

HB

390

Alaska State Legislature

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House Special Committee on Education

Representative Carl Gatto, Chair

April 1, 2004

To: Representative Wilson
RE: HB 390 – An Act Relating to School Terms

Dear Representative Wilson,

May I officially request that you schedule HB 390 for hearing before your committee at your earliest convenience?

Enclosed are:

- 1) Sponsor Statement
- 2) Text of HB 387
- 3) Supporting documentation

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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House Special Committee on Education

Representative Carl Gatto, Chair

SPONSOR STATEMENT

HOUSE BILL 390

"AN ACT RELATING TO THE REQUIRED NUMBER OF DAYS IN A SCHOOL YEAR."

HB 390 allows school districts to use school terms in a more flexible manner. Current law requires 180 days of school. If approved by the Commissioner of EED, districts would be allowed to adjust their school terms within statute to meet the needs of their students, teachers, families, and location.

Recently an Anchorage charter school proposed a plan to the Anchorage School Board for something less than 180 days. The plan was approved in concept but is now holding pending passage of this legislation. The increased flexibility provided under this bill allows for a stronger focus on academic performance instead of simply accounting for "seat time."

While allowing a four-day week is not the specific intent of HB 390, passage would allow meaningful dialogue on the merits of this and other plans. For example, boarding and residential students may benefit from a flexible schedule allowing students to return home more often. In addition, year round school and adjusted schedules may produce increased efficiency and savings for districts, which could be directed back into the classroom.

Anchorage School District Superintendent, Carol Comeau and the Anchorage School Board support this concept as expressed in resolution 2002/2003-8.

We have all heard about the uniqueness of Alaska and how it applies to many issues. Scheduling is one of several areas impacted by Alaska's weather, seasons, and culture. Passage of this legislation would allow school districts the flexibility to adapt and excel in Alaska.

Please join me in protecting our children by endorsing and passing House Bill 387.

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #188 (2002-2003)

March 3, 2003

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RESTRUCTURING THE
SCHOOL DAY AND/OR SCHOOL YEAR TO ALLOW
FLEXIBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board support a resolution to lobby the Alaska State Legislature to approve structural change in the daily schedule for schools, which would allow schools within the State to "bank time" or establish other forms of flexibility in a school day and/or school year.

PERTINENT FACTS:

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in January 2002, titled, No Child Left Behind, requires that school districts comply with a myriad of new regulations. These regulations include requirements for professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals in Title 1 schools. Also, schools are being asked to demonstrate adequate yearly progress for the identified groups stipulated by NCLB. The State of Alaska's requirements embedded in the Quality Schools Initiative and the requirement that all students pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in order to receive a diploma also pose challenges for school districts throughout the state. Staff training and professional development are essential components of implementing NCLB, the Quality Schools Initiative, and the HSGQE. School districts need additional time for professional development and collaboration among their staff members that is not adequately provided in the current school calendar.

As the six comprehensive high schools in the Anchorage School District recreate themselves both physically and instructionally into Smaller Learning Communities, there is demonstrated need for additional professional development time. Some monies are available from various grants to provide substitutes for teachers, or for addenda for teachers to work beyond the school day. The majority of teachers hesitate to miss time with their students and often decline having substitutes as an option for receiving training time. Additionally, there is a limit to the amount of time teachers and staff are willing to work beyond the school day or school week. Many teachers and staff serve as coaches and/or tutors after the school day and cannot attend professional development at that time.

A restructured schedule, such as "banking time", would allow schools to offer professional development time and collaboration time for teachers and staff within a scheduled workday. Students could begin their day ten to fifteen minutes earlier or extend their day later to accumulate additional banked time. When sufficient time is banked, students would attend school a shortened day once or twice a month. During the time students are on a shortened schedule, teachers and other staff would have time for professional development and/or collaboration.

Such a system of banked time would provide, for the first time, a sufficient amount of professional development and collaboration time for all teachers. While secondary teachers have a planning period and middle school teachers additionally have a team planning time, most elementary teachers have little actual planning time.

Mentoring of new teachers has become a priority in the Anchorage School District and a restructured school schedule would allow for more substantive mentoring of new teachers by experienced teachers within their own building. This would significantly reduce a teacher's sense of isolation, often reported as one of the main contributors to stress in the first years of teaching.

Aligning curriculum across the District is a priority as expressed through the curriculum audit and at the recent six-year planning session. Shared collaboration time would allow teachers in the field to participate fully in this most important process. This would not only provide a superior product, but it would increase support among teachers.

Restructuring the school day and/or school year allows flexibility to provide for professional development and collaboration time for all staff less expensively than adding days to the current school calendar.

Attachment

CC/JC

Prepared by: Jan Christensen, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction

Approved by: Carol Comeau, Superintendent

**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD
ASDR 2002/2003-8**

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RESTRUCTURING THE SCHOOL DAY AND/OR SCHOOL YEAR TO ALLOW FLEXIBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WHEREAS, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in January 2002, No Child Left Behind, requires that school districts comply with a myriad of new regulations; and

WHEREAS, these regulations include requirements for professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I schools, and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska's requirements embedded in the Quality Schools Initiative and the requirement that all students pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in order to receive a diploma poses challenges for school districts around the state; and

WHEREAS, staff training and professional development are essential components of implementing No Child Left Behind, the Quality Schools Initiative, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination; and

WHEREAS, many teachers hesitate to miss time with their students and tend to decline substitutes as an option for receiving professional training time; and

WHEREAS, the Anchorage School District needs additional time for professional development and collaboration among staff members that is not adequately provided in the current school calendar; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Anchorage School Board supports the idea of restructuring the school day and/or school year to allow for flexibility to provide professional development and collaboration time for staff.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage School Board this 3rd day of March 2003.

