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SCHOOL CALENDARS; HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

House Bill 4639 (Substitute H-3) First Analysis (5-27-99)

Sponsor: Rep. Ron Jelinek
Committee: Appropriations

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Under current law, public schools are required to offer a certain number of days of pupil instruction in order to be eligible for state aid. In addition, the law also sets a minimum number of hours of instruction each year. For example, during the 1998-99 school year, the minimum number of days was 182 and the minimum number of hours was 1,047. The number of days and hours is scheduled to increase over the next six school years. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION*, below, for a more detailed explanation.)

Some educational policy makers have argued that an instructional day should be defined as a day having at least five hours. However, school administrators point out that the current practice of counting as a full day any "snow day" in which classes are convened for at least two hours would be jeopardized if a five-hour definition of "day" were adopted. Instead, school administrators argue that the minimum number of days should be eliminated altogether, but that the minimum hours should be retained, thereby giving administrators far more flexibility in scheduling class sessions in order to meet the state's minimum instructional requirements.

In addition, some educational policy makers argue that as the number of instructional hours increases in schools, the new hours should be devoted to classroom instruction. Student learning should come first, and adult learning in the schools should come second. Further, they argue that any time designated for teacher professional development should be sharply focused on classroom curricular instruction that is situated in the learning disciplines. They point out that teachers need time to stay current in their disciplinary fields, and that teaching, learning, curriculum, and evaluation practices have undergone significant changes during the last decade, as researchers in the social and human sciences have begun to learn far more than has ever before been

known about child development and subject matter learning.

To accomplish these ends, legislation has been introduced to eliminate references to minimum days of instruction, and to generally to identify appropriate kinds of teacher professional development.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to require only the minimum number of hours of pupil instruction in a school year, and to eliminate the minimum number of days. Further, the bill specifies that the length of the school year for pupils could not be extended solely to provide professional development programs not related to curriculum or curriculum development for teachers or other employee groups.

MCL 380.1284

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For many years, the minimum number of school days in Michigan was 180. When the Revised School Code was passed in 1996, it increased instructional time in public schools. The minimum number of days and hours was increased from 180 days and 900 hours, to 190 days and 1,140 hours. However, the increase in instructional time was phased-in over a 10-year period that began in the fall of 1997 and will end in the fall of 2006. During that time, the minimum number of school days will increase by one day each year, and following a substantial increase in hours early in 10-year period, the minimum number of hours will increase by six hours each year.

Section 101 of House Bill 4498 (Substitute H-1), the proposed School Aid Act for fiscal year 1999-2000, also would remove references to the minimum days of

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instruction, and retain the minimum hours of instruction requirements.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, elimination of the requirement to provide a minimum number of school days will not affect the amount of state aid paid to school districts. Since schools may have more flexibility in scheduling instruction time due to the elimination of the instruction-day minimum, there may be some minor, indeterminate savings from efficiencies. (5-7-99)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

By retaining the minimum hours of instruction and eliminating the requirement for a minimum number of instruction days, the legislature would give school administrators more flexibility to schedule classes. For example, school days could be longer, although fewer in number.

For:

Teacher professional development should be sharply focused on teaching, learning, curriculum and evaluation practices that are situated in the learning disciplines. Learning in the subject matter disciplines--the essence of schooling--should be the first priority as faculties and school administrators plan their teacher development programs. Seminars in such matters as stress management, first aid, and safety techniques are inappropriate uses for valuable staff development time.

POSITIONS:

There are no positions on the bill.

Analyst: J. Hunault

■This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.