

Local schools waiting for options from IDOE in dealing with snow makeup days

Written by George Browning
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Meteorologist aren't the only people Mother Nature has been keeping awake at night. School superintendents have been pacing the floors wondering what to do with the number of mounting snow days.

Students at Eastern have missed a total of 14 days of school, at Salem the number is 12. West Washington has missed 10 days.

"This is just unreal," said EWSC Superintendent Steve Darnell. "My understanding is this has been the worst in the history here for this many days. It's unfortunate."

West Washington Superintendent Gerald Jackson said he remembers worse years. He recalls the 1977-78 school year when students at Paoli were out a total of 30 days.

"That was one of the reasons the state started making us make up days because we had back-to-back winters where things got pretty bad," Jackson said.

The bad news is most of the missed days will have to be made up, but the good news is Superintendent of the Indiana Department of Education Glenda Ritz has proposed giving school corporations options of making up the days.

West Washington and Salem have an advantage over Eastern in that they had two weeks scheduled for spring break.

Students will now only get one of those weeks off.

Things are a little trickier at East Washington.

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“We’ve added on the days and as of right now our last day of school is June 4,” Darnell said.

He said that date is not set in stone.

“Some of those days we are going to submit a waiver for and hopefully get those approved and hopefully get the last day of school bumped back into May,” he said. “That’s the plan.”

Some of the options include having students arrive earlier and leave later and also the possibility of doing some work on-line.

“I know the department of education is working on options because they understand this has been an exceptional winter for all school districts,” Darnell said. “Our goal is to have kids done with school before that graduation.”

Salem Superintendent Dr. Lynn Reed said once it’s official from the DOE and those options are spelled out, she will send out a school-wide e-mail asking for creative ways to make up the days.

“We have a lot of great creative minds in this corporation and I know there will be ideas on what we can do,” Reed said.

One of those options is not likely to be Saturday school.

“In doing school on Saturday there are other activities that would be postponed for kids,” Reed said. “High school students work and sometimes they only work on Saturdays and they count on their earnings for their insurance or extra money.”

Once the state board approves allowing schools alternative options, corporations will come up

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with a plan and submit that plan to Ritz for approval.

If there are no more snow days, Salem's last day of school would be May 30 and graduation would be May 31.

Historically Salem doesn't schedule graduation in advance because of situations like this one.

"Folks can look at our calender and say graduation will be the Saturday after the last day of school is the date," she said. "Our graduation could be May 31 or June 7. It all depends on Mother Nature."

At Eastern graduation is still scheduled for June 1 and Darnell said even if seniors have to come in the following week to make up days, they would likely still have the ceremony on June 1 and give the students their diplomas if they have days to make up.

West Washington's last day of school will now be May 27th and graduation will take place on May 30.

But worse than the moving of the last school day and graduation, Jackson's concern is the missed time.

"We have ISTEP testing coming at us in March and at this point the state is not talking about moving that," he said. "All this missed class time can't be good."

Reed said she expects to hear something official from the IDOE some time next week and things shortly after that schools will come up with suggestions.

All three are hoping that they have called off school for the last time this year.

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“I am just worn out from it,” Jackson said. “My thermometer in my truck this morning read -7 and I am done with it. As bad as it was back in the 70s, I don’t think it stayed this cold, this long.”