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD

Jeff Metcalfe, President

Debbie Ossiander
Tim Steele
Rita J. Holthouse

John Steiner
Harriet A. Drummond
Mary Marks

Carol Comeau, Superintendent

Four-day School Week?

Policymakers have been eyeing the four-day school week as a way to cut education costs.

There have been mixed results where the schedule has been adopted.

By Greta Durr

With promises of a 20 percent reduction in overhead and transportation costs, the four-day school week is growing more attractive to legislators seeking to cut education costs—especially in energy, transportation and classified personnel salaries. But while some states are looking at the four-day school week as a way to save money or as a creative option for rural areas, others have found it impractical.

The four-day week offers the same amount of class time in fewer days. Mostly these plans have been used by rural school districts and the savings are not always dramatic. There are other factors, however, that influence whether they are successful.

Custer School District in rural South Dakota adopted the four-day-a-week calendar in 1995 to reduce its annual budget by approximately \$70,000. The savings weren't as much as estimated, but a school survey found that the switch boosted morale, reduced absenteeism, decreased the need for substitute teachers, and led to a boom in participation in extracurricular activities. The survey also indicated that teachers were covering more academic content than they had under the traditional five-day calendar.

But the idea didn't work in Utah where a modified school week pilot program ended a year early because the schools involved reported only moderate or no actual savings, as well as scheduling complications. Some districts in the pilot went to four-and-a-half-day weeks after two years, which cut into savings on transportation and heat.

The legislation allowing the program required that extracurricular activities like school sports, dances, plays and speech meets be scheduled on Thursday nights, Fridays or Saturdays so students would not have to travel on a regular school day.

"Most schools opted out," says Steve Laing, state school superintendent. "There are still a couple of schools that would like to do it, but not because they're planning on any savings." Laing explained that, for these schools, the benefits of the modified week (better morale, decreased absenteeism, reduced need for substitutes) meant more to the communities than the money they saved.

Oregon has two laws that deal with shortened school schedules and both have come into play as districts struggle to survive the worst budget deficit in 20 years. After Oregonians defeated a measure in January that would have increased income taxes for three years to prevent \$310 million in cuts to schools and other programs, schools are looking at the four-day school week, as well as cutting five to 24 days from the school year.

"At least 16 districts are on the four-day week to cut costs," says Margaret Peterson of the state Board of Education, "and they would

still meet compulsory education requirements. But other districts are looking at cutting days from the school year, which is allowed in Oregon during severe budget difficulties. Some of them will be allowed to drop below the number of hours required by state law."

Oregon's rural Morrow County School District 1 adopted the four-day school week offered through a state policy option to lower expenses 10 years ago. The district currently is saving an estimated \$250,000 in a \$14 million budget, mostly from salaries of classified employees, such as cooks, bus drivers and teacher's aides.

In some states, laws have to change in order to change school calendars. When a small Michigan district considered a four-day week, officials found they couldn't do it because teacher labor contracts and retirement requirements are set by the state in terms of days, not hours.

Representative Stephen Adamini penned a bill to make the changes from specifications in days to required hours. Approximately nine districts have contacted him about making the switch.

Student transportation costs really take a toll on sparsely populated districts in vast, rural areas, Adamini says. "Small districts are hanging by their fingernails looking for savings," he says. "Local schools should have this as an option."

Montana was still debating a four-day week when this issue of the magazine went to press. The bill's sponsor, Senator Sam Kitzenberg, a high school English teacher, wants to give districts more flexibility with scheduling and funding, despite the potential impact on local jobs. "We're looking for a lifeboat for Montana schools in case of cutbacks," he says. "We don't want it forced, we want it as an option."

Yet Representative Carol Juneau is worried about classified employees. "If we go to the four-day week, many cooks, bus drivers and custodians would lose wages. In our community, many of our local people work those jobs," she says.

Ten states have some school districts operating on a four-day week: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. States with legislation allowing the four-day school week include Arkansas, California, Minnesota and Illinois. Bills are pending in Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Virginia.



Representative
Stephen Adamini
Michigan



Senator
Sam Kitzenberg
Montana



Representative
Carol Juneau
Montana

Greta Durr tracks education policy at NCSL.



FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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March 4, 2004

The Honorable Carl Gatto
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representative Gatto:

RE: HB390 - Alternative School Terms

As Superintendent of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, I would like to add my support for HB 390 – Alternative School Terms.

With the options for charter schools within our districts and the choices we want to provide for parents in the education of their students within the public school system, I believe your bill will provide some needed choice for school terms. Although we may not take advantage of this option in the immediate future, I do see it as a positive change for public schools.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to support your efforts in this regard.

Sincerely yours,

Ann E. Shortt, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools

/plh

cc: Board of Education