

Five minutes added to OES school day

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Classes starting earlier to avoid having to make up missed days in case of winter cancellations

Students at Ozaukee Elementary School are spending a little more time in their classrooms this week after a mid-year adjustment to the school day was implemented.

Parents were sent letters last Thursday that explained the elementary school day was being expanded by five minutes starting this week.

“We have an extremely low number of minutes in reserve should we need to close school for weather or other reasons,” Principal Cindy Dallman said in the letter.

The old schedule had the school day starting at 9 a.m. The new starting time is 8:55 a.m.

The end of the school day remains 3:40 p.m. except on Wednesdays, when students are released at 2:40 p.m.

The state requires elementary schools to have 1,050 hours of class time a year. With the added five minutes, the school will end the year with 1,076 hours.

That cushion will allow the school to have a cushion of four “snow days” built in to the calendar.

Dallman said the tweaking is primarily needed because of the uncertainty of Wisconsin winters.

“We were looking more closely at the hours counted by the state Department of Education and realized that lunch and recess were being counted as teacher-contact time,” Dallman said.

“We are easily meeting the state requirements for classroom time, but we realized we could run into trouble if we lost more than two days because of bad weather.”

The schedules at the district high school and middle school have enough time built in so as many as four days of school could be missed without having to make them up because neither school has recess time build into their daily schedule.

The number crunching done while comparing schedules made it clear a choice had to be made at the elementary school level.

“It came down to a question of whether it was better to adjust the length of the school day slightly now or face having to make up school days at the end of the year,” Dallman said.

“There might be no problem if we have a great winter and there are no delays or cancellations because of snow, fog or cold. Still, we thought the better choice to ensure the safety of the children was to add a few minutes at the beginning of the day instead of pushing people to be

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driving in bad weather.”

With the adjustment, all three schools will have the same number of reserve classroom minutes.

Dallman said the earlier start should be easily handled by the bus drivers and parents dropping off students since they generally arrive well before the start of school.

“The way it has been going, the buses usually arrive early and the kids end up sitting on the bus for at least five minutes before they are allowed in the school,” she said.

“We talked with the bus company, and they are fine with the new schedule.”

Teachers are already in the classrooms by 8:55 a.m. so the added time will not affect them.

Parents were told that the new starting time would start on Monday, but students will be given a “grace period” until classes resumed Jan. 3. Students who arrive at school by 9 a.m. will not be marked tardy until then.

“I haven’t heard complaints from any parents yet,” Dallman said.

The administration will study whether to make the 8:55 a.m. starting time permanent when next year’s schedule is prepared.

All the buses arrived well in advance of the new starting time on Monday, and only one student was tardy. Dallman said that student arrived at 9:25 a.m. and would have tardy under the old timetable, too.

Supt. Bill Harbron agreed that the schedule change is a logical move for the school.

“It is not a major adjustment. It is a more productive use of time rather than sitting on a bus,” Harbron said.