

New twists on making up snow days

Districts in several states are turning to online learning to make up for missed class time.

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The winter of record cold and heavy snow nationwide is finally over, but its impact persists even as students begin the countdown to summer break.

School systems in at least 10 states and the District of Columbia used up all of the year's allotted snow days by mid-February, according to the Associated Press. Now, schools are making up lost time by cutting vacations and professional development days, logging online learning hours, and even holding Saturday classes, according to a survey from the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization of the nation's largest districts.

Minneapolis Public Schools, which canceled classes six times this winter, has held school on two days that had been scheduled for parent-teacher conferences. It also offered its first K8 Spring Break Academy over April vacation to help students at risk of not passing state tests catch up on core subjects such as reading and math, says district spokesperson Rachel Hicks.

The snow days also have a financial impact: The closures in Minneapolis will likely cost the district millions of dollars, Hicks says. "Every day of school is an expensive venture," she says. "You're paying thousands of dollars in staff time and student meals. Even if we don't have students in school that day, we still have to pay for those things." The brutal winter also drove up snow removal and heating costs.

Most states let districts decide how to make up snow days. Administrators generally do not want to extend school into June or July because buildings get hot and students have started summer jobs, says Kathie Christie, spokesperson for the [Education Commission of the States](#).

To avoid this, districts in Ohio, Illinois, West Virginia, Indiana and Pennsylvania turned to online learning in lieu of time in school. In Ohio, districts that exhaust their five annual "calamity" days can use up to three e-learning days, during which students read through online lessons and complete assignments at home to meet class-time requirements. As of February, 246 districts had used that option, said John Charlton, the Ohio Department of Education spokesperson.

Most states require districts to provide 180 days of instruction each year. But this winter's abnormally harsh conditions led some states—including Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio and South Carolina—to let districts forgo making up all their snow days. More states are expected to do the same, Christie says.

To deal with future weather disruptions, some states may move from instructional days required to instructional hours. "This gives districts more flexibility in making up lost time," Christie says. Districts in states that adopt this model could add hours to the school day to make up lost time, rather than adding full days to the calendar, she adds.

Iowa passed a law in March that changes schools to required hours to recover lost time, Christie says.