



COLORADO
Department of Education

School District Calendar and Instructional Hours Guidance

Submitted to:

Colorado Public School Districts, Charter Schools, Charter School Collaboratives, Charter School Networks, The
Charter School Institute (CSI) and Colorado Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)

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We hope you find this document helpful in setting your school district and individual school calendars for the upcoming year. This guidance does not replace state statute or state board rule. Based on our experience auditing compliance with the Public School Finance Act, the examples included herein represent some commonly asked questions received from school districts. As required by 1 CCR 301-39-2.05(2), this guidance is issued by the Commissioner of Education. All variances or waivers from this guidance should be submitted to the Commissioner.

As always, the [School Auditing Office](#) is available to assist your district throughout the school year; please reach out to the office at any time.

Colorado Revised Statutes, www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/colorado/
Code of Colorado Regulations, www.sos.state.co.us/CCR/Welcome.do



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Introduction

Pursuant to § 22-32-109(1)(n), C.R.S. and 1 CCR 301-39-2.05(2), the local board of education shall provide for the adoption of a district calendar (and individual school calendars, where appropriate) that provides the minimum number of student contact days and instructional hours required of each school within the district.

In an effort to assist districts, the following guidance addresses some commonly asked questions related to these requirements. The guidance offered in this document is intended to help districts design and implement school-level calendars which are in compliance with state statute. These requirements are separate and distinct from the calendar and bell schedule funding calculations described in the Student October Count Audit Resource Guide. Although districts must ensure that each member school meets the instructional day and hour minimums, state funding is determined at the individual student level. As always, districts are encouraged to refer to the corresponding state statute.

Throughout this document, the ▲ symbol has been used to denote sections where language has been altered or clarified.



Minimum School Days in Session

Pursuant to § 22-32-109(1)(n), C.R.S., each district school must be in session for a minimum of 160 days (“student contact days”), unless the district is approved for an annual Reduced Academic Calendar Request through the Data Pipeline Application process.

Districts seeking approval to have a Reduced Academic Calendar resulting in fewer than 160 scheduled student contact days must submit an annual application through the Data Pipeline during the spring preceding the start of the proposed school year. For more information, please refer to the [“Reduced Academic Calendar Information”](#) webpage. **Districts receiving approval to operate on a reduced academic calendar must still meet the Minimum Instructional Hours requirement described below.**

*Please note: Calendars that meet the minimum 160 day requirement, including those on a four-day week or other alternative schedules that include at least 160 student contact days, do not need to apply for a Reduced Calendar Request.

In developing calendars for district schools, the following guidance should be considered:

- Half or partial instructional days may be included as student contact days for the purpose of meeting the 160-day minimum requirement.
 - For example: High School A is scheduled to be in session 158 full days and 2 half days. In this scenario, High School A is in compliance since the school is scheduled to be in session for 160 days (158 full days + 2 half days = 160 total student contact days).
- Only those dates in which attendance is mandatory should be counted toward meeting the requirement. Optional days, such as a “study day” when some students may receive additional help from teachers but are not required to attend, should not be counted.
- Different grade levels will commonly have different total numbers of required days. In determining the number of student contact days, so long as one entire grade at the school is required to attend, the day may be counted as a student contact day.
 - Example 1: All grade levels at Middle School A are scheduled to attend 163 days; however, incoming 6th graders are required to attend two days of orientation before the other students’ first day. The school should count 165 student contact days (163 all student days + 2 6th grade orientation days).
 - Example 2: At High School B, seniors are dismissed five days prior to the other grades in order to prepare for graduation. High School B should base its student contact day count upon the other grades and apply it to the whole school; a separate calculation for seniors is not necessary.
- Student-led conference days should not be included when determining the total number of student contact days.



Minimum Instructional Hours

Pursuant to § 22-32-109(1)(n), at the start of each school year, each school within a district must be scheduled to provide for the minimum number of hours of planned teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact during the school year as listed below:

- Secondary schools: **1,080 hours** (middle, junior high or high school)
- Elementary schools: **990 hours**
- Half-day Kindergarten: **450 hours**
- Full-day Kindergarten: **900 hours**
- Colorado Preschool Program (CPP): **360 hours**

These scheduled hours minimums must be met by every school within a district, including schools in districts that have been granted waivers to the 160-day minimum school day requirement.

Once the school year begins, the actual student contact days and instructional hours shall be tracked against the scheduled student contact days and planned instructional hours to ensure continuing compliance with the statute.

The number of instructional hours actually provided by a school may be reduced, up to a prescribed limit, for the following reasons: (1) parent/teacher conferences; (2) staff in-service programs, and (3) closings deemed by the board to be necessary for the health, safety, or welfare of pupils.

