

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hearing set on rules for seeking waiver of school hours

MADISON — The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will conduct a hearing from 1 to 3 p.m. Monday, Feb. 1, in Room 041 of the GEF 3 Building, 125 South Webster Street, Madison, to take public testimony on emergency and proposed permanent rules that allow school boards to request a waiver of the state's required school hours of instruction.

Under state law, school boards must schedule 180 days of instruction for their students and a certain number of instructional hours each school year. Five days may be counted toward the 180-day requirement if school is closed for inclement weather or parent-teacher conferences. In response to H1N1 flu last spring and other pandemic flu planning, Wisconsin recently added a provision in state law for school boards to count days when school is closed for health or safety of either the students or school personnel toward the 180-day requirement. This new provision, like the other exceptions, does not remove the requirement that school boards schedule at least 437 hours of direct pupil instruction in kindergarten, at least 1,050 hours of instruction in grades one to six, and at least 1,137 hours of instruction in grades seven to 12.

The emergency and proposed permanent rules establish criteria school boards must follow to apply to the DPI for a waiver of the required hours of instruction if a school is closed for health or safety reasons by the school district administrator or the department of health, including a local health officer. The waiver request must include a letter from the district administrator or school board president that specifies

- the reason or reasons for the waiver request;
- a record of the public hearing indicating community response to the waiver request;
- a copy of the order to close school or a copy of the school board minutes approving the request for a waiver, whichever applies;
- the number of hours requested to be waived;
- the dates the school or schools were closed;
- a description of the actions the school board took to make up the hours of instruction missed and what prevented the district from scheduling or holding at least the number of hours of instruction specified in statutes;

(more)

- the number of days planned for inclement weather and parent teacher conferences; and
- any additional information the DPI requests.

The proposed rules further specify criteria the DPI will use in determining whether or not to grant the waiver request. Those criteria include whether or not the department received all requested information, community response to the proposed waiver, the length of the school closure, and the dates of the school closure and whether there was sufficient time before the end of the school year to adjust the school calendar to provide the hours of instruction required by law, Wis. Stat. sec. 121.02(1)(f)2.

The hearing site is fully accessible to people with disabilities. A copy of the administrative rules and fiscal estimate are available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pb/rulespg.html>. Copies of these materials also are available by sending an e-mail request to lori.slauson@dpi.wi.gov or by writing to Lori Slauson, budget analyst and administrative rules coordinator, DPI, 125 South Webster Street, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841. Written comments on the proposed rules may be submitted via U.S. mail or e-mail to the addresses above no later than Feb. 5 and will receive the same consideration as testimony presented at the hearing.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2010_10.pdf.