

Good morning Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Beth DeShone with the Great Lakes Education Project.

I would like to spend a few minutes on a topic that is very important- the need for expanded student learning, irrelevant of weather concerns.

In a state like Michigan, it should come as no surprise that winter can be harsh, causing delays or cancelled days in our schools. That means that administrators are making calls based on the safety of their students that need to travel to a building, which is extremely important. However, even the number of state emergency days this year is still well below the days allotted for snow days and it does not mean that all learning has to also be cancelled.

For context, my children have missed 14 days of instruction this school year, and the chances of Michigan winter being over are quite slim. That's three weeks of missed instruction time, with little ability for our district to make swift changes to accommodate learning during these missed days, let alone the ability to shift testing windows later to make up missed learning.

Of course, other planned days off for our district including multiple breaks (like mid-winter and Spring break) are continuing as planned. You're again facing requests to waive snow days, but this issue is not unique as such requests have been made in the past. Instead of plowing past the current complaints from adults I encourage you to focus on the needs of kids.

We need to move towards a system that supports individual student learning with maximum flexibility in how that learning is delivered. A wholesale shift in the delivery of education to support mastery of content and how credit for that content is earned will benefit maximum student learning and empower teachers to focus on deeper instruction. This is a system not bound by any calendar constraints. That debate is worthwhile and should replace a desire to wave days once again.

However if we maintain a seat time requirement we should ensure there are 180 days of instruction even if that means a longer school calendar to accommodate weather delays. Contracts should demand this.

Schools should be able to easily consider project based learning, incorporating technology for at home and in school learning, engaging different levels of learners together to learn from each other and putting the teacher in charge of the flexibility to incorporate the methods that work best for their classroom.

I encourage you to look at the administrative rules and state laws that might be a hindrance to implementing a system of schools focused on mastery of concepts that has no calendar requirement, or policies that require fulfilling 180 days of instruction. These include seat time waivers, balanced calendar waivers, innovation waivers, and pupil accounting formulas. Moving away from the status quo will only benefit students and teachers.

I urge you to stand up for the students who aren't otherwise represented here today. I hope we can all prioritize learning for kids over vacations for adults.

Thank you for your time.