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New report laments lost classroom time at Mid-Hudson schools

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NEW PALTZ >> A study by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz has found state efforts to provide elementary and secondary school students with 180 days of classroom instruction per academic year is eroded by weather, standardized testing and training time for teachers.

The research by Robin Jacobowitz, who also is a member of the Kingston school board, was issued this week in a [report called "Erosion of Instructional Time"](#) that says a review of six Mid-Hudson schools found high school students miss about 14 days of class time per academic year while elementary schoolers lose about 9.5 days.

"This just shines a light on the issue that we have a certain amount of time set aside for instructional days in New York state and you don't use all that time," Jacobowitz said. "Conventional wisdom is that we have 180 days, but we don't.

This [research] is to show how it's used and ... the trade-offs that we make."

Among the reasons for lost class time cited in the study are weather-related delayed openings and early dismissals, which has a cumulative impact of about four lost days per school year. The impact is similar from the four shortened days allowed under state law for teacher training, conferencing with families and professional development, the study says.

The study found that between four and five days are lost to superintendents' conference days; another one to two days are given up for school activities and special events; and seven to 12 days are dedicated to testing.

"There are trade-offs for understandable reasons, but let's be deliberative about that and let's think about that and let's talk about it," Jacobowitz said.

"When you put together the number of Regents [exam] days, and that varies from district to district, it's a lot of time those kids aren't receiving instruction," she said. "Yes, they are taking tests, and I get that, but that's a lot of time. It adds up, you don't get that back, and it happens every year."

Jacobowitz said the study was not intended to encourage fewer snow days.

"We're not advocating that you drive on snow-covered roads," she said. "But if know we're going to lose a certain amount of time to that every year, let's think about how we're structuring our school year."

The report says some of the lost time does not have a clear rationale.

"In some school districts, the last few days of elementary and middle school are shortened instructions, during which students are dismissed but teachers are not," the report states. "[One district] has four shortened days during this last week of school (but) this contractual obligation does not specify how the time will be used."

The study notes there also is lost time that can't be accurately measured, such as unplanned interruptions in the school day.

"Such unplanned interruptions come in many forms, from the Santa who walks up and down the halls before winter break to the fire truck demonstrating its siren on fire safety day and disrupting students even when it is not their class' turn to visit with the fire safety officers," the report states.

Also, the report states, "we know it is a special treat to watch the occasional movie in class or to have parties to celebrate the many holidays that occur throughout the year. We believe that there is a place for those special events. Nevertheless, we also believe that these special events are sometimes too plentiful."

Jacobowitz declined to identify the school districts used in the study, which she said was done at the request of a local foundation.

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