

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill No:** SB 637

**49th Legislature, 1st Session, 2009**

**Short Title:** School District Three Session Calendars

**Sponsor(s):** Senator Linda M. Lopez

**Analyst:** James Ball

**Date:** March 2, 2009

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**Bill Summary:**

SB 637 amends the *Public School Code* in two sections by requiring that, in school districts with more than 10,000 students:

- local school boards establish three sessions per calendar year for school attendance, each separated by breaks of a minimum of five school days, unless the district operates on a year-round calendar; and
- a budget for a school district that has more than 10,000 students not be approved by the Public Education Department (PED) unless the district:
  - establishes a school year consisting of three sessions separated by breaks of a minimum of five school days; and
  - meets the minimum number of instructional hours established by the department.

**Fiscal Impact:**

SB 637 does not make an appropriation.

**Fiscal Issues:**

In the analysis of SB 637, PED states that the most significant issue is overall cost. PED notes, for example, that it is unclear if teacher contracts and other salaries are to be extended by 10 instructional days during the two five-day break periods. If that were to be the case, these days could be utilized for training, professional development, collaboration activities, or improving existing programs, but doing so would increase the total number of school days to 190.

**Issues:**

According to PED, the district population threshold of 10,000 students or more means that SB 637 would apply only to seven school districts:

- (1) Albuquerque Public Schools;
- (2) Farmington Municipal Schools;
- (3) Gadsden Independent Schools;
- (4) Gallup/McKinley County Public Schools;
- (5) Las Cruces Public Schools;
- (6) Rio Rancho Public Schools; and
- (7) Santa Fe Public Schools.

PED also raises the following concerns:

- breaks of 10 days inserted into the school calendars could place students at a disadvantage by disrupting testing schedules for nationally administered assessments such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and Advanced Placement exams;
- requiring district calendars to conform to a more rigid schedule will greatly reduce local flexibility, which currently permits districts to make allowances for holidays, academic or athletic events, and other special events such as feast days;
- problems could arise for students transferring from a school district of fewer than 10,000 students to one of the six districts over that number in terms of earning appropriate credits for coursework or taking state standardized tests; and
- reporting schedules to the Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) and the federal and state report deadlines based on STARS data could be compromised for the state's largest school districts.

If enacted, SB 637 would require a trimester system to be implemented in secondary schools in the affected districts since grading periods and awarding of course credits would be divided into three segments whereby, rather than one semester of work being equivalent to one-half credit, each session presumably would be worth one-third credit unless classes were blocked so as to allow sufficient class time for awarding one-half credit in a 60-day session.

### **Background:**

According to the website of a trimester advocacy group, over the past seven years 33 percent of high schools in Michigan have adopted the three-session school calendar, which, they say, has several advantages over the traditional schedule by:

- providing more classes for students, especially electives. but not requiring additional staff or funding;
- balancing students' core classes over three terms resulting in less stress;
- providing more preparation time for staff with fewer students and classes to manage; and
- allowing students to take courses over within the same school year.

### **Related Bills:**

SB 134 *Limit School Calendar Adjustments*  
SJM 36 *School District Incremental Day Increases*  
HB 442 *Increase Instructional School Year*  
HB 691a *Public School Year & Length of Day*