PURPOSE

Pursuant to Iowa Code § 279.10, as amended by Senate File 227 during the 2015 legislative session, all Iowa districts and accredited nonpublic schools are required to begin the school year no earlier than August 23. There is an exception in the start date requirement for districts or nonpublic schools that have applied and received permission from the Iowa Department of Education to operate a year-round calendar for one or more elementary and/or prekindergarten through grade eight attendance centers. The relevant Iowa Code sections, as amended, are quoted below.

Iowa Code § 279.10 (as amended)

1. The school year for each school district and accredited nonpublic school shall begin on July 1 and the school calendar shall begin no sooner than August 23 and no later than the first Monday in December. The school calendar shall include not less than one hundred eighty days [except as provided in subsection 3, (note: subsection 3, relating to innovative calendars, was repealed)] or one thousand eighty hours of instruction during the calendar year. The board of directors of a school district and the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school shall determine the school start date for the school calendar in accordance with this subsection and shall set the number of days or hours of required attendance for the school year as provided in section 299.1, subsection 2, but the board of directors of a school district shall hold a public hearing on any proposed school calendar prior to adopting the school calendar. If the board of directors of a district or the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school extends the school calendar because inclement weather caused the school district or accredited nonpublic school to temporarily close during the regular school calendar, the school district or accredited nonpublic school may excuse a graduating senior who has met district or school requirements for graduation from attendance during the extended school calendar. A school corporation may begin employment of personnel for in-service training and development purposes before the date to begin elementary and secondary school.

2. The board of directors of a school district and the authorities in charge of an accredited nonpublic school may apply to the department of education for authorization to maintain a year around school calendar at an attendance center or school for students in prekindergarten through grade eight. However, a board shall hold a public hearing on any proposal relating to authorization for a year around school calendar prior to submitting an application under this subsection to the department of education for approval.
   a. The initial application for a year around school calendar shall be submitted to the department of education not later than November 1 of the preceding school year. The department shall notify the board or the authorities of the approval or denial of an application not later than the next following January 15. The application may be approved for one or two years at a time. A board or the authorities in charge may reapply to renew an authorization by November 1 of the year prior to expiration of the authorization.
   b. An attendance center or school authorized to maintain a year around calendar must serve all students attending the school and shall not be limited based on student achievement or based on the trait or characteristic of the student as defined in section 280.28.
   c. An attendance center or school authorized to maintain a year around school calendar under this subsection shall provide at least ten days of instruction or the hourly equivalent during eleven of the twelve months of the school year. The period of time between instructional days shall not exceed six weeks.
   d. A year around school calendar authorized pursuant to this subsection is exempt from the school start date specified in subsection 1.
STANDARD FOR REVIEWING AND GRANTING APPLICATIONS

All applications will be reviewed for completeness. All applications are required to include a copy of the minutes from the public hearing at which the calendar was approved and assurances that (a) the attendance center will provide at least ten days of instruction or the hourly equivalent during eleven of the twelve months of the year, (b) the period of time between instructional days will not exceed six weeks, and (c) the attendance center serves all students, and attendance is not limited based on any trait or characteristic of a student.

NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL OR DENIAL

Districts that have applied for the ability to operate a year-round elementary or prekindergarten through grade eight attendance center for the 2015-2016 school year will be notified of the status of their request no more than 15 days following submission of their request. In subsequent years, notification will take place no later than January 15 of the school year preceding the year for which the application was made.

CLARIFICATION

There are several sections of Iowa Code that address school calendar and may require action on the part of school districts. To clarify the distinct sections of code and content, the Iowa Department of Education is providing the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iowa Code Section</th>
<th>Calendar Provision</th>
<th>Deciding Actor</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Application Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>279.10(2)</td>
<td>Year-round school</td>
<td>Iowa Department of Education Director or designee</td>
<td>30 days following enactment of SF 227 for the 2015-2016 school year; November 1 each year thereafter</td>
<td>Apply to operate a year-round school calendar through School Improvement Bureau annually; applies only to elementary and prekindergarten through grade eight attendance centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256.7(19)</td>
<td>Hours v. days</td>
<td>Local district</td>
<td>Spring BEDS due date</td>
<td>Submit decision to use hours or days in Spring BEDS annually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS

Please direct questions about start date, applications for year-round attendance centers, hours v. days requirements, and innovative calendar waivers to Amy J. Williamson, Bureau Chief for School Improvement, at amy.williamson@iowa.gov.
START DATE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question 1: If we operate a year-round school, how does this affect our start date?

