
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

School districts are currently required to provide 182 days of instruction during each school year, including designated time for parent-teacher conferences and teacher professional development. Each day must be at least five hours in length for grades 1 through 6 and five and one-half hours in length for grades 7 through 12. Districts are permitted to close schools for up to five days per year, delay the start of a school day for up to two hours, and close schools up to two hours early for public calamities such as hazardous weather, without making up the lost instructional time.

Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, the bill changes the instructional time requirement to one based on hours instead of days and eliminates the current excused time for public calamities. For grades 1 through 6, the proposed requirement is 910 hours (182 days x 5 hours/day) and for grades 7 through 12 the requirement is 1,001 hours (182 days x 5.5 hours/day). However, the bill also stipulates that each school district offer the same number of hours of instruction as it offered during the 2006-2007 school year. According to information from the Department of Education, it appears that most school districts are offering more than the minimum number of hours currently required. Under the bill, therefore, the minimum number of hours of instruction for most districts will be higher than the current 910-hour or 1,001-hour requirement. In addition, by removing excused time for public calamities, assuming most districts take advantage of some amount of this excused time each year, the bill effectively increases the number of hours of instruction required for most districts above what they currently offer.

The change to a requirement based on hours as opposed to days would allow the schools to make up these days or hours by possibly lengthening the school day rather than adding days on to the end of the year. While this may mitigate some of the cost of making up the days, school districts could still experience costs depending on the number of days or hours to make up throughout a school year. These additional costs would be dependent upon the amount and duration of time missed by school districts.

By changing the school year requirement to one based on hours instead of days, the bill gives districts some flexibility in establishing their school calendar. This flexibility is subject by the bill to the following parameters: each school must be open for instruction for a minimum of 36 school weeks per year, no school may be closed for more than 90 consecutive school days, and school districts must get their board of education's approval to reduce the number of hours per year or the number of days per week (as long as the hours do not go below the 2006-2007 school year levels). For example, the bill would permit district boards of education to establish a four-day school week instead of a standard five-day school week. According to the National School Boards Association, in 2002, 108 school districts in ten states were operating with four-day school weeks. Mostly small and rural districts have taken advantage of the four-day school week schedule. Some of these districts report reducing expenses for food service, pupil transportation, energy, and custodial services.

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