These are the minimum instructional hours that must actually be provided during a school year, including adjustments for the reasons listed above:

- Secondary schools: **1,056 hours** (middle, junior high or high school)
- Elementary schools: **968 hours**
- Half-day Kindergarten: **435 hours**
- Full-day Kindergarten: **870 hours**
- Universal Preschool (UPK): **360 hours (8 CCR 1404-1, Rule 4.109.A.1)**

Elementary schools are generally those that support grades 1-5 and secondary schools are those that support grades 6-12. In the event a school serves grades that include both levels (elementary and secondary), then each board of education shall establish the definition of “middle school” for purposes of the 1,080 requirement. In the absence of such definition, CDE applies the following criteria, used by the CDE Assessment Unit, to determine whether the 1,080 or 990 hour requirements would apply:

- No grade can stand alone
- 5th grade must always be elementary
- 8th grade must always be secondary



The following outlines the Assessment Unit's criteria for various grade ranges:

- K-6 school:
 - All grades would be held to the elementary hours requirement
- K-7 school:
 - Grades K through 5 would be held to the elementary hours requirement
 - Grades 6 through 7 would be held to the secondary hours requirement
- K-8 school:
 - Grades K through 5 would be held to the elementary hours requirement
 - Grades 6 through 8 would be held to the secondary hours requirement
- 4-8 school:
 - Grades 4 through 5 would be held to the elementary hours requirement
 - Grades 6 through 8 would be held to the secondary hours requirement
- 5-8 school:
 - Grades 5 through 6 would be held to the elementary hours requirement
 - Grades 7 through 8 would be held to the secondary hours requirement
- 6-8 school:
 - All grades would be held to the secondary hours requirement



Calculating a School's Instructional Hours

In order to determine total scheduled instructional hours at a given school, the following steps should be followed:

1. Evaluate each bell schedule that is used by the school to determine the total number of instructional minutes in the day.
 - a. Usually total minutes between the start of the first period and the end of the last period of the day, minus lunch (and passing out of lunch) and any other "non-instructional" time.
2. Determine the number of days in which each bell schedule is followed per the school's calendar.
3. Multiply the total instructional minutes for a given bell schedule by the number of days in which that bell schedule is followed.
4. Add the sum total of all instructional minutes in the year for all bell schedules, and then divide by 60 minutes to determine the number of instructional hours.

Best Practices

- Districts should determine the exact number of scheduled instructional hours as of the start of the school year in order to ensure compliance, and to monitor compliance in the event scheduled student contact days are cancelled or shortened.
- If a scheduled school day is canceled or shortened, the school will need to recalculate the total actual instructional hours because of the lost instructional minutes/hours for the cancelled or shortened school day.
- It is recommended the district allow for more instructional hours than the minimum requirements in order to maximize flexibility in the event a scheduled student contact day is cancelled or shortened for any reason.
- If a school offers multiple bell schedules throughout the day, then the total instructional minutes for each bell schedule may vary by day. It is the district's responsibility to ensure that all students at a given school, regardless of the bell schedule they follow, have the opportunity to receive the minimum number of instructional hours for the school level at which they attend.

Time Outside of the Classroom

According to the § 22-32-109(1)(n), C.R.S., a school must have a certain amount of "teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact" hours. Note: the definitions of instructional day here may be different from what qualifies as instructional time for funding purposes under State Board rule, 1 CCR 301-39.

For purposes of this guidance, those terms are interpreted as follows and referred to as the "instructional day":

- Lunch is not part of the instructional day.
 - ▲ For schools that do not have a scheduled lunch period, and students are scheduled for lunch during a regular class period, one class period and the subsequent passing period should not be included in the calculation of instructional hours.
- Passing periods between two classes, and periods passing from a class to lunch, can both be included as part of the district's instructional day.
- Passing between the end of lunch and the next class is not part of the instructional day.



Subject to Local Board or District Policy

Start and End of the School Day

- The start of the instructional day is the time at which the first scheduled period of the day begins.
 - If a school has periods that begin prior to the arrival of scheduled bus routes to the school, then these periods should not be considered as part of the instructional day.
- The end of the instructional day is the time at which the last scheduled period of the day ends.
 - If a school has periods that do not end prior to scheduled bus routes leaving the school, these periods should not be considered as part of the instructional day.
- If there is a question as to whether a given period, or time during the day, can be included in the instructional day, the district should ask the following question: Do all students have the opportunity to receive instruction during the noted period/time? If the answer is “no,” then this period/time should not be included in the instructional day. Conversely, if all students have the ability to receive instruction during the noted period/time, then it is likely reasonable to assume that the period/time could be included in the instructional time as long as the district does not have existing local board policy that contradicts this.
 - Example 1: A school offers a period “0” that begins at 6:45 a.m. Scheduled bus routes begin arriving at the school at 7:30 a.m. in time for the start of period “1” at 7:45 a.m. In this case, period “0” would not be considered part of the instructional day as not all students (those taking the bus to school) have the opportunity to receive instruction during this period.
 - Example 2: In order to offer a weightlifting class to student athletes, a district offers a period “9” at the end of school, during which only weightlifting class is held. In this case, period “9” would not be considered part of the instructional day, as not all students (non-student athletes) have the opportunity to receive instruction during this period.

Recess, Breaks, and Passing

- Recess, breaks, and passing time between classes (as described above) may be included as part of the instructional day, unless the district’s board of education has a policy that specifically excludes it as part of the instructional day.
- The inclusion of breakfast or “healthy snacks” in the instructional day may vary by school.
 - Example 1: Breakfast or snacks picked up during a passing period and eaten during class time may be included in the instructional day.
 - Example 2: If instructional time is suspended while students go to pick up and eat their breakfast or snack (similar to lunch time), this time may not be included in the instructional day.

