

Assembly Committee on Education
September 7, 2017

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Testimony for information on Assembly Bill 221

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here today to testify on Assembly Bill 221. The Department thanks the Committee for engaging in the discussion around innovative strategies to improve student outcomes.

Assembly Bill 221 creates a two year pilot program beginning in the 2018-19 school years under which the school board of a school district located in the Cooperative Educational Service Agency 6 (CESA 6) region that received a rating of significantly exceeds expectations or exceeds expectations on the most recent school and school district accountability report may opt out of the requirement to provide a minimum number of hours of direct pupil instruction at schools in the school district that received a rating of significantly exceeds expectations or exceeds expectations on the most recent school and school district accountability report.

To participate in the pilot program, the school board of an eligible school district must adopt an annual resolution that indicates its intent to participate in the pilot program during that school year and identifies the schools in the school district at which the school board will not be required to schedule the minimum number of hours of direct pupil instruction under the pilot program.

Current law requires each school board to schedule at least 437 hours of direct pupil instruction in kindergarten, at least 1,050 hours of direct pupil instruction in grades 1 to 6, and at least 1,137 hours of direct pupil instruction in grades 7 to 12.

Under current law there is no requirement regarding minimum days of instruction. 2013 WI Act 257, enacted on 4/8/2014 eliminated the requirement that public schools hold school for 180 days each year. (First effective in 2014-15)

The Department fully understands that School districts across Wisconsin are continually seeking new ways to improve learning and increase opportunities for their students. Innovative practices are used every day, but in some cases, more flexibility is needed to innovate.

Simultaneously to the development AB 221, the Department worked with educational leaders from across Wisconsin to develop the Innovation District application and process. In March 2017, State Superintendent Tony Evers convened the group and charged them with defining a clear, streamlined process to create Innovation Districts. Through an Innovation District application, districts could request exemptions from state law or administrative rules needed to implement innovative practices or reduce barriers to student learning, with the goal of improving outcomes for all kids.

Members of this group included a cross-section of leaders from districts of varying size around the state, including:

- Jon Bales, Executive Director, WASDA
- Kevin Bruggink, District Superintendent, Oostburg School District
- Jim Erickson, District Administrator, Webster School District
- Mark Hansen, District Superintendent, Elmbrook School District
- Nancy Hendrickson, District Administrator, Highland School District
- Gregg Goers, Teacher, Neenah High School, Neenah School District
- Michelle Langenfeld, District Superintendent, Green Bay Area Public School District
- Ted Neitzke, Agency Administrator, CESA 6
- Randy Nelson, District Superintendent, LaCrosse School District
- Sue Savaglio-Jarvis, District Superintendent, Kenosha Unified School District

Districts can apply to become Innovation Districts on behalf of one, more than one, or all schools within their district. All applicants will need to detail how their proposal aligns to their district's strategic direction, demonstrate how their request for an exemption will improve outcomes for all students, and how they will evaluate their success. Once approved by the DPI, waivers are in effect for four years and are renewable for additional four year intervals with evidence of improved student outcomes.

The application process requires that the district certify the following:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The Applicant has evidence of stakeholder engagement in development of the innovation plan (such as teachers, students, parents, business, and community leaders).
- **Compliance with State and Federal Laws:** The Applicant has evidence that the innovation plan meets all state and federal legal requirements, including those related to pupil confidentiality [Wis. Stats. s. 118.125] and those required for seeking a waiver from the State Superintendent [Wis. Stats. s. 118.38]. As part of this assurance, the Applicant agrees it is not seeking a waiver from any statutory provision ineligible for a waiver under Wis. Stats. s. 118.38, including those related to:
 - The health and safety of pupils;
 - Pupil discrimination;

- Pupil assessment;
 - Pupil records;
 - Data collection/reporting;
 - Financial reporting and audits;
 - Licensure or certification;
 - Commencement of the school term; and
 - Requirements for SAGE/AGR contracts.
- **Public Progress Review:** The Applicant shall provide periodic reports to the local school board(s) describing progress toward the goals outlined in its innovation plan and in this application, and such reports shall be publicly available.

The Department feels that the Innovations District Program is less restrictive and more equitable than what is statutorily provided through AB 221. The Innovations Districts program allows districts to pursue locally driven solutions that will improve outcomes for Wisconsin children. Unlike AB 221 the Innovations District Program is available to any district statewide and insures:

- The proposal aligns to the district's strategic direction;
- The exemption is designed to improve outcomes for students and includes a plan to evaluate that success, and
- Requires significant stakeholder engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill – I am happy to answer any questions.