



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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

Title:	Recommendation to Legislature, Option Two BEA waivers	
As Related To:	<input checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy Leadership <input 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. Can the SBE identify impacts of the waivers on student learning? 2. What costs savings can reliably be identified from implementation of the waivers? 3. Does the research literature on shortened school weeks provide support for such waivers? 4. Is there sufficient evidence from an examination of the waivers for a recommendation to the Legislature to continue the waiver program? 	
Possible Board Action:	<input type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input checked="" 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 2009 authorized the SBE to grant waivers of the basic education requirement of a minimum 180-day school year to a limited number of small districts “for purposes of economy and efficiency.” The Board has granted three of these waivers, termed Option Two to differentiate them from those authorized under RCW 28A.305.140. Currently two districts, both with under 150 enrollments, have Option Two waivers, one for 34 days and the other for 30 days. RCW 28A.305.141 expires on August 31, 2014. The statute directs the SBE to examine the waivers and make a recommendation to the Legislature by December 31, 2013 on whether the program should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate under law.</p> <p>In your packet you will find a memo describing findings made thus far and work still ahead to complete the examination of the waivers within available data. Staff’s initial recommendation will be to not change the sunset currently set in law.</p>	



ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY WAIVERS EXAMINATION

Policy Considerations

RCW 28A.305.141 directs the State Board of Education to examine the economy and efficiency basic education waiver pilot program, its impact on student learning, and make a recommendation to continue, modify, or allow the pilot program to expire. Policy considerations include, but are not limited to:

1. Was there an impact on student achievement?
2. Were there cost savings?
3. Does a review of the literature on shortened school weeks support continuation of the waivers?
4. Is there sufficient evidence to make a recommendation?
5. Is the economy and efficiency waiver still necessary?

Summary

The statute lists evidence to be considered in the Board's examination of the pilot waiver program, including the Washington assessment of student learning, dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills, student grades, and attendance. Because the stated purpose of the waiver is "economy and efficiency," board staff are also examining financial data from the districts with current waivers, Paterson and Bickleton. Staff are currently collecting these and other data from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the districts.

RCW 28A.305.141 requires that the recommendation of the SBE "focus on whether the program resulted in improved student learning." There are a number of factors that make attributing changes in student achievement to the flexible calendar difficult. The small sizes of the districts, short program time span, and incompleteness of much of the necessary data hinder the Board's ability to assess any impact on student achievement. If a change in student achievement is identified, it would also not be possible to disentangle the effect of the school schedule from the myriad other factors that may have affected student achievement over the course of the waivers. The data staff are collecting will provide information on district trends, but aside from anecdotal evidence from the district asserting one, a causal relationship cannot be identified.

In terms of financial data, preliminary analysis of state data on transportation revenues and expenditures does not indicate savings for the districts, particularly since the flexible week results in a prorated allocation from the state. In Paterson's reapplication, they estimated that transportation spending had actually increased by \$717. Other savings, such as for classified staff, substitutes, and utilities are unclear from the available data, and board staff have requested updated savings estimates and district methodology for the calculations from Bickleton and Paterson. Lyle, which discontinued the flexible schedule after two years, indicated that they did not reduce salaries of classified or certificated staff because of negotiated contracts, decreasing the possible savings from such a waiver.

The examination of the waiver program has also included a review of the districts' applications, supplemental materials, and a literature review of high-quality research on the impacts of a four-day week. Findings from the literature review indicate that there is no discernible impact on student learning and savings are often less than anticipated. Anecdotal evidence from district applications showed positive impacts attributed to the flexible week, primarily in attendance and staff and community satisfaction. Student achievement data provided in the reapplications were not complete enough to discern a change, either positive or negative. The district methodology used to arrive at estimated savings was unclear.

As a result of the limitations above, and other considerations such as change in student cohorts and assessments, the SBE will not be able to make a recommendation based on student achievement, as required in statute. The waivers' effects on district savings are also still uncertain. The Board must then make a recommendation based on other considerations, including whether a waiver for the express purposes of "economy and efficiency" is necessary.

