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## Number of calamity days reduced

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FREMONT -- During the 2010-2011 school year, the number of calamity days Ohio school districts can take will be reduced from five to three.

That means if school is canceled more than three times for snow storms, fog or other reasons, students must start making up days.

"It's essentially offering kids more learning opportunities, more time in the classroom," said Scott Blake, Ohio Department of Education spokesman. "It's slowly transitioning into what could be a longer school year."

Currently, students attend school for 180 days -- or a minimum of 175, if their district uses the five calamity days, Blake said. When the change takes effect, they must attend school for a minimum of 177 days, he said.

The change is part of the state budget Ohio lawmakers approved last week, Blake said. Gov. Ted Strickland originally had proposed lengthening the year by 20 days, but the Ohio House chose to reduce calamity days instead, he said.

Jane Garling, Woodmore Local Schools superintendent, said she supports the reduction.

"I think it's about time," she said. "We have a number of days students are supposed to attend. Curriculum is set up that way.

"We need to get the days in."

Having fewer calamity days will not change how Garling and her staff handle decisions to cancel school, she said. Students will make up days at the end of the year, if necessary, she said.

"I base it strictly on whether it's safe enough to bring kids in," she said.

Traci McCaudy, Fremont City Schools superintendent; Christine Opelt, Fremont City Schools director of human resources and community relations; Gregg Elchert, Clyde-Green Springs Schools superintendent; and Tom Peiffer, Gibsonburg Exempted Village Schools superintendent, were not available for comment Tuesday.

Although it might be inconvenient for some districts to have school later into the summer, they actually will not be having class longer than the other Ohio districts, Blake said.

"From a fairness standpoint, everyone's going to have to go the same amount of days," he said.

The budget also includes another provision to give some students more class time.

Also during the 2010-2011 school year, Ohio school districts must offer all-day kindergarten, unless they get a waiver from the state, Blake said. They can continue to have a half-day kindergarten option, as well, he said.

"It doesn't mean parents have to take advantage of (full-day kindergarten)," he said.

Locally, Fremont City Schools will begin offering all-day kindergarten this fall. Woodmore already offers full-day and half-day kindergarten, Garling said.

Meanwhile, the ODE superintendent of public instruction is studying other possibilities for extending the school year and is expected to have a report completed by Dec. 31, 2010, Blake said.

After the 2010-2011 school year, the budget provisions could change because lawmakers voted on a budget for 2010-2011, not other years, Blake said.

"Beyond next year, there's still some discussion of how things are going to go," he said. "It's hard for me to say with any certainty what will happen. It kind of remains to be seen what the long-term provisions will be."



State budget changes resulted in fewer calamity days. If school is cancelled more than three days during the year, the days will be made up at the end. (NM file photo)