

MEMORANDUM

April 27, 2010

TO: Management and Fiscal Policy Committee

FROM: Craig Howard, Legislative Analyst
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Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: **School System Furloughs**

The consideration and use of furloughs by public school districts has expanded in recent months as a response to the economic downturn, and in many cases, to substantial state budget cuts to education.¹ This memorandum summarizes the common characteristics of furlough structures specific to local public school systems, and provides examples of the furlough structures and experiences of selected public school districts.²

OLO limited its research to local public school districts (K-12) that have implemented furloughs during FY09 or FY10, or have adopted furloughs for FY11; this memorandum does not include information on university systems subject to furloughs. Furlough information is provided for:

- Anne Arundel County Public Schools (Maryland);
- Gwinnett County Public Schools (Georgia);
- Fulton County School System (Georgia);
- Fayette County School System (Georgia);
- Lynwood Unified School District (California);
- Charleston County School District (South Carolina).
- Washoe County School District (Nevada);
- Brea Olinda Unified School District (California); and
- Elk Grove Unified School District (California).

¹ Turner, Dorie, "School Districts Across the County Furlough Teachers to Reduce Spending Amid Budget Cuts", Associated Press, September 1, 2009. <http://www.baltimoresun.com>.

² Some school district information in this memorandum was also included in the Addendum to OLO Report 2009-9, available on OLO's website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo.

Characteristics of school system furloughs. OLO’s research identified three common characteristics of furloughs specific to school systems that are summarized below.

- **Nearly all school districts reviewed included teachers as part of their furlough plan.** Exempting teachers substantially limits the savings achieved from a school system furlough, and most school systems are structuring furloughs to include instructional and non-instructional staff.
- **School districts have been able to implement furloughs without decreasing the number of student instructional days.** A common strategy among school furlough plans is to identify fixed furloughs on days originally scheduled as staff workdays when school is not in session, e.g., teacher planning days, staff development days. Some districts scheduled their furlough days to occur during the week(s) before the start of the new school year.
- **Approval and authority for the school district furloughs reviewed rests with the local school boards.** In all of the school districts reviewed, while furloughs may have been enacted due to funding cuts at the state or county level, the authority to adopt a final furlough plan for school employees rests with the school board. However, in some cases, state approval was required to reduce the number of teacher work days.

In addition, OLO found examples of some school districts that negotiated furloughs with employee unions, and others that imposed furloughs without any negotiated agreement. In some cases, unions agreed to furloughs under the condition that the school district avoid and/or rescind planned layoffs of union members.

Reduction in instruction days. A significant recent change in school furloughs is the authorization by some states for local school districts to enact furloughs that reduce student instruction days. The most prominent examples of this are in California and Hawaii.

School districts in California have been given authority by the State Legislature to reduce up to five student instruction days per school year through 2012-13.³ As a result, many districts in California are considering or already have negotiated upcoming furloughs that will decrease student instruction days.⁴ Examples of two California districts that have done so are summarized on page 7.

The State of Hawaii has a statewide school system, and reached agreements with employee unions, including teachers, to implement 17 furlough days in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. As a result, Hawaii’s school year is reduced from 180 to 163 instructional days, the shortest school year in the U.S. In response to pressure from parents and the Hawaii State Teachers Association, the Hawaii legislature is currently debating funding to decrease the number of furlough days that reduce student instruction.⁵

³ CA Education Code, § 46201.2

⁴ “School Furloughs Leave Parents in a Lurch,” *San Jose Mercury News*, April 26, 2010.
http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci_14940293?source=rss

⁵ “Hawaii’s Fight Over Furloughs Heats Up,” *Time*, April 15, 2010.
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1982331,00.html>

Examples of furlough structures and experiences. This section provides examples of the structure and experiences of nine public school districts that are implementing furloughs.

1. Anne Arundel County Public Schools (Maryland)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools FY10 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	1 to 4 days (depending on job class); 2 days for teachers
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed furloughs days prior to and during school year • Specific days vary by job class • No furloughs taken on student instruction days
Employee Exemptions	Bus drivers and aides are exempt
Other Details of Note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary loss spread out over the entire year • Paid holidays cannot be used as furlough days • Staff not authorized to report to work or work from home on furlough days • Staff received no COLA and no increments for FY10
Estimated Savings	\$5 million

The furlough plan originally adopted by the Anne Arundel County School Board required between two and five furlough days. In November 2009, the Board voted to restore one furlough day for all employees, making the final number of furlough days required between one and four. The Board set the number of required furlough days by job class, with more senior and/or higher-paid employees incurring a higher number of furlough days.

The school system reports that it was able to give back the furlough day due to greater than anticipated savings from lapse and a hiring freeze on non-teaching positions.⁶ While the school system originally estimated \$7.7 million in savings from the furlough days, the overall savings were reduced by \$2.5 million due to the furlough day restoration. Teacher furlough days in Anne Arundel were all taken on days previously designated as teacher workdays or staff development days when students were not in school.

⁶ Anne Arundel Schools, <http://www.aacps.org/html/press/postrelease/files/files887/Furloughdayrestoration11-4-09.pdf> and “Anne Arundel School Employees Get Furlough Day Back,” <http://www.wbaltv.com/education/21523042/detail.html>

2. Gwinnett County Public Schools (Georgia)

Gwinnett County Public Schools FY10 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	3 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed furlough days prior to and during the school year • Specific days differ for school- and non-school-based staff • No furloughs taken on student instruction days
Employee Exemptions	None
Estimated Savings	\$12 million

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) implemented a three-day furlough of all employees in FY10. Teachers and school-based staff took the furlough days on teacher planning and staff development days. Non-school-based staff took the furloughs on staff development days and holidays. The GCPS Superintendent's recommended budget for FY11 includes a proposal for three additional days of furlough for all staff except bus drivers and school nutrition staff.

