

Are Ohio kids in class enough? Republican bill would expand school instructional hours

By **Laura Hancock**
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio - A state House bill is in the works to expand Ohio school instructional hours to address what the sponsor believes is a declining amount of time students spend with teachers.

State Rep. Adam Bird, a suburban Cincinnati Republican who will sponsor the bill, said student class time decreased after Ohio switched from requiring a minimum 180 days of school per year to an annual minimum number of instructional hours by grade band.

"They've increased spring break. They've now added a fall break. They've now added a winter break or a lengthier winter break, and there are more three-day weekends," said Bird, a former teacher, principal and superintendent. "And so I want to stop the decline."

The bill, which Bird expected to introduce Thursday, would do the following:

- For grades 7-12: The current minimum of 1,001 instructional hours would increase by 53 hours to a total of 1,054 hours a year.

- For students in full-day kindergarten and in grades 1-6: Currently required to receive a minimum of 910 instructional hours, the bill would also require 53 more hours a year, bringing the total hours to 963 hours a year.

- For half-day kindergarteners: The bill would require an additional 27 hours, bringing total minimum instructional time to 482 from the current 455 hours.

These hours requirements apply to public and most private schools.

Charter schools, which are publicly funded and privately run schools, are required to offer 920 "learning opportunity hours" a year. A learning opportunity hour can include a goal-oriented classroom and non-classroom educational activity provided by a licensed teacher.

It's unclear whether private schools and charter schools will also have to comply with the hour increases in the bill.

[The state defines "Instructional hours"](#) as class time, assemblies, other approved educational options and co-curricular activities during the scheduled school day. Lunch periods, recess and extra-curriculars outside of the school day do not count as instructional time.

In 2014, when the state switched from the minimum 180 days a year to the minimum hours of instructional time, Bird believes a slide began.

If high schoolers receive 6 hours and 15 minutes of instructional time a day, under the minimum 1,001 hours, they only have 160 days a year, Bird said.

Bird said he researched a handful of other states and found they have more minimum instructional hours: [Kentucky requires](#) 1,062 hours a year; [Michigan](#) requires 1,098 hours; [Texas](#) requires 1,260.

He said South Korea requires 1,300 hours.

"The point is the time matters, and the more time students spend in meaningful learning, the better that they're going to perform academically, the better that they're going to perform socially, the better that they're going to bring the soft skills to their employment later on in life," Bird said.

Bird said he is working on an amendment that would state that schools must follow collective bargaining agreements until they expire. Then they would be required to follow the new requirements.

Bird said he doesn't have any data on how many schools are meeting for the minimum amount of time, versus those adding additional hours.

In December, the General Assembly passed a bill that will require all school districts to pass a policy allowing [students to leave mid-school day for released time for religious instruction](#).

That also limits instruction time.

"We continue to move down this path of allowing additional released time, not only for (religious instruction) but for 4-H experiences and a wide variety of things that are valid," Bird said. "Whether it's field trips, college visits, we are allowing all of those things to happen."

It's unclear if the bill has momentum in the legislature.

The Ohio Education Association hasn't yet seen the language of the bill, said its President Scott DiMauro in a statement.

"That said, OEA is concerned by any proposal to create another large unfunded mandate on Ohio's public schools - especially when many Ohio districts face a large decrease in state funding in the state budget, House Bill 96," he said. "HB 96, as introduced, relies on cost data that is three years out of date. Without updated data, the formula is broken."

Bird, who is sponsoring the bill with Republican state Rep. Josh Williams of suburban Toledo, said he's discussed the legislation with all the Republicans in the Ohio House and with key lawmakers in the Senate.

Bird said he's never heard a parent complain about the school day being too long.

"Parents have to work," Williams said. "And we're simply saying, 'Hey, while parents are at work, let's get the best maximum outcome for students, which is adding a few extra hours to the requirement of the minimum.'"