

10/15/2012

# Instructional Time Task Force

## Final Report



Senate File 2284

## Iowa Department of Education

Grimes State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146



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## Senate File 2284

Through Senate File 2284, the Iowa Legislature provided the following charge: The director of the Iowa Department of Education shall appoint a School Instructional Time Task Force comprised of at least seven members to conduct a study regarding the minimum requirements of the school day and the school year. The study shall include, but not be limited to, an examination of the following:

- Whether the minimum length of an instructional day should be extended and, if so, whether the instructional day should be extended for all students or for specific groups of students.
- Whether the minimum number of instructional days or hours in a school year should be increased and, if so, whether the minimum number of days or hours in a school year should be increased for all students or for specific groups of students.
- Whether the minimum number of instructional days or hours should be rearranged to result in a shorter summer break, with other days or weeks off throughout the school year.
- Whether the minimum school year should be defined by a number of days or by a number of instructional hours.
- Whether there should be a uniform statewide start date for the school year that can only be waived for the purpose of implementing an innovative educational program.
- Whether resources necessary to extend the minimum length of an instructional day or minimum length of a school year are justified when compared to competing education priorities.

Based on its study, the task force was directed to design, propose, and establish goals for a pilot project on extending the school day or school year to expand instructional time for prekindergarten through grade 12. The task force submits its findings, as directed, to the State Board of Education, the Office of the Governor, and the Iowa Legislature on October 15, 2012.

## **Task Force Membership**

Shirley Phillips, Sac Economic Tourism and Development, Sac City

Mark Tucker, Retired Teacher and Coach, Indianola

Darryl DeRuiter, Pella Christian High School/Principal, Pella

Frank Spillers, Global Horizons, Atlantic

Jerry Parkin, Farm Bureau, Earlham

Leonard Griffith, Paton-Churdan Community School District/Superintendent, Churdan

Katie Byers, Iowa Alliance of Iowa Boys and Girls Clubs, Des Moines

Mick Jurgensen, Rogers Elementary School/Principal, Marshalltown

Mike Dick, Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, West Des Moines

Mary Hillman, PACES, Perry

Kerry Gumm, Principal Financial Group, Des Moines

Gary Norris, Waterloo Community School District/Superintendent, Waterloo

Anita Micich, Mason City and Clear Lake Community School Districts/Superintendent,  
Mason City and Clear Lake

Cindi McDonald, Waukee Community School District/Associate Superintendent,  
Waukee

Sandy Klaus, Starmont Community School District/Elementary Principal, Arlington

Maureen Tiffany, United Way of Central Iowa, Des Moines

Kay Stork, CAM North Elementary School/Title I Teacher, Anita

George Wheeler, Iowa Association of School Boards/Fort Madison Community School  
District, Fort Madison

## **Non-Voting Task Force Membership**

State Rep. Kevin Koester, Iowa Legislator, Ankeny

State Rep. Ako Abdul-Samad, Iowa Legislator, Des Moines

Beth Happe, Iowa Department of Education, Des Moines

Fred Kinne, Iowa Department of Education, Des Moines

Isaiah McGee, Iowa Department of Education, Des Moines

Anne Tesar, Student Member, Clear Lake Student Body President, Clear Lake

Sahan Jayawardena, Student Member, Mason City Student Senate President, Mason City

Bob Stouffer, Des Moines Christian Schools Superintendent, Urbandale

## 2012 Meeting Schedule

| Date         | City       | Facility  | Time                |
|--------------|------------|---|---------------------|
| July 26      | Des Moines | Iowa Department of Education/Grimes State Office Building | 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.   |
| August 23    | Des Moines | Iowa Department of Education/Grimes State Office Building | 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.   |
| September 18 | Des Moines | Iowa Department of Education/Grimes State Office Building | 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| October 1    | Des Moines | Iowa Department of Education/Grimes State Office Building | 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.    |

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## Introduction

The work of this task force is intended to integrate with the recommendations of the five other state task forces into a systemic proposal.

The Instructional Time Task Force is charged with meeting the mandates of Senate File 2284, School Instructional Time Task Force.

The task force met four times with representation of a diverse group of Iowans dedicated to meeting the state law. Iowa Department of Education Director Jason Glass began the process by asking task force members to focus primarily on proposals that would be effective for all students in Iowa. Mike Cormack of the Iowa Department of Education took responsibility for coordination of meetings and facilitation of all meeting activities.

During the first and second meetings, experts on school calendars, school finance, and expanded learning presented research<sup>1</sup> to the task force. Task force members interacted with questions, answers, and discussion about a wide variety of related topics.

