

Common county school calendar gets Senate OK

Bill goes to House amid union resistance

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LANSING -- All school districts in the same county would use the same school-year calendar -- including days off for Christmas and spring break -- under legislation passed by the state Senate on Wednesday.

Senate Republicans who sponsored the bill said it would make it easier for school districts to cut costs by sharing services such as busing, food service and technology.

They said it would benefit families with children who attend multiple districts.

Teachers unions oppose the bill, which now goes to the Democratic-controlled House.

"It's an anti-collective bargaining bill," said Doug Pratt, spokesman for the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest teachers union.

"Every district's procedures are different. Every district has particular things about their calendar," he said.

House Education Committee Chairman Rep. Tim Melton, D-Auburn Hills, said a common calendar is a good idea as long as it doesn't clash with existing labor contracts and allows districts to set days off for non-Christian holidays.

The Senate bill does not make exceptions for religious holidays, although it would allow individual districts to set their own mid-winter breaks or days off around Thanksgiving.

The bill would require schools within intermediate school districts to adopt the same school calendar, which typically is negotiated between school boards and teachers unions.

The common calendar would include starting and ending dates, Christmas and spring break and professional development days for teachers. Most intermediate school districts encompass a single county, but some include more than one county.

The bill would not apply to year-round schools and charter schools.

Louise Somalski, lobbyist for the American Federation of Teachers Michigan, said uniform calendars weaken the ability of school districts to be customer friendly.

For example, she said, Dearborn schools, with many Muslim students, close for the Muslim holiday, Ramadan, whose dates vary year to year.

Debbi Hartman, spokeswoman for Rochester Community Schools, said getting 28 Oakland County districts to agree on a single school year calendar might be impossible.

"Districts like to be able to set their own calendars. That's a big item of interest for our community," Hartman said.

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