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Weather threatens students' vacations

By Matt Rocheleau and Jenna Duncan
Globe Correspondents / January 28, 2011

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Two more snow days could require Boston public schools to cut into student vacation time to make up for lost instruction time.

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Extending the year into July, however, is not an option because the city's contract with the teachers union does not allow it, said Matthew Wilder, a School Department spokesman.

Yesterday marked the fourth snow-related school cancellation in the past two weeks. Superintendent Carol R. Johnson said in a statement that "considering it is only January, we may have to begin looking at days already reserved as school vacation days later in the school year, to make up these missed days."

All public schools in Massachusetts are required to hold 180 days of classes each academic year. School districts account for cancellations by using a 185-day schedule, leaving a five-day cushion at the end of the year.

With no snow days, Hub students would have been dismissed for the summer on June 21. But with yesterday's cancellation, they will not be able to belt out Alice Cooper's "School's Out" until June 27, a Monday.

One more cancellation would push the academic year to June 28. If Boston has a sixth cancellation, the city might target vacation time before July 1 for make-ups.

"If we have a couple more, we're going to have to look at other ways to make these up," said Wilder. "At this stage, I think everything is on the table."

State Education Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester is not granting waivers to the state's

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180-day requirement at this point in the school year, Education Department

spokesman JC Considine said yesterday.

"There is still time for districts that have had to close for multiple days to adjust their calendars to ensure that our students do not lose out on valuable learning time," Considine said.

He said state law does not prohibit districts from extending the year beyond June 30, although collective-bargaining agreements or local ordinances can prevent districts, like Boston, from pushing the academic year into July."

Before yesterday, Boston schools shut down because of snow on Jan. 12, 13, and 21.

"We are well aware that closing school is not optimal for our families and our students," Johnson said in announcing the latest cancellation.

"However, the safety of our students," she said, "must be our first priority at all times."

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