The task force explored ideas that would enhance the quality of education for all students. Recommendations focus on three main topics:

1. Start date
2. Length of the school day, including after-school hours
3. Length of the school year

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<sup>1</sup> See the References section on page 15 for a list of presenters.

## Executive Summary

Everything that drives the discussion in this policy area should focus on quality instructional time to improve student achievement. Simply adding time to the day or year without thinking how that time can best be used is not beneficial. Every decision should put the focus on students and how the use of time in school can best help their educational experiences:

- We believe that providing a sustained focus on instructional time issues is beneficial to Iowa education. We recommend an ongoing statewide effort to determine how best to utilize the school day, facilities, and school year. Because one size does not fit all, we believe there should be room for flexibility on the local level on how to best meet those needs.
- Additional sustained state-level funding is needed for any changes to instructional time policy. Public-private partnerships also should be encouraged, both in terms of assisting with practical content and additional resources. Tax incentives are recommended for private-sector partners who assist with focused student achievement programming.
- The education of all Iowa students should be taken into consideration in deliberating these recommendations. Research supports this task force's recommendation that policy changes that focus on quality instructional time increase student achievement. When students are not achieving proficiency, school districts must be given the authority to require their attendance in extended/supplemental learning opportunities.
- We recommend that an ongoing state advisory board, made up of public and private-sector interests, be formed by the Iowa Department of Education to advise the State Board of Education and the Iowa General Assembly on instructional time recommendations examined in this report.
- The Iowa Department of Education must collect information from all Iowa school districts on the current status of physical infrastructure that impacts instructional time, including, but not limited to, the status of air conditioning. Consideration should also be given to transportation costs as it relates to additional instructional time. Local districts need long-term plans, as well as state funding assistance, to best meet those needs.

## Our Recommendations

### 1. Length of the Instructional Day

Simply adding time for the sake of adding time may not always be beneficial and does not automatically equal enhanced student learning or higher quality education. The task force recommendation is for local school districts to continue to set the appropriate length of the school day for their students.

There is support for increasing the length of instructional time through high-quality programming. Partnerships between local education agencies and businesses could establish additional sustained funding streams for programs, adding to their quality. According to the research presented to this task force, extended learning opportunities would be more effective with targeted groups of students; however, there are academic, employability, and social benefits to these programs for all students. Iowa lacks substantive extended learning opportunities and dedicated funding mechanisms needed to improve these programs.

### 2. Length of School Year

Iowa uses a traditional 180-day school year calendar. The task force studied the concept of lengthening the school year and found that each additional day of instruction would cost approximately \$15 million statewide. Given the cost, we do not recommend adding days for all Iowa students, but recognize the benefit of additional quality instructional time for some.

#### Alternative Calendar

Student achievement results from some schools that have implemented alternative calendars have been promising. Districts should not be required to pursue alternative calendars, but increased efforts should be made to inform all Iowans of the possibilities. School districts proposing alternative calendars could receive incentive funding to the extent they are designed to improve student achievement. Continued funding could be awarded to those that demonstrate success.

#### Definition of School Year (Days vs. Hours)

The task force recommends that state lawmakers require Iowa schools to meet a minimum of 1,080 hours of instructional time beginning with the 2014-15 school year. We believe this would allow for more effective use of instructional time.

### **3. Start Date**

Current law regarding the school-year start date is not well-defined. During the 2011-12 school year, 97.7 percent of Iowa's school districts received waivers under the Iowa Code. This issue has been before our state for a long period of time. First, our group will list those things we have in common, and then the dissenting viewpoints will be shared.

This task force recommends:

- The law needs more clarity, definition, or change, specifically to the phrase, "Significant negative educational impact."
- The 2013 legislative session and this Governor must make a decision on this issue that best benefits Iowa's students for their highest academic achievement.

In the absence of consensus on a school start date, the following views are presented on the issue:

#### **The majority view**

The task force recommends that Iowa school districts should determine their own school calendars, including local input of citizens at the school board level. Iowa has a strong tradition of local control. Many schools desire to have equal-length semesters to end the first semester before the holiday break and to better coincide with post-secondary school calendars. Districts should determine how to best meet the needs of their own students in meeting proficiency, as local control frequently results in innovation and best fits local needs.

#### **The minority view**

The task force recommends the current state law without waiver, which would start school during the week of September 1. Such a proposal would prevent major conflicts with Iowa tourism and recreational industries, impacting businesses and revenues to the state. There are no data showing an earlier start date has a positive impact on student achievement. Summer work for students is shortchanged with early school start dates. Many parents in Iowa have expressed concern about the school year starting earlier each year.

