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Darker mornings ahead for students if state switches to year-round daylight saving time

By MEGAN OLSEN Standard-Examiner

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A senate bill proposing that Utah move to **daylight saving time year-round**, eliminating the biannual time change, **would mean more dark mornings** for K-12 students in Utah, many of whom attend schools with early start times.

The Senate passed the bill, SB 59, and sent it to the House for consideration on Feb. 11, though it's far from a done deal. Sponsored by Sen. Wayne Harper of Salt Lake and Rep. Raymond Ward of Bountiful, the bill calls for the switch only if the U.S. Congress allows states to move to daylight saving time year-round and four other Western states also make the change.

Such a change would mean that Utah would stay on "forward" time all year, which currently occurs from early to mid-March through early November, when the state falls back to standard time.

"Twenty-six other states so far have introduced similar bills based on these findings," said Sen. Harper, in a Senate press release. "After studying the best available data on the pros and cons, avoiding bi-yearly clock changes is best for Utah citizens as long as there is uniformity in surrounding states."

Eliminating the biannual time change would reduce accidents, the release says, which rise by 6% the day after the "spring forward" change in March. In addition, the release says that brighter evenings benefit retail and tourism industries while allowing people to recreate later in the evening.

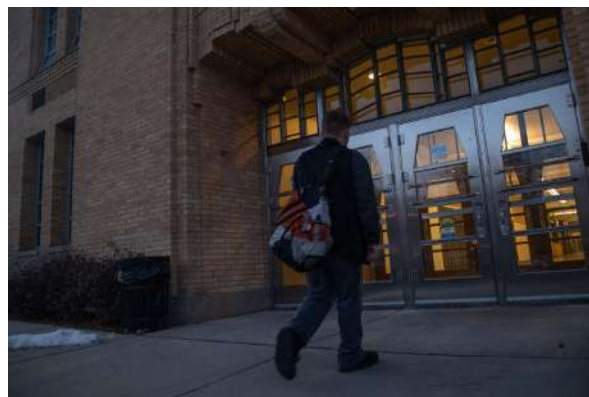
"Teachers report that our young children have the most difficult time adjusting" to the spring time change, according to the release.

If Utah were to move to year-round daylight saving time, students would have to adjust in a different way.

High school students, who face start times as early as 7:30 a.m. in Northern Utah, have long been traveling to school in the dark during the fall and winter. But **year-round "forward" time would increase the length of the darkness in the morning and the number of days per year that students would be starting their studies in darkness or early twilight.**



Ogden High School is seen at 6:40 A.M., 38 minutes before sunrise, on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020. If Utah were currently on year-round daylight saving time, as has been proposed in the Utah legislature, **this is when Ogden High students would be arriving at school.**



Ogden High School junior Ilario Rodriguez arrives to school around 7 A.M. on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020, 18 minutes before sunrise. If Utah were currently on year-round daylight saving time, as has been proposed in the Utah legislature, Ogden High would be 15 minutes into the school's first class when he arrived.

Under Utah's current combination of standard and daylight saving time, a school start time of 7:30 a.m. would occur at or before the beginning of Civil Twilight (about 30 minutes before sunrise, when light is starting to be visible) on only one day of the year during the 2020-2021 school year — Oct. 31, the day before the state falls back to standard time, according to twilight times from Time and Date (timeanddate.com).

To consider a hypothetical, if the state were to move to year-round daylight saving time during the 2020-2021 academic year, a school start time of 7:30 a.m. would occur at or before the beginning of Civil Twilight for 124 days from Oct. 31-March 3, including holidays and weekends.

An Ogden High student returning to school from winter break at 7:40 a.m on Jan. 4, 2021, would sit in class for about 40 minutes before Civil Twilight began — and for more than an hour before sunrise at 8:53 a.m.

While the problem is magnified for high school students, they wouldn't be the only grade level affected. Darkness would also reach into the school days of elementary students, even though elementary schools tend to start later than junior high and high schools.

Students arriving at Ogden's Horace Mann Elementary for breakfast at 8 a.m. on Jan. 4, 2021, would get there in the dark, 22 minutes before Civil Twilight began and 53 minutes before sunrise.

Schools with start times of 8 a.m., more typical of elementary schools, would start at or before the beginning of twilight from Nov. 28, 2020 through Feb. 9, 2021 — an increase of 73 days compared to standard time, when this would never occur.

Some districts in Utah are considering delaying high school start times because of recommendations from the medical community that later times would better align with adolescent biology.

The day before SB 59 passed in the Senate, the House passed a concurrent resolution, HCR 3, "encourag(ing) school districts and charter schools to consider the possible benefits and consequences of a later start to the school day for high schools."

Because of busing logistics, districts that delay high school start times often must move up the start times for elementary schools — which would mean that the previously discussed scenarios for high school students could potentially apply to much younger children.

Weber School District will soon be convening a committee to consider the delay of start times for high schools, according to Lane Findlay, community relations specialist for the district. If legislation on daylight saving time passes, this would factor into committee discussions, Findlay said.

There hasn't been discussion of SB 59 among transportation officials or district leadership in Davis School District, said Chris Williams, director of communications for the district. The district did attempt to launch a pilot program during the 2016-17 school year allowing high school students to start school later, he said, but not enough students signed up to run the pilot. Since that time, the issue has not resurfaced, Williams said.

Ogden has not seen considerable demand from the community to delay start times for high schools, said Jer Bates, director of communications for the district.

"School schedules, particularly the idea of later start times for secondary students, is something that has been discussed by district leadership in recent years and would naturally warrant further discussion with a change to the traditional daylight saving model," Bates said in an email. "We would engage all stakeholders to help determine if scheduling changes would be in the best interest of our schools."

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