

KENTUCKY SCHOOL UPDATES

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SCHEDULES AND CALENDARS

THE BASICS OF THE LAW

- State law requires that the minimum school term include 185 days, including the equivalent of 175 six-hour instructional days. The 2006 General Assembly added two instructional days to the calendar by mandating that the equivalent of 177 six-hour instructional days be included for the 2007-08 school years. The legislature provided \$32.6 million in the budget to assist schools in adding those days.
- Neither the law nor the regulation requires schools or districts to implement alternative calendars. Decisions about changing school calendars are left to local districts. The 1994 General Assembly passed a resolution asking the Kentucky Department of Education to promote the idea of **year-round school calendars** and assist schools and districts in gathering information. The purpose was to encourage educators to think about using time in more effective ways to support student learning.
- The 1996 General Assembly gave schools **more flexibility** in setting school calendars (length of the school year and school day) as long as 1,050 hours of instruction are provided for students each year. This is equal to 175 six-hour days and includes flexibility for half-day students as long as 525 hours of instruction are provided. With the additional two days beginning in 2007-08, schools must provide 1,062 hours of instruction for full-day students and 531 for half-day students.
- The law also requires that year-round or alternative school programs begin no earlier than July 1 and end no later than June 30.

RESULTS

- A few school districts have implemented full-fledged **year-round calendars** (meaning they have 8 weeks or less of summer break) and 161 school districts have modified their calendars by adding fall breaks of a few days to as many as three weeks. These schools and districts are required to have the same amount of instructional time for students, but use a different schedule to put in that time.
- A school district may **dismiss students early** one day a week, allowing teachers time for planning together. The district might add more days to the calendar to make up the time lost or add more minutes to each school day.
- **The Kentucky Association for Year Round Education**, created in 1996, can provide assistance to schools and districts interested in adopting alternative calendars. See below for contact information.

- **Block scheduling** has been adopted by many high schools. Students have fewer subjects with longer class periods each day and complete courses in one semester. Instead of six one-hour classes, students might have four 90-minute classes or different classes on different days. There are several variations of block scheduling.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- ✍ School districts have formed **local task forces** to study ways to use school time more efficiently and effectively. They review research about how the school day, week, and year can be reorganized to enhance student learning and support teachers by providing more time for planning and professional development. Some districts have studied the issues and decided against alternate calendars. It is important for each district to consider its own student and community needs in making these changes.
- ✍ Early **lessons learned** by schools and districts that should be considered when studying changes in scheduling include:
 - ✓ make sure there is adequate time to plan before changing to a different schedule
 - ✓ involve all persons and groups who are affected by these changes such as teachers, parents, and students, as well as community, business, and church leaders
 - ✓ use a decision-making process that is fair and based on the needs of the local community
 - ✓ realize that such changes challenge local culture and traditions
 - ✓ be sure teachers reorganize their lesson plans to cover the same material in different ways
 - ✓ make sure changes are made for the right reason — to improve academic achievement for students

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- ★ **Ask** if your district or any schools in your district are considering a different schedule. Ask about the purpose of those considerations. Is it to improve student learning, decrease costs, or use the available building space more efficiently and perhaps avoid building new schools?
- ★ If your school or district has adopted an alternative schedule, **ask** what has happened as a result of those changes.
- ★ **Volunteer** to serve on a committee that is studying these issues. If your school has adopted an alternative calendar, **ask** how it has affected student learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

- **Kentucky Association for Year Round Education**, 502-349-7000.
- **Kentucky Department of Education**, (502) 564-4718 or visit the Web site at <http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Default.htm>.
- **Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence**, P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588-1658; (859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111; e-mail: admin@prichardcommittee.org or visit the Web site at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org/>.

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