## **Importance of Recommendations When Compared to Other Task Force Recommendations**

Effective use of all school time obviously is an important issue. Effective time on task correlates with student achievement. In and of itself, instructional time is not the “silver bullet.” Instructional time must fit into the recommendations of the state’s other task forces. Our task force believes constructive changes are advocated in this report, and additional resources could be devoted to some of these policy areas.

Recommendations could be helpful in educational reform but, alone, could not have significant educational impact. Effective use of tax dollars and additional focus in this policy area can help Iowa students. We strongly believe in the contents of this report, but we understand that ours are not the only solutions to Iowa’s educational challenges. A strong area of consensus among task force members centered on the need for extended learning time programs that are done in a quality manner with best practices. Addressing start date and use of instructional time is not enough. The 2013 General Assembly needs to address many important systemic educational issues, recognizing that this is one of them.

## **Models to Extend the School Year or Day to Expand Instructional Time PK-12**

Innovative uses of instructional time have already taken place in this state and across the country. Through increased flexibility in scheduling, using hours versus days as recommended earlier in the report, further innovations would be encouraged in more school districts across this state. With the rapid change in workforce needs, future flexibility in schedules will meet the educational needs of our students. While we don’t believe in mandating calendar changes statewide, we do believe that promising results are being seen in practice that could be replicated on a larger scale. Through additional state resources, public-private partnerships, promotion of promising practices, and the flexibility of hours determining school time, there can be increased student achievement in this area. As effective innovations occur and additional research in this field develops, we believe reform in instructional time issues will grow naturally and in a stronger manner than they would through the use of mandates.

There is a need for promotion of practices that work within our state. The task force was presented with positive data that demonstrated student achievement growth from districts that utilized additional and/or restructured quality learning time. These existing programs need to be studied more closely to monitor student progress, and any positive results, if shown, should be promoted by the Iowa Department of Education to other districts. In limited usage, innovative calendars – whether adding time to a school day or

meeting year-round with limited breaks – have shown promise in this state and beyond. One drawback has been simply the lack of knowledge or study of them by other districts in the state.

When Iowa school districts are considering future calendars, they should be informed of the best practices taking place among schools that are incorporating an innovative school day or school year. As indicated previously in this report, we would promote the use of public monies to support districts that have produced plans in this policy area with goals demonstrating the benefits to student achievement. We believe the State Board of Education should have the authority to grant permission and to revoke innovative calendars. The policies and rules should reflect that student achievement, including local input of citizens at the school board level, should be driving the success of schools allowed to innovate with non-traditional school year schedules. Schedules that produce such results should be allowed to continue, and schedules that do not produce such results should be modified or eliminated to meet their performance goals.

Staggered school days or school years are another practice that could be considered by Iowa school districts and eligible for additional funding. These schedules could help reduce the cost of adding days to the calendar. In systems such as these, school time is added to the schedule either through longer days of instruction or a longer school year for the student while maintaining the same amount of contract time for teachers. While there could be additional costs to districts for support staff, transportation, and utilities, contracted educator time could remain constant. Teachers would report at varying times throughout the school day, week, or year, much like a college-level schedule (college professors do not teach at the same time, but educational coursework is presented collectively throughout the day). One teacher might work from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on a school day, while another might work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The same could apply to the school year, as well. This would allow the student to have a longer school day or year while contracted hours would remain unchanged for the instructor and district. It is an innovation taking place nationally in areas such as Denver, Colorado, and should continue to be monitored. This could be a measure to address the issue of the millions of dollars it would take to add instructional days for students in this state.

The basis for a sound model in extended learning programming includes replication, expansion, and merging of best practices. From 2006-2008, Iowa administered a before- and after-school grant program. That program was limited in scope and was eliminated when state budget problems reduced or eliminated many items. Yet it provides the framework for an expansion in this area. Approximately 32 Iowa districts receive funding from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program, which

draws federal funds for these additional educational programs. That program has been viewed favorably by the field and has been limited not by objection to it, but rather limitations of funding. More applicants apply each cycle than are awarded grant dollars. A new model that incorporates both measures into a sustained extended learning programming model would allow Iowa to join other states with scientifically researched gains in academic achievement.

