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**Luther S. Olsen**

State Senator

14th District

**Senate Bill 589**

**Testimony of Senator Luther Olsen**

**Senate Committee on Education**

Thank you committee members for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 589. The purpose of this bill is twofold: 1) Provide school districts with more flexibility in terms of the number of days per year that they must provide instruction; and 2) Ensure that school districts receive aid for students while in sessions not considered part of the regular school year, including summer school and interim sessions.

School districts are increasingly wanting and needing flexibility in order to provide the best education to their students. One area where districts have requested flexibility is around the number of days they are required to hold school each year. Current law requires that students be in school for 180 days AND maintain a minimum number of hours of instruction; this bill removes the requirement for the number of days but maintains the minimum number of hours. In this way, the bill provides flexibility without compromising instructional time.

In addition, some school districts are choosing to operate schools on a non-traditional calendar, most often with schools that operate year-round but also have interim sessions, which function similarly to summer sessions in terms of providing a period of instruction outside of the regular school year. This bill ensures that school districts can receive aid for students during both summer school and interim sessions.

Once again, thank you for your time today – I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Senate Committee on Education  
February 13, 2014

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Testimony on 2013 Senate Bill 589

Thank you to Chairman Olsen and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Bob Soldner and I am the Director of the School Financial Services Team at the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to today on behalf of State Superintendent Tony Evers to testify in support of Senate Bill 589 (SB 589).

SB 589 would provide additional flexibility for school districts as they schedule their calendars while keeping in statute a minimum number of hours all school districts are required to offer regular instruction.

This flexibility is something school districts have repeatedly requested. In fact, the requirement for school to be held for 180 days is the most common waiver proposal the department receives from school districts every year.

Additionally, the department has received inquiries from some schools who would like to move to a year round calendar to address academic needs. A major barrier to this has been the realization that this would result in an inability to provide interim session courses due to a lack of state aid. This bill would fix that problem and thus provide schools and districts with another scheduling option moving forward. I should note that there may need to be an amendment to clarify the definition of interim session in the bill, but we are working with Senator Olsen on that and hope to have it fixed shortly.

Finally, this bill would provide a solution in how to treat online classes for purposes of summer school, and now interim session, in state statute. School districts have in the past wanted to offer online or blended learning opportunities and the department has been unable to recognize those classes for aid purposes. This bill will allow us to do so and, as a result, create additional options for the delivery of instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



## School Administrators Alliance

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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**TO:** Senate Committee on Education  
**FROM:** John Forester, Director of Government Relations  
**DATE:** February 13, 2014  
**RE:** Senate Bill 589 – 180-Day Requirement

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) strongly supports Senate Bill 589, relating to the number of school days required each school term.

I want to thank Chairman Olsen for bringing this bill forward and for allowing the SAA to participate in the bill development process. Mr. Chairman, in my research for today's hearing I found that you presided over a public hearing on this issue as Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Education on August 12, 2003. So, this issue has indeed been around a while. I also noted that the arguments made in favor of the bill that day by the SAA's then youthful lobbyist are still very much relevant today.

Under current law, school districts must hold school for at least 180 days during the school term. In addition, each school district must maintain minimum required hours of instruction. SB 589 eliminates the 180-day requirement and retains the minimum instructional time requirement. The bill also ensures that a school district employing a flexible year-round instructional calendar can receive state aid for pupils during both summer school and interim session classes. In this fashion, SB 589 removes a current law impediment (loss of summer school aid) to school districts exploring innovative year-round schooling.

If enacted, SB 589 would:

- Empower local officials to direct limited district resources to most effectively meet the instructional needs of their students. Local elected board members, school administrators and instructional staff are better positioned to identify student needs and allocate resources to meet those needs than are lawmakers and bureaucrats in Madison. Increasingly, schools are being held accountable to student outcomes. Dictating inputs like the number of calendar days reduces local control and flexibility. Also, given the challenging weather issues we have faced this year in Wisconsin, giving school districts the flexibility to respond to local conditions is simply the right thing to do.
- Allow districts the flexibility to achieve significant cost savings in the areas of energy, transportation, utilities and food service – savings that could be reinvested into improving student achievement.

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An Alliance of:

Association of Wisconsin  
School Administrators

Wisconsin Association of  
School District Administrators

Wisconsin Association of  
School Business Officials

Wisconsin Council for  
Administrators of Special Services

- Allow districts the flexibility to explore innovative school calendars and instructional strategies including, but not limited to, year-round scheduling. Increasingly, schools would like to build their schedules around more flexibly-designed learning periods and less around the agrarian calendar.
- Help school districts increase critically-needed staff professional development. Many school administrators hope to use the flexibility in this bill to “buy” a day or two of additional staff professional development time within the existing school calendar without increasing staff costs. This is the most popular argument in support of SB 589 expressed by school administrators in the field.

