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## Extended summer break in '09 adds school days to June 2010

Because of a late-in-the-month Labor Day, next year's school calendar will stretch well into June in many districts.

By **NORMAN DRAPER**, Star Tribune

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The 2009-2010 school year will stretch deep into summer for many school districts, according to calendars recently approved by school boards.

That will put many districts perilously close to the dreaded third week in June, a time of family vacations, summer jobs and summer activities.

"There was a year when we went into the third week of June," said John Ward, Mounds View schools' director of human resources and operations, and the district's school calendar guy. "It was awful."

What could be the saving grace of next year's arrangement for many kids and parents is an extended summer vacation this year. With Labor Day falling on the latest possible date, and the apparent failure of a measure before the Legislature to allow schools to start before Labor Day, most students will be heading back to school

Sept. 8.

To accommodate the late starting date, school officials have had to push the end of the 2009-2010 school year as deep into June as they dare.

"June 10 is very late," Jeff Dehler, Robbinsdale schools spokesman, said about the district's graduation day for the class of 2010. "It's six days later than this year." The last day of classes in Robbinsdale is June 3 this year. Next year, it's June 9.

Schedulers haven't just pushed the school year later into June. In some districts, to make up for lost days in early September, they've had to trim winter break.

In Anoka-Hennepin schools, for instance, students will get eight school days off -- from Dec. 23 through Jan. 4 -- next school year. This past Christmas and New Year's, and the year before, Anoka-Hennepin students got a full two weeks. Schedulers in Mounds View have done the same thing.

In contrast, Robbinsdale decided to give students a full two weeks. That, Dehler said, is because too many kids don't show up anyway if the district schedules them for a few days during Christmas week.

"We've looked at winter break and tried to shorten it," Dehler said. "We've found that if we

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just have two days of school in a week, attendance is just atrocious. We want to make sure that every kid comes to school every day."

School schedulers must also consider the number of classroom days each district requires, and the number of teacher work days required in the contracts with teacher unions. In Anoka-Hennepin, for instance, there are 173 classroom days for secondary school students and 172 for elementary school students. Robbinsdale requires 170 instructional days.

Mounds View's Ward said the school board was originally presented two calendar scenarios: the one that got adopted, and the other that would have begun the school year Aug. 31 and ended it June 4. That second scenario would have been adopted had the Legislature acted on a proposal to allow school districts to start school before Labor Day.

Currently, in deference to Minnesota's tourism industry, school cannot start before Labor Day except under certain circumstances. A proposal this year that would have allowed schools to set their own starting dates was defeated in a legislative committee and appears doomed. That means school in Mounds View ends June 11 next year.

What school schedulers generally don't do is mess around with spring break. Although spring break is a moveable vacation, often shifting in

accordance with Easter and state testing dates, it is rare that it gets cut to less than a week.

"There has been talk about whether we should continue with the current [spring break] model," Ward said. "But when the dust settles, we haven't made any changes to it. ... You get the idea that parents, students, and teachers need a break in the spring."


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