The previous Before and After School Grant Program (Iowa Code 256.26) should provide the basis for the model for extended learning programming. While 21<sup>st</sup> Century program schools must show a minimum 40 percent of student eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch, we believe there is a need for academic and social benefits throughout the state. While we think socioeconomic status should be a factor in determining potential funding, it should not preclude student achievement-driven programs that strive to provide such services. We believe that every project should have local participation that should encourage private-sector involvement. The value of public-private partnerships enhances community involvement, real-world learning for students, and develops mentoring opportunities. This may be in the form of financial support or in donated hours of labor, equipment, materials, or space to assist the professionals involved in this effort. Partnerships with local nonprofits also should be included in the proposals for funding. The Iowa Department of Education should determine, through a formalized process, the granting of funds in a measure consistent with 256.26.

In addition, all Iowa higher education teacher preparation programs should encourage their students to participate in content-area extended learning opportunities in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This does not preclude the work of other volunteers participating in this program and should provide education to all grade levels. With oversight from trained professionals, this would provide valuable experience for prospective teachers, help with program costs, and, most important, provide enthusiasm for the programs being offered. With approximately \$12 million in grant applications denied and left unfunded each year in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program, the task force recommends closing the gap on these unfunded applications. The need is clearly there for additional spending in this area. Positive results have come from limited extended learning programming efforts in our state. Financial limitations and lack of statewide focus in this policy area have been the problems in this area, not program results.

In reviewing Iowa Code 256.26, no such dedicated funding stream exists in Iowa, but one should be incorporated into the legislation. In addition, student achievement should be added as a core component of that legislation. As previously stated, a public-private partnership must be incorporated, as well as availability of prospective teaching

professionals. Best practices discovered in this process must be shared throughout the state with other districts. Otherwise, we support the legislation as written and include it in this report.<sup>2</sup>

Iowa has been a national leader in education throughout our history. Education policy in Iowa must keep pace with the changing demographics and student needs across the state. Our task force believes while much of the research on extended school instructional time is emerging, it does demonstrate positive benefit to student achievement. Iowa must make efforts around extended time a priority and, in partnership with other measures, these efforts can help make a positive difference. Iowa should encourage, not mandate, extended time opportunities, and those districts willing to make a commitment to innovations should be supported. In adopting the recommendations from this task force, Iowa will move toward the forefront in extended-learning opportunities for student achievement.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A on page 16.

## References<sup>3</sup>

Jennifer Davis and Blair Brown, The National Center on Time and Learning (“Length of School Calendar”).

Dr. Jeff Berger and Jay Pennington, Iowa Department of Education (“Cost Analysis of Adding Days to the School Year”).

Margaret Buckton, Iowa School Finance Information Services (“It’s About Time: Instructional Time Macro and Micro Policy Considerations”).

Dr. Terry Peterson, The College of Charleston (“Current Opportunities for Iowa and the Research on the Power of Expanded Learning”).

Jill Burnett Requist, Principal, River Woods Elementary School, Des Moines (“Continuous Learning Calendar”).

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<sup>3</sup> More reference materials are available on the task force’s wiki site: <http://iaschovertime.wikispaces.com/>

## Appendices

### Appendix A: 256.26 Before and After School Grant Program

1. There is established a before and after school grant program to provide competitive grants to school districts and other public and private organizations to expand the availability of before and after school programs, including but not limited to summer programs. The amount of a grant awarded in accordance with this section shall be not less than thirty thousand dollars nor more than fifty thousand dollars.
2. Grant applications shall be assessed by the department based on the targeted student population and whether the application meets all of the following conditions:
  - a. Demonstrates partnerships and collaboration with not-for-profit community organizations.
  - b. Indicates that the applicant has a plan for continually improving quality in the program.
  - c. Provides for a safe and engaging environment.
  - d. Combines academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities.
  - e. Provides for not less than an equal match of any state funds received for purposes of the program. The local match shall be in cash or in-kind contributions.
  - f. Demonstrates that the applicant is able to sustain the program after the grant is exhausted.
3. Activities supported by an applicant may include but are not limited to tutoring and supplementing instruction in basic skills, such as reading, math, and science; drug and violence prevention curricula and counseling; youth leadership activities; volunteer and service learning opportunities; career and vocational awareness preparation; courses and enrichment in arts and culture; computer instruction; character development and civic participation; language instruction, including English as a second language; mentoring; positive interaction with law enforcement; supervised recreation programs; and health and nutrition programs.
4. The department shall make every effort to award grants to a balance of rural and urban programs.
5. The department shall make every effort to leverage additional funding from other public and private sources to support the grant program.
6. An applicant serving middle and high school-age youth is eligible for funding under this section if the applicant demonstrates that the applicant is serving youth at least once a week or a minimum of two hours per week.
7. Grant funding may be used for programming for multiple fiscal years as proposed by the applicant and approved by the department. 2007 Acts, ch 214, §19; 2008 Acts, ch 1181, §19 – 22