If enacted, SB 589 **would not** require school districts to hold fewer than 180 days of instruction. The bill simply affords districts the flexibility to reduce student contact days if local circumstances or student needs warrant. Nothing in the bill would prevent a district from maintaining a 180-day calendar (or more) if the district and the community believed it was best for their children. Calendar issues would still be determined by the local school board in consultation with the community.

Simply put, SB 589 is about restoring a modicum of calendar flexibility to local school districts and trusting in local school leaders to use this flexibility to meet the unique needs of the students they serve.

We urge your support of SB 589. Thank you.

Jerry Fiene  
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President-Elect, Bob Houts  
Owen-Withee School District  
Secretary, Diana Bohman  
Tomorrow River School District  
Treasurer, Jerry Walters  
CESA #11  
Past President, Joan Wade  
CESA #6

## TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON IMPACT OF SENATE BILL 589

Senator Olsen and the members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the positive impact of Senate Bill 589 on rural school districts. I am Jerry Fiene, the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, an organization representing administrators, board of education members, teachers and community leaders from rural school districts throughout the state.

We would like to thank the authors and sponsors for introducing legislation that creates flexibility for school districts as opposed to creating more mandates. The topic of the significant challenges facing rural school districts has received much attention over the past several years and frankly, one of those challenges is sufficient resources to meet state and federal requirements and mandates. This bill not only creates flexibility that has the potential to conserve resources but also provides opportunities for accessing additional resources.

Through our connections with the National Rural Education Association, we have learned of creative and successful organizational schedules in school districts for both the length of school days and the scheduling of those school days that are just not possible to implement in Wisconsin because of our 180 day requirement. Removing that requirement but maintaining the required hours of instruction would open up various options for conserving resources while actually improving achievement. Transportation costs are a major expense for rural districts that drains resources from the classrooms. Reducing district-wide transportation for just a single day would save thousands of dollars. Scheduling fewer days of school during the coldest winter months would again save thousands of dollars in utility costs. Research has shown that long breaks in instruction have a negative effect on achievement and retention. Creating a schedule for the school year that would reduce the length of the traditional summer recess addresses this issue. It is even more important for children in poverty and we have had a dramatic increase in poverty across rural Wisconsin over the past 10 years. Expanding the eligibility for our current summer school aid to interim sessions further allows for creative scheduling to conserve resources and at the same time increase the opportunities for learning.

I have advocated for a long time to allow online classes at the junior and senior high level to be eligible for summer school aid. We are very pleased to see that this provision is included in Senate Bill 589. The quality and rigor of online classes has improved dramatically over the past 10 years. During the same time our rural school districts have been forced to eliminate advanced classes, AP offerings and foreign languages as a result of declining enrollments and diminished resources. These opportunities are all available online and would be a great resource for students to access during the summer session or interim session. However, these opportunities do come with a cost that a rural school district may not be able to afford. Eligibility for state aid on these courses will make them much more affordable and the clear winners will be our rural youth.

Thank you very much for introducing this legislation and we encourage your support for its approval.



**School District of  
West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.**  
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION CENTER

February 13, 2014

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

The School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee is providing testimony on Senate Bill 589.

Education throughout the world has seen significant changes over recent decades. In today's world of education we applaud the State Legislature for your willingness to review and evaluate the way we deliver education. Education today is centered around children and their learning not seat time. We are in support of Senate Bill 589 which eliminates days children are in school (seat time) but maintains hours and minutes of learning as accountability. By eliminating the number of required days it allows for school districts to be more creative with the way education is delivered. In addition, we hope this legislation will also encourage and allow flexible learning opportunities in diverse and non-traditional learning environments as we are in an age where 24/7 learning is at the fingertips of each child.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this matter. Please contact my office with any questions.

Kurt Wachholz,  
Superintendent of Schools



# CHEQUAMEGON SCHOOL DISTRICT

*"The Home of the Screaming Eagles"*

DISTRICT OFFICE

David G. Anderson  
District Administrator

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February 12, 2014

Senator Luther Olsen  
Room 319 South  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Re: Senate Bill 589

Dear Senator Olsen:

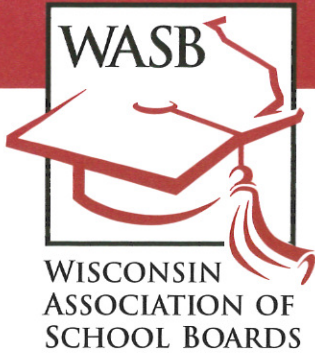
It is my understanding that there will be a Public Hearing on Senate Bill 589 tomorrow. Unfortunately I will not be able to attend but I wanted to make you and members of the Senate Committee on Education aware of my strong support for the legislation, as I understand it. Eliminating the 180 day requirement, while still maintaining the current hours of instruction requirements, will give local school districts the option of considering creative approaches to organizing the school year. It supports the concept of local control in considering innovative methods of delivering instruction. It also gives districts needed flexibility for making up lost instruction in those years where we have an inordinate number of inclement weather cancellations, such as this year.