Answer 1: A district or accredited nonpublic school must apply to operate a year-round school. If this application is approved, the school is exempted from the start-date requirement of Iowa Code §279.10. Directions for submitting an application are provided in the guidance.

To qualify as a year-round school, an attendance center must (1) serve all students attending the school and not limit attendance based on any trait or characteristic of a student, (2) provide at least ten days of instruction or the hourly equivalent during eleven of the twelve months of the school year, and (3) provide a break between instructional days of no more than six weeks. In addition, a request to operate on a year-round calendar must be accompanied by minutes from the public hearing where the year-round calendar was approved.

Question 2: We already had a calendar approved by our board. What do we need to do now?

Answer 2: If your current, approved calendar is in compliance with Iowa Code §279.10, as amended by SF 227, to begin school no earlier than August 23, you need to complete the calendar information in the Spring BEDS data collection.

If your current calendar does not comply with the new start date requirement, you need to hold a public hearing to amend your calendar, and also complete the calendar information in the Spring BEDS data collection.

If you would like to operate a year-round elementary or prekindergarten through grade eight attendance center for the 2015-2016 school year, you need to hold a public hearing, submit an application to operate a year-round attendance center, and also complete the calendar information in the Spring BEDS data collection.

Question 3: How does this affect Iowa Learning Online courses?

Answer 3: Iowa Learning Online courses will begin after August 23.

Question 4: How will schools deal with Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) and concurrent enrollment courses?

Answer 4: Many sections of concurrent enrollment courses are delivered solely at high school locations with sufficient contact time to start later than on-campus sections. It is possible that adjustments can be made to start dates of regional center or concurrent enrollment-only sections as well.

Question 5: Does this apply to nonpublic schools and independently accredited schools?
Answer 5: Yes. The start-date requirement applies to public, nonpublic, and independently accredited schools.

Question 6: May a high school student enrolled in a concurrent enrollment course at a college begin that class before regular classes start at the high school?

Answer 6: Yes, a high school student who is concurrently enrolled may begin to attend the course at the college or university prior to the beginning of the school year for the public, nonpublic, or independently accredited school.

Question 7: Can we play games for athletics before the start of school?

Answer 7: Athletic practices and games are governed by the Iowa High School Athletic Association and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union. Please see Iowa Administrative Code §281—36.14(5).

Question 8: How will the change in start date affect testing windows for universal screening, placement tests for AP courses, and other assessments?

Answer 8: Statewide windows for universal screening will be adjusted to accommodate district start dates. It is recommended that local assessment windows also be adjusted to allow adequate time for instruction to occur if this is a necessary component of the assessment process.

Question 9: Is there still an innovative calendar waiver?

Answer 9: No. The authority to grant innovative calendar waivers was repealed by the legislature. Schools and school districts may configure their calendars based on a minimum of 1,080 hours or a minimum of 180 days. There is no authority to operate a calendar with less than this minimum number of hours or days, and permission is not required to exceed this number of hours or days.

Question 10: If my school or school district has a calendar that exceeds 180 days, must my school or school district apply to operate a year-round school?

Answer 10: No. A school or school district that has a calendar exceeding 180 days does not need to apply to operate a year-round school if the school does not start before August 23.

Question 11: My district would like to start before August 23. Is there any flexibility to that date?

Answer 11: No. The only exception is for year-round schools.

Question 12: What is the process for operating a year-round high school?
Answer 12: The law does not permit year-round high schools.

Question 13: My district has a building that serves grades seven through nine. May it operate as a year-round school?

Answer 13: No. Year-round schools are not authorized for attendance centers that serve grade levels above grade eight.

Question 14: When do these changes take effect?

Answer 14: The amendments took effect immediately upon their signature by Governor Branstad. They apply beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.

Question 15: Will there be a “grace period” for schools and school districts to adjust to these amendments?

Answer 15: No. The amendments are effective now.