

**Senate Committee on Education**  
**August 17, 2017**

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction**  
**Testimony for Information on Senate Bill 105**

Thank you Chairmen Olsen and members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here today to testify on Senate Bill 105. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) thanks the Committee for engaging in the discussion around innovative strategies to improve student outcomes.

**Senate Bill (SB) 105** creates a two year pilot program (2018-19) where certain school districts may exempt high performing schools from the minimum hours of pupil instruction.

For a district to be eligible, it must (1) be located in CESA 6; and (2) have received a rating of four or five stars (exceeds expectations or significantly exceeds expectations) on the most recent school district accountability report card.

For a school to be eligible, it must be in a participating district and received a rating of four or five stars on the most recent school accountability report card. The school board must adopt an annual resolution indicating the participating schools.

**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 eliminated the requirement that public schools hold school for 180 days each year.

The DPI understands and supports districts efforts to improve learning and increase opportunities for their students. However, SB 105 raises a few problematic issues:

1. **Innovation?** Offering less instructional time may reduce cost, but it is not necessarily innovative or linked to improved student outcomes;
2. **Equity?** Innovative practices should be used to improve outcomes for all students, not just those in already high performing schools and districts in a particular region;

3. **Redundant?** The current law waiver and recently launched Districts of Innovation process already provide a mechanism for this flexibility.

## Innovation Districts

School districts across Wisconsin are continually seeking new ways to improve learning and increase opportunities for students. Innovative practices are used every day, but in some cases, more flexibility is needed. To address this, the DPI is empowering school districts with a new opportunity to become [Innovation Districts](#) to pursue locally-driven solutions that will improve outcomes for Wisconsin children.

Leaders from across the state came together to review innovation programs in other states and help create a unique, Wisconsin approach that leverages the State Superintendent's existing waiver authority in new ways.

The result is a **streamlined innovation process that puts local communities in the driver's seat** on innovation. A short state application and expedited process now gives districts the flexibility to meet state requirements in new and transformative ways.

While other states require cumbersome 100+ page applications with extensive documentation, Wisconsin is taking a simplified approach that places the responsibility for community engagement, policy review, and goal setting with the local schools. The DPI's role is to provide technical assistance and ensure the proposed innovation protect students' rights.

Through the Innovation District application, districts can request district-wide or school-specific exemptions from state law or administrative rules to implement innovative practices or reduce barriers to student learning, with the goal of improving outcomes for all kids. 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.

Members of the Innovation Working Group included a cross-section of leaders from districts of varying size around the state, including:

- Jon Bales, Executive Director, Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA)
- Ted Neitzke, Agency Administrator, CESA 6
- Gregg Goers, Teacher, Neenah High School, Neenah School District
- 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
- Michelle Langenfeld, District Superintendent, Green Bay Area School District
- Randy Nelson, District Superintendent, LaCrosse School District
- Sue Savaglio-Jarvis, District Superintendent, Kenosha Unified School District

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 Districts of Innovation program is less restrictive, more equitable, and more accountable to the public. The DPI would encourage any districts interested in direct instruction flexibility to apply.

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