In examining this issue, we must consider that Washington state accounts for the diseconomies of scale faced by small districts with the small school and remote and necessary factors in the school funding formula. These factors increase the state funding allocation for small districts to alleviate resource challenges inherent in serving small student populations or being in rural locations. In 2012-2013, Bickleton received \$16,373 per pupil from the state and Paterson received \$8,987 per pupil, compared to the state average of \$6,522 per pupil. The small school factor is intended to address the same issues that the economy and efficiency waiver is intended to address, creating redundancy between the funding formula and BEA waivers.

There has also been very limited demand for the waivers. Over the course of the waiver pilot program, only four schools have applied to receive these waivers. There were 52 districts in 2011-12 with enrollment below 150. Three districts – Bickleton, Paterson, and Mill A – requested waivers under this statute. There were 53 districts in 2011-12 with enrollment between 150 and 500. One district, Lyle requested, and was granted, a waiver under this statute, but abandoned its modified calendar after two years. While there is a cap on the number of waivers that may be granted in this pilot program (two waivers for districts below 150 students, three for districts between 150 and 500), there has been a low number of applications given the number of districts that would be eligible. The lack of interest by districts that would qualify in the 150-500 student category could indicate that, among larger districts, it is of less interest than among the smallest districts. Expansion of the program to districts over 500 may not, then, elicit any increased interest.

Another key consideration is whether the purpose of the waivers is consistent with the basic education act (BEA). The BEA presumes that there is value in the number of days that a student is in school, as well as the number of hours. Any deviation from the time requirements of the BEA would need to add value to a student's educational experience. In the requirements for the "Option One" waivers, districts must show how the educational program would be enhanced by the waiver. For the Economy and Efficiency, or "Option Two" waiver, the requirements emphasize potential savings, rather than educational enhancements. This seems incongruous with the intent of the BEA and the tenet of school finance that funding and basic education programs should only be decreased for educational reasons, not for budgetary reasons. This begs the question of whether the affordability of the program of basic education warrants a waiver from it.

Background

Data to be Considered

The following datasets have been requested and will be considered:

- Median Student Growth Percentiles
- State Assessments (WASL, MSP, HSPE)
- Language Proficiency Exams (WELPA, WLPT)
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)
- Transportation Revenue and Expenditures
- Classified Staff Salaries
- District Reported Savings
- State Revenue and Expenditure Reports

Other indicators mentioned for evaluation in RCW 28A.305.141 included attendance and student grades. Both Bickleton and Paterson cite decreased absences of teachers and students as a benefit of the flexible schedule. This was attributed to having a business day off to take care of appointments, which normally require a full day absence because of the long distance traveled to town. Data reported to the state for student attendance is limited to unexcused absences before 2011-2012. The data on unexcused absences cannot support the district findings since the absences described would be excused and the two years of excused absence data is not enough to discern a trend. Student grade point averages for grades K-8 are also unavailable at the state level.

Attributing changes in district finances to the flexible week is similarly difficult because of factors that impact savings, such as contract agreements with staff, changes in fuel prices, and programmatic changes. The recent changes in the state transportation funding formula pose additional challenges to calculating transportation savings. Most savings will accrue to the state, which prorates the transportation allocation for the four-day week, decreasing the funding a district receives. Paterson continues to transport high school students into neighboring Prosser, so does not receive a prorated allocation. Any local dollars used for transportation may be available for the district to repurpose as a result of the flexible schedule.

Impacts on other aspects of the school community, such as child nutrition programs, childcare, and districts' ability to recruit and retain staff were not studied independently due to the lack of funding for such in-depth analysis, the lack of available data to assess, and difficulty attributing observed changes to the flexible schedule. However, some of these were addressed in the districts' reapplications. Both Paterson and Bickleton explained that childcare for working parents was not a major concern in their communities, where many parents work at home on farms or many families have multiple caregiver options, such as nearby relatives. A letter from Lyle's current superintendent, in response to a staff request for feedback on the waiver program, cited childcare as a concern in her community and one of the reasons for discontinuing the flexible schedule. Bickleton does not participate in the free and reduced price lunch program. Paterson provides a free breakfast and lunch for every student in the district, using local dollars to supplement the federal reimbursements, and provides these meals on "Adventure Fridays".

