, August 2008; www.sreb.org
3. "The Four-Day School Week." by Ai Dam. Colorado Department of Education. 2004; <http://www.cde.state.co.us/artemis/ed2/ED22F822004INTERNET.pdf>
4. "The Four-Day School Week," By Molly Chamberlin and Jonathan Plucker. Indiana Education Policy Center. *Education Policy Briefs*, Vol.1 No. 2 Winter 2003.
5. "Four-day school week draws fans. More small districts can choose to change schedules, which some say will save on buses, utilities and lunches." By Jim Sanders. Bee Capitol Bureau, Published December 25, 2004. <http://web.archive.org/web/20060129152910/http://sacbee.com/content/politics/story/11864806p-12751731c.html>
6. "The Four Day School Week Research Brief," The Principals' Partnership. Adapted from *Scheduling Alternatives: Options for Student Success*, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. <http://www.principalspartnership.com/> & <http://www.nwrel.org/request/feb97/article4.html>
7. "Key Lessons: What Research Says About Reorganizing School Schedules," by Eileen M. O'Brien. Center for Public Education, 2006;
8. "Making time: What research says about re-organizing school schedules," by Eileen M. O'Brien. The Center for Public Education, Posted: September 25, 2006; http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjXJ5MP1wE/b.2086551/k.9967/Making_time_What_research_says_about_reorganizing_school_schedules.htm#Four_day_school_week