3. Fulton County School System (Georgia)

Fulton County School System FY10 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	6 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed furloughs for teachers days • Fixed and rolling furlough days for non-teaching staff • No teacher furloughs taken on student instruction days
Employee Exemptions	None
Other Details of Note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary loss spread out over three pay periods • Paid holidays cannot be used as furlough days
Estimated Savings	\$15.8 million

The Fulton County Board of Education implemented six furlough days in FY10. An initial three day furlough was adopted in July 2009, with an additional three days adopted in February 2010. Teachers took furlough days during a pre-planning week before school started and on staff workdays that were not student instruction days. Non-teaching staff took furlough days on staff workdays or as determined by each employee's supervisor.

4. Fayette County School System (Georgia)

Fayette County School System FY09 and FY10 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY09: 2 days • FY10: 3 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY09: Rolling furloughs days • FY10: Fixed furlough days prior to and during school year
Employee Exemptions	Teachers exempt from FY09 furlough; bus drivers and food service employees exempt from FY10 furlough
Estimated Savings	\$2.3 million in FY10

The Fayette County Board of Education adopted furlough plans in both FY09 and FY10. In FY09, all non-contract staff (custodians, secretaries, maintenance staff, etc.) took two furlough days. In addition, administrative staff (superintendents, principals, etc.) were asked to take four or five voluntary furlough days. In FY10, all employees (except for bus drivers and food service workers) took three furlough days prior to the start of school and/or on staff workdays that were not student instruction days.

5. Lynwood Unified School District (California)

Lynwood Unified School District FY09 and FY10 Furlough Plans	
Amount of Furlough Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY09: 4 days • FY10: 1 or 6 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	Fixed and rolling furloughs days
Employee Exemptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY09: Teachers exempt • FY10: None
Other Details of Note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY10 also includes a 3% reduction in pay for the employees with 1 furlough day. • For both years, furlough agreements with unions included promise to forgo or rescind employee layoffs

The Lynwood School Board enacted furlough plans in FY09 and FY10. In FY09, all employees except teachers took four furlough days. In FY10, the School Board came to an agreement with employee unions for teachers and administrators for a 3% salary reduction in FY10 along with one furlough day. The furlough day was taken on a pupil-free work day during the school year. The Board's agreement with the remaining employee union (SEIU) did not include a salary reduction, but did require six furlough days. The six furlough days for these employees were scheduled as rolling days, requiring mutual consent of the employee and the supervisor.

6. Charleston County School District (South Carolina)

Charleston County School District FY09 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	4 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	Fixed furloughs days during winter and spring break
Employee Exemptions	Teachers exempt
Other Details of Note	All non-exempt employees required to take mandatory furloughs, even if they had taken voluntary furlough days
Estimated Savings	\$650,000

In FY09, the Charleston County School Board approved a furlough plan that applied only to 12-month positions (e.g., principals, district-based officials, maintenance and IT staff, etc.) and exempted teachers. All furlough days were taken during the district’s spring break, previously scheduled as paid holidays.

7. Washoe County School District (Nevada)

Washoe County School District FY11 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 days for teachers • 1 to 3 days for non-teaching staff • 5 days for senior administrative staff • 10 days for superintendent
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed and rolling furloughs days, varies by position • All fixed days taken on non-student instruction days
Employee Exemptions	None
Other Details of Note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furloughs agreed to by all employee unions • FY11 also includes wage freeze for all employees
Estimated Savings	\$3.3 million

The Washoe County School Board has approved a furlough plan for employees in FY11 in agreement with each of the school district’s employee unions. The number of furlough days and when they will be taken vary by employee group. All fixed furlough days will be scheduled for professional development, holiday, or other non-student instruction days.

8. Brea Olinda Unified School District (California)

Brea Olinda Unified School District FY10-FY12 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY10: 3 days • FY11: 8 days • FY12: 2 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed furlough days • Elimination of 8 student instruction days over the three school years • Remaining 5 days will be taken on teacher development or teacher prep days
Employee Exemptions	Classified employees (e.g., custodians, health clerks, librarians)
Estimated Savings	\$1.2 million over three school years

In March 2010, the Brea Olinda School Board and Brea Olinda Teachers Association agreed to a furlough plan that will result in teachers taking 13 furlough days over FY10, FY11, and FY12. The Brea Olinda furlough plan will reduce student instruction days. Student instruction days will be reduced by two in FY10, five in FY11, and one in FY12. The school district has not reached an agreement for furlough days with its classified employee union, which includes custodians, health clerks, and librarians.

9. Elk Grove Unified School District (California)

Elk Grove Unified School District FY10 Furlough Plan	
Amount of Furlough Time	2 days
Scheduling of Furlough Days	Fixed days at the end of the school year, eliminating 2 student instruction days
Employee Exemptions	Certain non-instructional staff, such as custodial staff and bus drivers
Estimated Savings	\$2.5 million

In April 2010, the Elk Grove School Board and the Elk Grove Education Association agreed to a two-day furlough in the current school year that will reduce student instruction days. School administrators, non-instructional managers, and other administrative support staff have also agreed to take the two furlough days. The district will use the estimated \$2.5 million in savings to restore 29 counseling positions targeted for elimination in FY11. The school district is asking employees to take seven furlough days in FY11, but an agreement has not yet been reached with employee groups.