

The Washington State Board of Education

Governance | Accountability | Achievement | Oversight | Career & College Readiness

Title:	Economy and Efficiency Waivers Study	
As Related To:	<input type="checkbox"/> Goal One: Effective and accountable P-13 governance. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Two: Comprehensive statewide K-12 accountability. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Three: Closing achievement gap.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal Four: Strategic oversight of the K-12 system. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Five: Career and college readiness for all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Relevant To Board Roles:	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy Leadership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> System Oversight <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Convening and Facilitating
Policy Considerations / Key Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What questions would the Board direct to staff for incorporation in the study to be conducted of "Option Two" waivers granted under RCW 28A.305.141? 2. What information would be helpful to the Board for the recommendation it must make to the Legislature by December 15 on whether the program of 180-day waivers for purposes of economy and efficiency should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate on August 31, 2014? 	
Possible Board Action:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Materials Included in Packet:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Graphs / Graphics <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Third-Party Materials <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint	
Synopsis:	<p>Legislation enacted in the 2009 Session authorized the State Board of Education to grant waivers of the basic education requirement of a minimum 180-day school year to no more than five small school districts "for purposes of economy and efficiency." The legislation is codified as RCW 28A.305.141. The State Board has termed these "Option Two" waivers to differentiate them from the long-standing, "Option One" waivers that may be requested by any district under RCW 28A.305.140. In November 2012, the SBE adopted criteria in rule for evaluation of requests for these waivers as WAC 180-18-065.</p> <p>The Board has granted three waivers under this section of law. Currently two districts, both with enrollments of under 150 FTE pupils, have Option Two waivers of 30 and 34 days, respectively, extending through the 2014-15 year.</p> <p>RCW 28A.305.141 expires on August 31, 2014. The statute directs the SBE to make a recommendation to the education committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2013 regarding whether the program of economy and efficiency waivers should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate under current law. The recommendation "should focus on whether the program resulted in improved student learning as demonstrated by empirical evidence."</p>	

ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY WAIVERS STUDY

Policy Consideration

Members will consider what questions and direction they may have for staff that would help inform the recommendation the SBE is required to make, per RCW 28A.305.141, regarding whether the “Option Two” program of 180-day waivers for purposes of economy and efficiency should be continued beyond the statutory August 31, 2014 expiration date, modified, or allowed to terminate as scheduled. Possible questions for consideration include:

1. Should the Board’s recommendation be based solely on whether the waiver program resulted in improved student learning, or should it be based on other considerations as well, such as the monetary savings accruing to the district, the impacts on families and employees, and support from the community?
2. Can the impacts of the modified school calendars on student learning in these districts be identified and measured in a valid way, separately from other factors affecting student learning?
3. How significant are the financial savings obtained by the districts from the modified calendars implemented through these waivers? What are the sources of the savings? To what extent have savings achieved been redirected to support student learning, and to what results?
4. The findings in the 2009 legislation creating the economy and efficiency waivers state, “[T]he legislature finds that a flexible calendar could be beneficial to student learning by allowing the use of the unscheduled days for professional development activities, planning, tutoring, special programs and athletic events,” and “School districts in several western states have operated on a four-day school week and report increased efficiencies, family support, and reduced absenteeism, with no negative impact on student learning.” To what extent are these findings in 2009 supported by (a) the experience of the districts that have operated four-day school weeks under these waivers, and (b) high-quality research literature on four-day school weeks?

Background

Legislation passed in the 2009 Session, SHB 1292 (Chapter 543, Laws of 2009) delegated the State Board of Education authority to grant waivers from the basic education requirement of a minimum 180-day school year to a limited number of small school districts to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for purposes of economy and efficiency. The State Board has termed these “Option Two” waivers to distinguish them from the “Option One” waivers the Board has granted since the 1990s “to implement successfully a local plan. . . designed to enhance the educational program for each student.” (RCW 28A.305.140.)

Under RCW 28A.305.141, the SBE may grant waivers for purposes of economy and efficiency to no more than five districts. Two of the five districts receiving the waivers must have “student populations” of less than 150 students, the remaining three of between 150 and 500.

The waivers may be granted for up to three years.

Districts seeking a waiver under this section must submit an application that includes:

- a. A proposed calendar that shows how the 1,000 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 180 days.
- c. An explanation of how monetary savings gained will be redirected to support student learning.
- d. A summary of comments received at one or more public hearings on the proposal, and how concerns will be addressed;
- e. An explanation of impacts on students who rely on free and reduced-price child nutrition services, and on the ability of the child nutrition program to operate;
- f. An explanation on the impact on the ability to recruit and retain employees in support positions;
- g. An explanation of the impact on students whose parents work during the missed days;
- h. Other information the SBE may request to assure that the proposed flexible calendar will not adversely affect student learning.

The SBE was directed to adopt criteria to evaluate requests for the waivers.

RCW 28A.305.141 expires August 31, 2014. The SBE is required to examine the waivers granted under this statute and recommend to the Legislature by December 31, 2013 whether the waiver program should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate as scheduled. Legislation would have to be enacted in the 2014 Session for the program to be continued beyond next year.

The State Board has granted three waivers under this law. In November 2009 the Board approved the requests of Bickleton and Paterson school districts, both with enrollment under 150, and Lyle school district, with enrollment of about 300.

In March 2012 Bickleton and Paterson requested renewal of their waivers. Mill A School District also requested an Option Two waiver at that meeting. As all three had enrollment under 150, only two of the requests could be approved. The Board approved the Bickleton and Paterson requests, based on informal criteria approved at a special meeting in February. Bickleton's waiver was for 30 days, for each school year through 2014-15, and Paterson's for 34 days, also through 2014-15.

Both districts operate on four-day school weeks of Monday through Thursday, with longer school days. Both districts certify that they meet minimum instructional hour requirements for basic education.

In November 2012 the Board adopted rules for evaluation of waiver requests under RCW 28A.305.141. WAC 180-18-065 provides that in order to be granted a waiver to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for the purposes of economy and efficiency, an eligible district must meet all of the requirements for the application specified in that statute. They further provide that in the event more requests for the waivers are received than may be granted, the SBE will give priority to those plans that best redirect savings from the proposed calendar to support student learning.

Summary

RCW 28A.305.141(4) requires the SBE to examine the waivers granted under this section of law and make a recommendation to the education committees of the Legislature by December 15, 2013 regarding whether the economy and efficiency waiver program should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate on August 31, 2014 as provided in the statute. It specifies that

This recommendation should focus on whether the program resulted in improved student learning as demonstrated by empirical evidence. Such evidence includes, but is not limited to: Improved scores on the Washington assessment of student learning, results of the dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills, student grades, and attendance.

The SBE has published an Informal Solicitation for proposals to conduct a study of Option Two waivers in order to inform the Board's recommendation on whether the program should be continued, modified, or allowed to expire. The proposed scope of work includes:

1. Identification of changes in student learning and achievement over the school years in which each district granted the waivers operated flexible calendars under them, as measured by specified indicators;
2. Analysis of the extent to which the identified changes in student learning and achievement resulted from or were affected by the flexible calendars operated by each;
3. Identification of the net savings, if any, which the districts operating flexible calendars through these waivers have achieved in operations, and the extent to which savings were redirected to support student learning;
4. Review of research literature on four-day school weeks, including both academic and financial impacts.

Responses are due on September 3. The performance period for any contract resulting from the solicitation would be September 11 -- December 15. The successful contractor would be required to submit a preliminary draft to the SBE on November 1 for discussion at the Board's November meeting.

Action

None.