

**IOWA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION**
(Cite as 25 D.o.E. App. Dec. 229)

In re Petition for Waiver of Rule

Rudd-Rockford-Mable Rock and Nashua-Plainfield Community School Districts, Petitioners, for a Waiver of Rule 97.7(4)	:	ORDER GRANTING WAIVER REQUEST [Adm. Doc. #4711]
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On or about April 12, 2010, the Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock and Nashua-Plainfield Community School Districts filed a request with this agency for a waiver from administrative rule 281-Iowa Administrative Code 97.7(4) beginning with the 2010-11 school year.

Authority for filing and ruling on petitions for waiver is found in 281—IAC chapter 4. The agency considered the facts, the criteria for waiver in chapter 4, and the information submitted by the districts in ruling on the petition.

FINDINGS OF FACT

At issue in this matter is the requirement in rule 97.7(4) that “[s]chool districts that share operational functions with other school districts must be contiguous school districts.”

In 2007, the Iowa Legislature amended sections of Iowa Code chapter 257, creating new opportunities for school districts and area education agencies to request supplementary weighting (Senate File 447 and Senate File 588, section 20). One of the new opportunities was in the area of operational function sharing, which includes sharing the services of a business manager, and which is eligible for supplementary weighting for up to five years (of which three years remain) with an annual 20 percent phase-out. Pursuant to the new legislation, amendments were adopted by the State Board of Education to the administrative rules that govern supplementary weighting. The pertinent subrule regarding sharing the services of a transportation director is as follows:

97.7(2) "Operational function sharing" means sharing of managerial personnel in the discrete operational function areas of superintendent management, ... The operational function sharing arrangement does not need to be a newly implemented sharing arrangement in order to be eligible for supplementary weighting.

b. Business management.

(1) Shared personnel must perform the services of managing the business operations for each of the sharing partners. Managing business operations would include personnel performing the duties of a business manager or personnel performing the duties listed in

the Iowa Code for a board secretary including, but not limited to, board secretary duties listed in Iowa Code chapter 291, or personnel performing the duties listed in the Iowa Code for a board treasurer including, but not limited to, board treasurer duties listed in Iowa Code chapter 291, in each of the sharing partners.

...
97.7(4) School districts that share operational functions with other school districts must be contiguous school districts. If two or more sharing partner districts are not contiguous to each other, all districts separating those districts must be a party to the operational function sharing arrangement.

Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock and Nashua-Plainfield desire to share the services of a business manager, starting with the 2010-2011 school year. The two districts are not contiguous to each other; the Charles City Community School District separates them. On behalf of his district, Charles City Superintendent Andy Pattee states that he has no objection to this waiver request.

Some of the pertinent facts submitted to this agency from the two petitioning districts include the following:

- Both districts project a savings of approximately \$10,000 annually to be realized by both of them by sharing a business manager. The savings will provide additional financial resources to both districts, enabling them to more fully meet the academic and educational needs of their students.
- Both districts intend to make a long-term commitment to the sharing arrangement.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

When a petition for waiver is filed, the undersigned must conclude that all five criteria listed in rule 4.4 are satisfied before granting a waiver. Those criteria and the undersigned's conclusions are as follows:

1. *Not waiving the rule would result in an undue hardship to the petitioner.*

An agreement between Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock and Nashua-Plainfield to share a business manager is a sensible approach by these districts to manage their resources. If the rule is not waived, both districts will forego the supplementary weighted funds. While it is not clear whether this would result in an *undue* hardship, this agency does not wish to be a barrier to good faith efforts of school districts to use their resources wisely. In addition, because the undersigned concludes that the other four criteria are met, the benefit of any doubt regarding this criterion is given to the districts.

2. *Waiver would not prejudice the substantial legal rights of any person.*

The policy underlying the requirement in the rule of contiguousness is designed to ensure that sharing agreements are sensible from a resource and a geographic standpoint, and that the sharing partners do not snub any other school district contiguous to one or more partners. The superintendent of the district between Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock and Nashua-Plainfield has no objection to this waiver. Therefore, the policy underpinnings are not compromised by waiver in this case.

3. *The provisions of the rule from which waiver is sought are not mandated by statute or other provision of law.*

The requirement of contiguousness is not statutory and is not mandated by any provision of law outside of rule 97.7(4). Therefore, it is a proper subject for waiver request.

4. *Substantially equal protection of public health, safety, and welfare will be afforded by a means other than that prescribed in the rule from which waiver is sought.*

This agency finds that the public health, safety, and welfare are not at stake. Therefore, it is unnecessary to determine whether there is another means by which the same can be met other than by the requirement in rule 97.7(4).

5. *Waiver would not have a negative impact on the student achievement of any person.*


Granting this waiver would not have a "negative impact on the student achievement of any person." To the contrary, the savings to Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock and Nashua-Plainfield, as well as the supplementary weighted funds, will enhance the ability of the districts to serve their students.

The undersigned is satisfied that the intent of the requirement of contiguousness is not harmed by granting a waiver herein.

III. DECISION

For the foregoing reasons, the petition for waiver is GRANTED.

4/14/10
Date



Judy A. Jeffrey, Director