



CPS ranks near bottom in class days

By Jessica Brown • jlbrown@enquirer.com • August 15, 2010

Cincinnati Public Schools held class fewer days than all but two of the state's 614 school districts in 2008-09, the most recent year for which data was available.

An Enquirer analysis of Ohio Department of Education statistics revealed that CPS logged 168 "session days," or days when students were required to be in school.

The only districts with fewer such days was Plain Local in Canton with 167 days and Youngstown City with 166 days. CPS tied three other districts, Eaton in Preble County, Yellow Springs in Greene County and Franklin Local in Muskingum County.

CPS officials say they'd love to provide more instructional days. But the district says it is hamstrung by finances and contractual obligations.

"It would cost us \$1.5 million per (additional) day," said CPS Superintendent Mary Ronan. "In these difficult economic times we can't afford that."

Ohio requires a 182-day school year but gives flexibility to districts to use two of those days for training and two for parent-teacher conferences, rather than classroom time.

State law also allotted up to five "calamity days" or school closings due to weather that year. (The number of calamity days allotted was reduced to three this year.)

On top of those allotments, districts may also

ask the state for waivers to use some of their instructional days for teacher training. In 2008-09, CPS used three of its 182 days for parent-teacher conferences, six for training and five as calamity days.

Lockland Local Schools, with 181, logged the most days of any district in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

Ohio's average was 174 instructional days. Toledo and Cleveland City Schools averaged 180 days, Columbus City and Dayton schools averaged 173.

Districts in Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties ranked in the upper and middle of the pack among Kentucky districts, according to statistics from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Among the Northern Kentucky schools, Bellevue Independent logged the fewest days (171), while Beechwood, Covington, Fort Thomas and Walton-Verona tied for most days (177).

Nationwide, states required an average of 177 instructional days in 2006, the most recent year for which that data was available, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Many educators believe that the amount of time

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students spend in school equates to better academic success, particularly in academically struggling schools - generally urban school districts with high poverty rates.

Nationally, educators and government leaders have long pushed for longer school years to compete with students in other countries where requirements of 200 days or more is the norm.

"Our traditional academic schedule in America was created to meet the needs of children and families of a very different era," said Jennifer Davis, president of the Boston-based National Center on Time and Learning.

"It's shifted toward really preparing students for college and career. The 180, roughly six-hour day really isn't enough, particularly for some of our needier students who live in poverty."

CPS, which last year rated Continuous Improvement on its state report card (fourth out of six categories), recognizes its low school-day count isn't ideal.

"We agree that Cincinnati Public School children need more time in class if we're going to be competitive," Ronan said.

The district is seeking to change language in its teachers' union contract to allow the district to increase its number of instructional days. However, the district has no money to pay teachers for those days, so it's essentially asking the teachers to take a pay cut.

Another option would be for teachers to switch some of their teacher training days to instructional days. That wouldn't cost extra money.

School board member Eve Bolton has been among those proposing a longer school year. "When we compare instructional time, the reality is (CPS students) have less than other children do."

Julie Sellers, president of the Cincinnati teachers union, said teachers would be open to using some training days for instruction. The idea of adding additional unpaid days to the school year hadn't been discussed by the union, she said, so she declined to offer an opinion on that issue.

Sellers said the state numbers for Cincinnati Schools seemed low when compared to what's in the union contract. She also noted that the district had added an hour onto each school day several years ago, which would increase the instructional time.

Davis, with the National Center on Time and Learning, advocates creative solutions such as staggering teachers' schedules or partnering with community groups to augment the staff.

"I think what's important as Ohio looks to the future ... is to try to think outside the box," she said.

President Barack Obama supports longer school days or school years. Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland last year proposed lengthening the school year by 20 days.

In Kentucky, the Department of Education has long pushed for a longer school year. Kentucky legislators added two instructional days in 2006.

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"More instructional time is always a good thing," said Linda Gross, spokeswoman for the Kentucky Department of Education. "There are so many things teachers don't get to focus on. When you compare us to other districts nationally we come up short."

More online

For a full list of school-year data statewide, visit www.data.Cincinnati.Com

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