

School's out again, but just wait until June

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EASTON — School is out again tomorrow for Talbot, Caroline, Kent and Dorchester counties, and there is a 90-minute delay today in Queen Anne's County with no morning pre-kindergarten.

Many Mid-Shore students have had an entire week off, but they may not be as joyful when they find themselves sitting in a hot classroom for more days in June than they anticipated.

According to Maryland law, the school year must be at least 180 days long.

Dr. Henry Wagner, superintendent of Dorchester County Schools, said five snow days had been built into the schedule, with a last day of school on Tuesday, June 10.

Dorchester County will have six snow days this year, including tomorrow. They had a snow day in December, one earlier this January, and four this week.

“After today, any full snow day off will extend the last day of school past June 10,” Wagner said Thursday.

In Talbot County, the original last day of school was Wednesday, June 11, but the weather has changed all that. Talbot declared a snow day on December 10, January 3, and three days this week.

This week Talbot students have had an entire week off, including Monday and Tuesday for a holiday and teacher-in-service day.

There were no snow days built into Talbot's schedule, so as of tomorrow, the last day of school has been extended to Wednesday, June 18.

There have also been six days when there has been a 90-minute delay, but those still count as full school days, according to the law.

Jeff Straight, spokesman for Queen Anne's County Public Schools, said the school system has used four snow days as of Thursday, and with five snow days built into the calendar, the last day of school for them is still tentatively Thursday, June 12.

Straight indicated that he thought it more than likely that all five snow days will be used and possibly more, but the school system usually tries to keep the last day of school constant.

In the past, Queen Anne's County schools have used scheduled days off for Presidents Day, spring break and Memorial Day to make up the difference.

Caroline County's last day of school is tentatively a half-day on Friday, June 13.

Students in Caroline stayed home one day in December due to the threat of inclement weather.

This week they were off from school for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday holiday on Monday and also on Tuesday for an in-service teacher day.

Caroline students were out of school Wednesday through today for inclement weather and county schools will be closed again tomorrow.

That makes a total of four snow days for Caroline. Any more and the last day of school could possibly extend into the week of June 16.

An exception could be granted if Gov. O'Malley declares a weather-related "State of Emergency."

In that case, a school system can request a waiver for those special circumstances and the state can grant an exception that the lost school day does not need to be made up.

"Usually we don't make a final decision until the end of March or beginning of April," Tina Brown said about the final determination of the last day of school. Brown is the assistant superintendent of instruction for Caroline County Public Schools.

For youngsters who have cabin fever or whose parents need to work, the YMCA of the Chesapeake in Easton offers a "school's out" day program on those emergency snow days.

The cost is \$25 for members and \$40 for non-members.

"We try to open up as quickly as possible for the parents that need to get to work," Jennifer Ainsworth said, who is chief operating officer of the YMCA of the Chesapeake.

Young people need to bring their lunch and will need to fill out paperwork and get signatures releasing them to swim and take part in activities.

"We try to keep them busy and warm so their parents don't have to worry and can go about their day," Ainsworth said.

Rock climbing, swimming and indoor games are part of the program.

The Easton branch is the only location where the program is offered on snow days, but on holidays it is planned at several other branches of the YMCA of the Chesapeake.