

January 17, 2006

To: School Superintendents and School Board Presidents
From: Anita K. Decker, Director, School Approval and Accreditation
Subject: Four-day school week

In recent weeks there have been questions regarding a four-day school week from school board members, administrators, community members, parents, and the media. The Department has answered questions while retaining the neutrality required to fairly assess any waiver applications it may receive.

The Department has done much research on schools in the U. S. and Canada who are now or who have in the past adopted a four-day school week. Whether successful with the implementation of a four-day week or not, these schools have provided considerable insights into what strategies work, what questions need to be answered, and what issues need to be resolved before committing to the four-day week.

Administrative Rules for the reconfiguration of instructional days are available on the DPI website.

We provide the following to aid schools considering applying for a waiver to follow a four-day week:

SCHEDULE:

- ◆ What is the proposed schedule of classes for elementary schools?
- ◆ What is the proposed schedule of classes for secondary schools?
- ◆ Will the district add an additional 30 minutes per day as the storm day “cushion” (Statute requires 84 hours additional per year)?
- ◆ Does the high school have an open or a closed campus?

INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE:

- ◆ How have teachers been prepared to ensure student achievement in a longer day?
- ◆ How has the district addressed the fatigue factors of a longer day on students and faculty?
- ◆ If curricular activities—for example, distance learning—are shared with other schools, how will class schedules be aligned?
- ◆ Will additional daily classtime be used for something other than independent study/homework?
- ◆ Will all teachers have the option of working on the off-day?
- ◆ What considerations have been made to reduce potential negative impacts on at-risk and special education students?
- ◆ What educational research guides the proposal? (Example: brain research, teaching and learning studies, etc.)

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

- ◆ How does the district plan to minimize classtime interruptions?
- ◆ What provisions has the district made to control absences for extra- and co-curricular activities?
- ◆ What, if anything, has the district done to control the number of extra- and co-curricular activities available in the district or the number in which individual students can participate?
- ◆ What is the proposed schedule of practice times for sports under the proposal?
- ◆ Will the off-day be used for sports/practice days?

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES:

- ◆ How will bus schedules and routes differ under the proposed plan as compared to the current plan?
- ◆ What impact will the four-day week have on transportation of students—for example, ride times, pickup/drop-off schedules?

FINANCE ISSUES:

- ◆ What does a cost-benefit study reveal with regard to transportation and energy costs?
- ◆ Will ancillary staff/time be reduced under the proposed plan?
- ◆ Will teacher salaries increase because of the off-day activities?

COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

- ◆ What evidence can be provided to show broad community support of the proposed change?
- ◆ What evidence can be provided to show that parents of school-age children support the proposal?
- ◆ How has the district addressed other concerns in the area (e.g. nearby school districts on a 5-day schedule, law enforcement, business community, etc.)?
- ◆ How has the district addressed the potential issue of increased child care, especially for low- and middle-income parents?
- ◆ What evidence can be provided to show support from non-school organizations which sponsor other after-school activities? (Boy/Girl Scouts, 4-H, church groups, etc.)
- ◆ How has the district addressed the issues relating to student employment off-campus? When will students be allowed to leave school?

USE OF OFF-DAY:

- ◆ Will the district provide any services on the proposed off-day each week? If so, describe those services.
- ◆ Will off-day activities at the school impact liability if students come for half-day remediation or other activities on the off-day?
- ◆ Will all teachers be involved with off-day activities? If not, how are teachers selected to work on the off-day?

CONTRACTUAL CONCERNS:

- ◆ Do district teachers support the four-day week?
- ◆ Has the teacher contract for next year been negotiated based on this plan?
- ◆ Have teachers been given time to plan for implementation of a longer class period to rethink lessons and instructional techniques?
- ◆ Will the proposed plan put increased pressure on teachers to produce greater achievement results?

RELEVANT DATA—CURRENT YEAR:

- ◆ Attendance
- ◆ Absences for non-illness reasons
- ◆ Absences for sports activities
- ◆ Participation rate for school activities—extra- and co-curricular
- ◆ Number of home-educated students and open-enrolled students