Application Review

The waiver reapplications for Paterson and Bickleton included information about how the flexible week was implemented, including activities on the now-free Fridays. Paterson has instituted "Adventure Fridays" on select Fridays throughout the school year for enrichment programs,

such as field trips, fine arts, and special projects. Bickleton has used the Fridays for professional development programs and is working on a school-to-work program with wind turbine companies in the area. Both districts also report using time outside of the student day for instructional and team planning, staff meetings, and professional development, though do not specify if this is limited to Fridays or is distributed throughout the week.

Both districts stated that savings from the waiver allowed them to continue reading programs and increased hours of kindergarten by preserving classified staff. Both had received grants for Reading First prior to 2009 and used savings to replace those funds and preserve the program.

The public comment submitted as part of the reapplication was overwhelmingly positive. However, there was a significant number of identical comments on both applications. All of the comments in Bickleton's application appeared in Paterson's. Paterson's application also included specific comments about "Adventure Friday" and in-depth comments from teachers about the new schedule.

Literature Review

The review of the research to date on the four-day week provided findings in three main areas: student achievement, finances, and school culture.

Student achievement: While a number of districts across the nation have implemented four-day weeks, the available high-quality studies have found that student achievement was not affected, either positively or negatively (Gaines, 2008, Donis-Keller & Silver, 2009, Plucker, Cierniak, & Chamberlin, 2012). Any impacts that were observed in case studies were not attributable to the school schedule alone, and so, at best, the flexible week was found to not adversely affect student learning.

Finances: Savings attributed to the four-day week varied across districts depending on programming, but most research found that savings were less than anticipated. Although the savings experienced were a small percentage of a district's overall budget (on average, between 0.4% and 2.5%), they were found to be significant in terms of the number of staff or instructional programming that they could be redistributed to support (Griffith, 2011). Transportation was found to be the area with the greatest savings, though this conflicts with the findings of Bickleton and Paterson. This could be the result of programming choices and of the state prorating transportation allocations to account for the four-day week, decreasing the funding Washington districts receive. Paterson stated that the largest savings were in classified staff salary and benefits. Bickleton stated that its largest savings were in transportation, followed by classified staff.

School Culture: Many studies found increased student and teacher attendance with the four-day week. This finding was also echoed by Paterson and Bickleton. Studies also found decreased behavioral problems, increased morale, and fewer discipline referrals in the research reviewed.

Action

Staff is seeking the board's approval to produce a recommendation to the legislature consistent with the analysis contained in this memorandum.

RCW 28A.305.141

Waiver from one hundred eighty-day school year requirement — Criteria — Recommendation to the legislature. (Expires August 31, 2014.)

(1) In addition to waivers authorized under RCW [28A.305.140](#) and [28A.655.180](#), the state board of education may grant waivers from the requirement for a one hundred eighty-day school year under RCW [28A.150.220](#) and [*28A.150.250](#) to school districts that propose to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for purposes of economy and efficiency as provided in this section. The requirement under RCW [28A.150.220](#) that school districts offer an annual average instructional hour offering of at least one thousand hours shall not be waived.

(2) A school district seeking a waiver under this section must 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 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; and

(h) Other information that the state board of education may request to assure that the proposed flexible calendar will not adversely affect student learning.

(3) The state board of education shall adopt criteria to evaluate waiver requests. No more than five districts may be granted waivers. Waivers may be granted for up to three years. After each school year, the state board of education shall analyze empirical evidence to determine whether the reduction is affecting student learning. If the state board of education determines that student learning is adversely affected, the school district shall 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. All waivers expire August 31, 2014.

(a) Two of the five waivers granted under this subsection shall be granted to school districts with student populations of less than one hundred fifty students.

(b) Three of the five waivers granted under this subsection shall be granted to school districts with student populations of between one hundred fifty-one and five hundred students.

(4) The state board of education shall examine the waivers granted under this section 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. 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.

(5) This section expires August 31, 2014.

[2009 c 543 § 2.]