Although our school board has not acted as a body on supporting this bill, I know from my regular past communication with them that Board members generally favor legislation placing control of the form in which education will take place in the hands of the elected school board members. This bill will support that concept. I believe there is support among our teaching staff for such legislation as well. It is my understanding you have been contacted by at least one of our teacher leaders, Helen Armstrong, supporting this legislation.

Please share this letter with your committee as you consider this bill and feel free to contact me with any questions. I believe it is a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

David G. Anderson  
District Administrator



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JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director  
RE: WASB Support for Senate Bill 589, relating to the number of school days and hours of instruction held in a school year and state aid for summer classes  
DATE: February 13, 2014

Good morning Chairman Olsen and members of the committee. My name is Dan Rossmiller. I am the Director of Government Relations for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), representing the 424 locally elected school boards in our state. We wholeheartedly support Senate Bill 589.

To meet the demand for higher student achievement levels while maximizing limited resources, school boards and administrators are looking for greater flexibility in setting school schedules.

Since the 1800's, school schedules have been organized around an agrarian calendar. The current 180-day school term is a remnant of a bygone era and its rigid linkage to state school aid funding is a hindrance to school districts wishing to explore 21<sup>st</sup> century options such as longer school years or year-round schooling as a way to improve student achievement.

School board member delegates to the 2014 WASB Delegate Assembly from around the state voted overwhelmingly last month to adopt a resolution in support of legislation to repeal the existing statutory provisions governing the number of school days required under current law (the 180-day requirement), and to allow districts to be governed only by the hours of direct pupil instruction required under current law.

Under those existing hours of instruction requirements, school boards must schedule at least 437 hours of direct pupil instruction in kindergarten, at least 1,050 hours in grades one to six, and at least 1,137 hours of direct pupil instruction in grades seven to twelve. Under the bill, these requirements would take the place of the 180-day requirement.

Eliminating the 180 day requirement, while still maintaining the current hours of instruction requirements, as Senate Bill 589 does, will give local school districts the option to explore creative approaches to organizing the school year, which could help them both to improve instruction and to attract and retain high-quality educators.



The bill also attempts to ensure that school districts receive aid for students while in sessions not considered part of the regular school year, including summer school and interim sessions, and in that way will encourage school boards and administrators to explore innovative scheduling that could help to reduce summer learning loss and further contribute to student learning gains.

Senate Bill 589 supports the concept of local control in developing and implementing innovative methods of delivering instruction. It also gives districts needed flexibility in making up lost instruction in years, such as this year, when an inordinate number of inclement weather cancellations occur. Many school districts will have to schedule additional days of school this year, at additional cost, in order to meet the 180-day requirement, even though they meet the hours of instruction requirement.

To be sure, some school districts, particularly smaller and more rural districts, would like to explore options such as a four-day week to save on pupil transportation costs. Other districts seek flexibility for other reasons, such as the ability to schedule additional professional development time for teachers and staff without increasing costs or cutting back on instructional time for students.

With the September 1 start date law mandate in place--and depending on when the Holidays fall--in order to get in 180 days of instruction under the current definitions, the end of the school year is being pushed closer and closer to mid-June. Using last year as an example, most Wisconsin school districts began the 2012-13 school year on Sept. 4 and ended between June 7 and June 14. Many large school districts, including Milwaukee and its surrounding suburbs, ended school between June 12 and June 14.

This year, because classes could not legally start until September 3 and, as I noted earlier, due to high number of "inclement weather days" it is likely that many school districts will have to add additional days—even though they may be meeting the required hours of instruction—and will almost certainly be in session through mid-June.

Given when the regular school term ends under current law, fitting in a six-week summer school session means that classes can easily run into early August. For teachers who both teach summer school and coach fall sports and students who both take summer school and participate in fall sports, this makes it challenging to fit in a vacation.

When it comes to improving student performance, and especially when it comes to narrowing achievement gaps that are preventing many low-income and minority students from reaching their full potential, *all* options should be on the table. The bill before you will give districts the ability to consider more flexible options in scheduling summer sessions and interim sessions to provide more time on the essential task of student learning without risking the potential loss of state aid.

Senate Bill 589 provides school districts with much needed flexibility. We urge your support.