

Prepared Notes for House Education Committee
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Chairman Stebelton, Ranking Member Luckie, thank you for allowing public participation in this process. My name is Marc Schare and I am a member of the Worthington Board of Education currently serving my 7th year in that body. Tonight, I come to you both as an individual Board Member and as a constituent concerned that through House Bill 191, the legislature will indirectly cause a significant reduction to the quality of education that is provided throughout the state.

I'm sure that most members of this panel are aware of research that indicates that if anything, our country needs to lengthen the school year so we can maintain and increase our competitiveness with other countries. I do not believe it was the intent of this legislation to provide less student contact time; however, my argument to you this evening is that less student contact time will be the inevitable result. Here's why.

Student Contact Time – Secondary Level

	Current Law in Worthington	HB191
Days	178 (182-2-2)	150.61 (979 / 6.5)
Hours	1157 (178 * 6.5)	979 (1001-11-11) ¹
Difference in Days		-27 (178-151)
Difference in Hours		-178 (1157-979)

As the chart shows, HB191 takes the minimum school year, currently specified as 178 days and converts it to a minimum number of hours using a conversion factor of 5.5 hours for a secondary day, excluding lunch. This works out to a minimum school year of 979 hours. In my home district of Worthington, we have a school day at the secondary level of 6.5 hours. This means that in a typical year, under this legislation, we would be in school 178 hours above the minimum which works out to around 27 days. In other words, this legislation is giving Worthington carte-blanc to reduce the number of days in our school district calendar from 178 to 151 days. Running the calculation another way for clarity, if we take the minimum number of hours, 979 and divide it by our school day length of 6.5, we get 150 and change. You are essentially permitting us to shave 5 full weeks off the school year.

A quick check shows that we are not alone. While Worthington's school day is slightly longer than others in Central Ohio, most districts have adapted a school day which is

¹ 1001 Hours from Sub HB191 Line 388, 11 hours each for Parent Teacher conferences and Professional Days as per Sub HB191 Lines 391-403 inclusive.

longer than the minimum, therefore, the same effect would apply – HB191 would permit school districts to shorten the number of days that school must be in session.

Still, the language is permissive, not mandatory, so you might be asking yourselves what would possess a local Board of Education to cut 4 or 5 weeks out of the school year just because the law says that they can. My response has to do with the limitations of local control and honestly, I wrestled with this question for the better part of two days before deciding to come to you tonight. My task is to convince you that given the flexibility to take 3, 4 or 5 weeks out of the school year, many school boards would eventually do just that to the detriment of their students. I have three arguments. The first is by way of observation. The current minimum school year is 180 days and the length of many, perhaps most teacher union contracts in the state is that same 180 days of student contact time. The fact that so many school districts settled at the current minimum is *prima facie* evidence of the risk you would be taking by offering this flexibility. If it happened once, it will happen again, and those of you who have served on school boards and have experience with negotiations can guess why. OSBA and many school law attorneys will tell you that at contract negotiation time, the unions will either want money or language. It isn't likely there will be much new money to spread around anytime soon, so it is not difficult to envision a scenario where in lieu of money, a local school district agrees to a shorter year that while still compliant with the new law, provides fewer contact days for students and once one district does it, others will quickly follow – it is the nature of negotiations in the state.

Don't take my word for it. Check with your own experts on negotiations and gauge the probable result for yourself. I checked with the professional negotiators at the Ohio School Boards Association and a few Central Ohio School District Superintendents. The sentiment is near universal that given this new minimum requirement, it is only a matter of time (no pun intended) before we all get there.

Even if the local union doesn't attempt to use this new flexibility as a bargaining chip, it is possible, even likely, that financial constraints could force the issue. Of course, a local school board wouldn't want to cut days from the school year any more than they want to cut busing, bands or sports but if given a choice between cutting days, cutting staff or cutting programs, what do you think would happen and once those days are cut, it would be difficult and costly to bring them back.

My final argument comes from that state up north where Michigan did exactly what you are contemplating. Back in 2003-2004, Michigan had, as most states including Ohio have now, a 180 day minimum school year. After passage of Michigan Public Act 158 which eliminated the minimum number of days requirement and substituted a 1098 hour requirement, districts started eliminating school days until finally, in 2007-2008, 98 percent of Michigan districts shortened their school year². You should note that Michigan's minimum requirement is 1098 hours, a full 9.6% higher than that contemplated by this legislation and they still lost days. Finally, last year, the Michigan

² <http://www.iammea.org/awissner/days/lessdays.html>

legislature took action to stop the erosion of the school year and reinstated the minimum day requirement, all be it at 165 days, ratcheted back up to 170 by next school year. Before you decide to move forward with this legislation, please read the Michigan experience at:

<http://www.thecenterformichigan.net/special-report-michigans-incredible-shrinking-school-year/>

Members of the committee, once again, I applaud the policy initiative but question the implementation. I believe it is possible to fashion legislation that provides the flexibility to local school districts but does not allow the dramatic shortening of the school year.

While I've got your ear, I also need to speak out against the component of HB191 that requires a school district to jump through hoops to start school prior to Labor Day and in this, I do speak for my board and my administration. This legislation and the resulting annual ritual of requesting the waiver would be an unnecessary and unwelcome distraction for already overburdened school district administrators. In Worthington, we have a calendar committee with representation from different segments of our community (usually, people who have complained about previous calendars). The committee creates calendars literally years ahead of time and the public has, again, years to comment on them. If at some future date, the waiver provision was removed and Worthington had to adapt, it would be done at the expense of the timing we've put in place to maximize instructional time ahead of state mandated assessments. In my 7 years on the board, I've never heard a complaint that we start school ahead of Labor Day. If there is a problem you are trying to solve in my district, it's not obvious.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my prepared statement and I'd be glad to try and answer any questions you may have.

Time for school

Starting this fall, Dublin high-school students will get another 35 minutes to rest before heading to school. They join a handful of high schools that start just as late. The expected bell times for students in the 2011-12 school year:

SCHOOL DISTRICT	START	DISMISSAL
Bexley	7:54 a.m.	3:10 p.m.
Canal Winchester	7:30 a.m.	2:20 p.m.
Columbus	Varies 7:15 to 7:30 a.m.	Varies 2:30 to 2:45 p.m.
Dublin	8 a.m.	2:54 p.m.
Gahanna-Jefferson	7:35 a.m.	2:50 p.m.
Grandview Heights	8 a.m.	3 p.m.
Granville	8 a.m.	2:50 p.m.
Groveport Madison*	7:30 a.m.	2:10 p.m.
Hamilton	7:15 a.m.	2:15 p.m.
Hilliard	7:45 a.m.	2:37 p.m.
Marysville*	7:15 a.m.	2:32 p.m.
New Albany-Plain	7:30 a.m.	2:30 p.m.
Olentangy	7:20 a.m.	Varies 2:35 to 2:37 p.m.
Pickerington	7:20 a.m.	1:40 p.m.
Reynoldsburg	7:25 a.m.	2:20 p.m.
South-Western	8 a.m.	3:20 p.m.
Upper Arlington	8:05 a.m.	3:05 p.m.
Westerville	7:45 a.m.	2:11 p.m.
Whitehall	8 a.m.	3 p.m.
Worthington	7:45 a.m.	3:05 p.m.

* Schedules for the 2010-11 school year.

School start and end times are under review and could change this fall.

Sources: school districts