



## Mounds View school changes times by a few minutes -- and saves big bucks

By Beth Hawkins | Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010

Next year, the Mounds View school day will start five minutes earlier and end five minutes later. And while students will probably always watch in agony as the clock ticks toward the last bell, pretty much everybody else is excited about the change.

The extra 10 minutes a day mean Mounds View can do away with unpopular half days, which will become regular school release days. Because buses don't run when there's no school, the district will save an estimated \$125,000 a year.

"Parents have been asking for this for a long time," said Barbara Mundis, who had two daughters in Mounds View Public Schools.



Mounds View's six elementary, three middle and two high schools serve some 10,000 students who live in the cities of Arden Hills, Mounds View, New Brighton, North Oaks, Roseville, Shoreview and Vadnais Heights.

Like many districts, Mounds View has long accommodated teacher training, student testing and other periodic schedule-crashers by scheduling a handful of half days during the school year. The practice is frustrating to parents, who had to figure out how to care for kids for the other half of the day. Making matters worse, the schedule was different for the district's elementary and secondary schools, so a family with a child in each might end up scrambling to figure out how to transport and occupy kids on twice as many days.

"They were a logistical nightmare," said Mundis. "It's easier to plan for a full day off than a half day."

Administrators were aware of parents' irritation, but couldn't figure out how to fix the problem without running afoul of a state law that says school districts cannot reduce the amount of instructional time from the number of hours school was in session in 1996. A longer school year was out of the question: Minnesota says schools can't start before Labor Day, and Mounds View long ago abandoned an experiment with keeping kids until the third week in June.

"It was awful," said John Ward, Mounds View's director of human resources and operations. "The public wasn't happy, the kids were angry."

**Grateful parents**

Curiously, state law does not spell out how many hours school must be in session each year or how those hours are scheduled, just that the number not decrease. This idiosyncrasy means Mounds View schools are in session the equivalent of 168 days a year, while other districts offer a few more or a few less.

On Jan. 12, the Mounds View school board voted to start the new schedule in the 2010-11 academic year. So far, the only feedback board members and administrators report is e-mail from grateful parents.

The move wasn't prompted by fiscal belt-tightening, but the money the district will save on bussing — the equivalent of one and a half teacher salaries — is certainly welcome, Ward added.

Mounds View isn't the first Minnesota school district to look at reducing bussing as a potential budget-healer. Prompted by the high cost of fuel and budget deficits, four rural districts this year switched to a four-day week. MACCRAY, which serves students in the west central communities of Maynard, Clara City and Raymond, added an hour to each remaining day to make up for the shorter week.

Minneapolis Public Schools also recently eliminated half-days for high schoolers and will add 15 minutes to the day at some schools starting next year. The half-days were equally unpopular with Minneapolis parents, said Jackie Turner, MPS' executive director of student engagement, while the longer school days are an attempt to iron out a scheduling wrinkle that meant longer days for some kids than for others.

*Beth Hawkins writes about education and other topics.*

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