**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 59-1-425 OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL TERM, TO PROVIDE THAT A LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MAY ADVANCE THE OPENING DATE OF THE SCHOOL TERMS FOR ANY SCHOOL YEAR BY NO MORE THAN ONE WEEK TO NO EARLIER THAN THE SECOND MONDAY IN AUGUST, AND TO FURTHER PROVIDE FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO WAIVE THE SCHOOL OPENING DATE REQUIREMENT.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Section 59‑1‑425 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 59‑1‑425. (A) Each local school district board of trustees of the State shall have the authority to establish an annual school calendar for teachers, staff, and students. The statutory school term is one hundred ninety days annually and shall consist of a minimum of one hundred eighty days of instruction covering at least nine calendar months. However, beginning with the 2007‑2008 school year the opening date for students must not be before the third Monday in August, except for schools operating on a year‑round modified school calendar; provided, that a local school district board of trustees by majority vote may advance the opening date of the school term for any school year by no more than one week to no earlier than the second Monday in August of that year. Three days must be used for collegial professional development based upon the educational standards as required by Section 59‑18‑300. The professional development shall address, at a minimum, academic achievement standards including strengthening teachers’ knowledge in their content area, teaching techniques, and assessment. No more than two days may be used for preparation of opening of schools and the remaining five days may be used for teacher planning, academic plans, and parent conferences. The number of instructional hours in an instructional day may vary according to local board policy and does not have to be uniform among the schools in the district.

(B) Notwithstanding any other provisions of law to the contrary, all school days missed because of snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions requiring schools to close must be made up. All school districts shall designate annually at least three days within their school calendars to be used as make‑up days in the event of these occurrences. If those designated days have been used or are no longer available, the local school board of trustees may lengthen the hours of school operation by no less than one hour per day for the total number of hours missed or operate schools on Saturday. Schools operating on a four‑by‑four block schedule shall make every effort to make up the time during the semester in which the days are missed. A plan to make up days by lengthening the school day must be approved by the Department of Education before implementation. Tutorial instruction for grades 7 through 12 may be taught on Saturday at the direction of the local school board. If a local school board authorizes make‑up days on Saturdays, tutorial instruction normally offered on Saturday for seventh through twelfth graders must be scheduled at an alternative time.

(C) The General Assembly by law may waive the requirements of making up missed days or, by law, may authorize the school board of trustees to forgive up to three days missed because of snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions requiring schools to close. A waiver granted by the local board of trustees of the requirement for making up missed days also must be authorized through a majority vote of the local school board.

(D) If a school is closed early due to snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions, the day may count towards the required minimum to the extent allowed by State Board of Education policy.

(E) The instructional day for secondary students must be at a minimum six hours a day, or its equivalent weekly, excluding lunch. The school day for elementary students must be at a minimum six hours a day, or its equivalent weekly, including lunch.

(F) Elementary and secondary schools may reduce the length of the instructional day to not less than three hours for not more than three days each school year for staff development, teacher conferences, or for the purpose of administering end‑of‑semester and end‑of‑year examinations.

(G) Priority during the instructional day must be given to teaching and learning tasks. Class interruptions must be limited only to emergencies. Volunteer blood drives as determined by the principal may be conducted at times which would not interfere with classroom instruction such as study period, lunch period, and before and after school.

(H) In addition to the provisions of subsection (A) pertaining to advancing the opening date of the school term for any school year by a local school district board, the ~~The~~ State Board of Education may waive the school opening date requirement pursuant to subsection (A) ~~of this section~~ to any particular date on a showing of good cause or for an educational purpose. For the purposes of this section:

(1) ‘Good cause’ means that schools in a district have been closed eight days per year during any four of the last ten years because of severe weather conditions, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations.

(2) ‘Educational purpose’ means a district establishes a need to adopt a different calendar for a:

(a) specific school to accommodate a special program offered generally to the student body of that school~~,~~;

(b) school that primarily serves a special population of students~~,~~; or

(c) defined program within a school.

The state board may grant the waiver for an educational purpose for that specific school or defined program to the extent that the state board finds that the educational purpose is reasonable, the accommodation is necessary to accomplish the educational purpose, and the request is not an attempt to circumvent the opening date set forth in this subsection. Waiver requests for educational purposes may not be used to accommodate system‑wide class scheduling preferences. Nothing in this subsection prohibits a district from offering supplemental or additional educational programs or activities outside of the calendar adopted under this section.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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