

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 15, 2013
8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Lynn Gattis, Chair
Representative Lora Reinbold, Vice Chair
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Peggy Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Gabrielle LeDoux
Representative Harriet Drummond

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 21

"An Act relating to the length of a school week; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 87

"An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 21

SHORT TITLE: FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) P.WILSON, T.WILSON, KREISS-TOMKINS

01/16/13	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/13
01/16/13	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/13	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/15/13	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the presentation of HB 21, as a joint prime sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE PETE HIGGINS

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered comments on HB 21.

DR. DONALD GATZKE, Teacher

Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

LAUREN BURCH, Superintendent

Southeast Island School District

Thorne Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

BING SANTAMOUR

Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:22 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN GATTIS called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Gattis, P. Wilson, Seaton, Reinbold, and Saddler.

HB 21-FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK

[8:03:54 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 21, "An Act relating to the length of a school week; and providing for an effective date."

[8:04:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON introduced HB 21, paraphrasing from the sponsor statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

HB 21 would allow a pilot program for one rural school district to implement a 4 day school week.

There is continued concern of poor student performance in our schools. We should be actively seeking alternative solutions that may improve district results. There are over 22 states in the US that have implemented a 4 day week in rural districts.

For most schools this has been a positive achievement - increased morale for students and teachers, reduced absenteeism and allowing teachers and students to have more direct contact time which then leads to better understanding of educational materials.

Provisions in HB 21 require the district to show that the majority of the community, students and teachers support the implementation of this program. Additionally, the district will have to prove that the students are receiving the equivalent of a 5 day school week. They will also be required to file quarterly reports to the Department of Education on student and teacher performance and the effect of the program. Specifically an annual report will be required to be submitted to the legislative education committee on the progress and performance ratings from the school district. This report will be due no later than January 15th and must include a comparison of the performance ratings before and after implementation of the 4 day week.

This bill is specific for a 3 year pilot program; at the end of that time period, the State Board of Education will evaluate the program and determine if it is beneficial to the district.

[8:09:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON expressed caution for designing a system focusing on cost saving and convenience versus school achievement.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON agreed, and said that an annual report will be required for submission to this committee, the commissioner of Department of Education and Early Development (EED), as well as to the State Board of Education and Early Development, ensuring student progress and school performance. She suggested that if a school adopts a four-day week and

indicates an improvement of performance, it would be important information for other schools considering a similar schedule.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON suggested specific requirements be stipulated to ensure that the quality of education is reflected in the reports that will be filed, and he stated support for the bill.

[8:11:47 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS asked how the equivalency of a five-day week will be accomplished in four-days; possibly implementing on-line courses, working from home, or longer school days.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said a longer school day would be scheduled, to ensure that the same number of teacher:student hours are maintained, and deferred further details for response by the school superintendent.

[8:12:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER queried whether teachers are supportive and if contract issues have been considered.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said the teacher agreements will not be changed, as the expectation is for educators to work a five-day week. To a follow-up question, regarding student response and achievement when attending modified school days, she directed attention to the committee packet and several reports based on data from states with public schools that offer a four-day school week. She said the information is thorough regarding scholastic achievement; however, information on attendance may not be as available.

[8:14:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON referred to the fiscal note, which stipulates 153 teaching days, and said it may be in conflict with statute that requires 172 days, despite the length of the day. He pointed out that the bill does not contain a provision temporarily suspending the day count requirement to accommodate the proposed pilot program.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON reiterated that the teachers are supportive of the schedule, and have the expectation to work five-days in accordance with current contracts. The law allows

schools to request departmental waivers, an option which some districts may choose to exercise.

8:16:55 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as a joint prime sponsor, said statute currently allows schools to request a four-day school week through the Office of the Commissioner, EED; however, the bill provides autonomy and flexibility to districts based on community interest and involvement. The four-day week has worked well in other states, as indicated in the reports contained in the committee packet, and she said, attendance is shown to improve and stress levels are lowered. She reported how the three-day weekend provides exciting options, and said many of the programs operate best in small communities. Further, she stressed how this bill represents local control and provides cost saving measures. The amount of savings to a district would depend on a number of factors, which include: fuel, food, and utilities. Another benefit is having longer blocks of class time available, during the extended day. Reports indicate that students respond positively to these lengthened study periods. There may be a downside also, as changing a traditional schedule always presents a challenge. A district with several schools would not be required to have every school on a four-day week, and she underscored that the bill is not a one size fits all mandate. She reiterated the flexibility that HB 21 allows parents, and reminded the committee that parental involvement is known as a key factor for school improvement. In order for a district to consider a four-day week, a high level of parental involvement is required. As a three year pilot program, HB 21 will return to the committee for review. Finally, she said the district will handle financial concerns and budgetary adjustments, hence the zero fiscal note attached to the bill.

8:23:13 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER clarified that HB 21 allows some schools in a district to not implement the four-day week and asked if there is language in the bill stipulating that option.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON confirmed the members understanding and said language is not included, as the decision occurs at the local level, through community meetings.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that the bill specifies "district," and he maintained the necessity for language stipulating that a

"school" could request permission to continue a five-day program.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON said that schools are already allowed the five-day week, and HB 21 provides an option for a four-day program.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER drew attention to page 1, line 13, and paraphrased the language which states "demonstrates majority community support ...", to ask what method of measurement will determine the level of support.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON answered that community public hearings would be held, and common sense may need to prevail in determining the level of community support; a percent for required agreement is not stipulated. She stressed that the best laid plan will not work in a community that does not embrace the concept. Additionally, a district could implement a four-day week for one year, and if it doesn't prove successful, without extensive effort return to the five-day program the following year.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that it would be the call of the local school board, whether there was cause to change to a four-day week and conjectured that the recourse for the community would be to overturn the school board at the next available election.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON stressed the importance for local control of schools, and HB 21 provides another tool for a district to tailor a program to meet specific needs, as well as to implement cost saving measures.

[8:27:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated his understanding that the option will be available to all districts, but a district must apply within 30 days of the effective date of the act; it is not an ongoing pilot program with start-up allowed any time.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON said HB 21 is specific to allow one district to participate in a pilot program for three years. She said the sponsors may be open to an amendment to allow other districts to participate. However, the intent is that the pilot program will report data to ensure that this approach works for Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON added that the timeframe was stipulated to enable the district requesting the action to implement the program in the coming school year [2013-14].

[8:29:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that the program appears successful in several states, and suggested that it be made available to other districts without delay.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON responded that EED has expressed concern, as implementation necessitates appropriate planning. Additionally, the limit ensures that districts will approach the option with caution and by exercising due diligence.

[8:30:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON confirmed that HB 21 doesn't override the commissioner's ability to grant flexible schedules through the statute already available; the bill is outside of that authority without cancelling it.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON clarified that HB 21 does override the authority intentionally, as the requesting district has made application to the department and been denied. However, providing the opportunity for the district to make the decision through community involvement is important, and the bill establishes that option.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON added that the focus is not only on finances; however, in some areas a school bus ride may be in excess of an hour every day, which represents a significant time commitment for the student as well as cost to the district. She expressed hope that other districts will see this as an option for implementation.

[8:33:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETE HIGGINS characterized the proposal as a good idea. However, he opined that it would be an injustice for the district that brought this forward because this [legislation] makes it open to all districts. He further opined that it could be an issue if the department awarded this pilot project to another district [besides the district that brought it forward]. Therefore, he related his belief that the proposal should be available for all districts that meet the criteria because then

the pilot programs could be compared to determine how well the program is working.

8:34:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON said that the requesting district may have gained approval via the commissioner's office if they had been able to provide required information, which is now on hand. She said it would not be objectionable amend HB 21 for the purpose of allowing additional participation.

8:36:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER directed attention to page 1, line 6 and read, "the board shall approve, at the request of the governing body of a school district," and asked if the board being referred to is the State Board of Education and Early Development or the local school board. He pointed out that the governing body would be the local school board, and suggested that there may be a conflict in the language as drafted.

REPRESENTATIVE T. WILSON clarified that the initial reference to "board" is intended to be the local school board, and agreed that the language may need to be clarified/amended.

8:37:40 AM

DR. DONALD GATZKE, Teacher, stated support for HB 21 and said how a child fulfills required school attendance should be left to the discretion of the parents speaking through the local school board, and should not be an issue of state authority. The important point is not the configuration of days, but the seat time required. If the parents are supportive and allowed to have their child attend a four-day week, he conjectured, it may be a stimulus for them to ensure that the student attend as required. He said some students miss over 100 days per year, and there is a direct correlation between attendance and performance. Whatever can be done to assist parents in getting their child to school should be a focus. Therefore, if parents wanted year-a-round school with time between quarters, such a schedule should also be supported. Emphasis for attendance versus stipulating when attendance will occur is important, he stressed. Also, a case could be made for the benefit to the student in having a longer school day, and teachers would appreciate having extended time to cover lesson plans. The teacher contract is negotiable with the local union bargaining unit he finished, and urged passage of the bill.

8:40:29 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked about the correlation between attendance and performance and asked for the outside limits; when might effectiveness begin to fade.

DR. GATZKE offered that a six-day school week provides a higher performance even with a shortened school year.

8:41:33 AM

LAUREN BURCH, Superintendent, Southeast Island School District, said the Southeast Island School District requested a four-day school week for the last school year, as a grassroots initiative from the nine school communities in the area. Over ninety percent of the community members are behind taking this approach, and the teachers are also supportive. He suggested that amending the bill to add language stating "or board approved alternative schedule" would address the concern for minimum days relating to teacher retirement. Considering the sports and other activities, he projected that attendance could be improved by 20 percent, as many Friday or Monday dates are used for students to travel for either school or private reasons. The district request was turned down by EED due to lack of information regarding how a four-day week could work in a small rural area. He pointed out that the district's proposal includes professional development time for teacher's to be scheduled for Fridays, and is a radical improvement. Having nine schools that are separated by large distances, it is difficult to bring staff together and this would help that effort immensely. The district is considered successful by any standard, he reported, and stressed that there are a dozen ways for students to attain an education. The current structure results in students missing too many school days.

8:47:44 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted that not all schools will go to the four-day school week, and asked for clarification.

MR. BURCH responded that a number of school calendars are proposed and chosen by majority rule. Many of the schools only have 10 students with a variety of specific needs and if one chose to stay with a five-day program, it would be important to take that under consideration.

[8:50:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what would constitute an expression of compelling support to approve a pilot four-day week at either an individual school or district wide.

MR. BURCH said majority vote has been the rule, and the Advisory School Council (ASC) community meetings are highly attended; voting includes students. He said that the district wide ASC vote was over 80 percent last year and the voting can be reported by site. The ASC wields a heavy influence over school operations, he added.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER queried whether the district would be locked into a three year compliance period, or could it return to a five-day status on demand.

MR. BURCH responded that the ASC would expect to be able to request an immediate change if the program were not satisfactory.

[8:54:48 AM](#)

BING SANTAMOUR, stated support for HB 21, and said it should be available to other districts as well. The existing [statute] allowing a district to apply for a four-day school week may be all that is necessary, if it is broadened, she suggested, and urged support of the bill.

The committee took an at-ease from 8:57 a.m. to 9:56 a.m.

[9:56:57 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS apologized for the extended at-ease and announced that HB 21 would be held over.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.