Student-Led Conference Days

Student-led conference days should not be included in the determination of total instructional hours unless mandatory attendance is required for all students. In cases where all students are expected to attend, only the amount of time in which students are expected to attend should be included in the instructional day.

- Example: School A has 1 day set aside for student-led conferences in which each student is required to attend 30 minutes during their assigned day. In this case, only 30 minutes would be applied to School A’s instructional hours.



Reliance on Student Information System

In the event a district utilizes a student information system allowing for individual schools to input school calendars and bell schedules, then data pulled from this system may be used to assist the school in determining the scheduled instructional hours for the year. However, the following should be considered:

- Such systems would need to be able to allow the school to identify which bell schedule is followed on each student contact day (per the calendar), and which periods or times on each bell schedule are considered instructional vs non-instructional
- If the system is able to determine total scheduled instructional hours, it may not be able to adjust for professional development, staff in-service days, or days cancelled due to weather, etc. As a result, the school or district will need a process in place for adjusting for the reduction in student count days and/or instructional minutes within a given day

Waivers to the Required Minimums

Districts are required to ensure that all schools remain in compliance. In the event a school falls out of compliance, it must make a good-faith effort to come back into compliance. If the school is unable to come back into compliance before the end of the school year, the district must seek a waiver from the Commissioner of Education to be exempted from the required minimums. These waivers are not granted often, and when they are, it is usually due to circumstances outside the district's control that occur very late in the school year (when there is limited time for the district/school to make arrangements to make up missed instructional time).

For consideration, the district must be able to document that the school has made a good-faith effort to come back into compliance. All waiver requests addressed to the Commissioner should be sent to [Jennifer Okes](mailto:okes_j@cde.state.co.us), Special Assistant to the Chief District Operating Officer, at okes_j@cde.state.co.us.



Illustrative Example Days and Hours Calculation

The following example demonstrates how a hypothetical school with some common calendar variations would calculate their total instructional hours. Schools may use this method (while incorporating the above considerations, as appropriate) in order to determine the scheduled number of instructional days and hours in a school year.

High School A is in session for 170 student contact days. High School A uses 3 bell schedules throughout the school year. Because of the multiple bell schedules, High School A must evaluate each bell schedule separately to determine the number of instructional minutes for each day that the bell schedule is followed. The following steps include the calculation for each bell schedule.

Bell Schedule 1 (“Regular Days”):

- Period 1 starts at 7:30 a.m. / Period 8 ends at 3:30 p.m.
- Lunch is 40 minutes long with 5 minutes passing into the next class
 - Total Minutes in the day: 480 minutes (8 hours)
 - Less Lunch and subsequent passing: 45 minutes
 - Total Instructional Minutes: 435 minutes
- This bell schedule is followed 130 total days during the school year
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 1: 56,550 minutes (435 minutes x 130 days)**

Bell Schedule 2 (“Short Fridays”):

- Period 1 starts at 9:00 a.m. / Period 8 ends at 2:30 p.m.
- Lunch is 25 minutes long with 5 minutes passing into the next class
 - Total Minutes in the day: 330 minutes (5 hours and 30 minutes)
 - Less Lunch and subsequent passing: 30 minutes
 - Total Instructional Minutes: 300 minutes
- This bell schedule is followed 30 total days during the school year
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 2: 9,000 minutes (300 minutes x 30 days)**

Bell Schedule 3 (“Finals”):

- Period 1 starts at 7:30 a.m. / Period 8 ends at 11:30 a.m.
- No lunch
 - Total Minutes in the day: 240 minutes (4 hours)
 - Less Lunch and subsequent passing: 0 minutes
 - Total Instructional Minutes: 240 minutes
- This bell schedule is followed 10 total days during the school year
 - Seniors only follow this schedule for 8 total days, so the calculation is based on grades 9-11
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 3: 2,400 minutes (240 minutes x 10 days)**



Total the 3 Bell Schedules:

Days

- Bell Schedule 1 ("Regular Days") = 130 days
- Bell Schedule 2 ("Short Fridays") = 30 days
- Bell Schedule 3 ("Finals") = 10 days
- **Total scheduled instructional days for High School A = 170 days**

Instructional hours

- Bell Schedule 1 ("Regular Days") = 56,550 minutes
- Bell Schedule 2 ("Short Fridays") = 9,000 minutes
- Bell Schedule 3 ("Finals") = 2,400 minutes
- **Total scheduled instructional hours for High School A = 67,950 minutes or 1,132.5 hours**

Summary:

High School A is starting out the school year in compliance with both requirements. High School A is in session for at least 160 scheduled student contact days AND is scheduled for at least 1,080 hours of planned teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact during the school year.

Further, in the event High School A must cancel scheduled student contact days due to (1) parent/teacher conferences; (2) staff in-service programs, and/or (3) closings deemed by the board to be necessary for the health, safety, or welfare of pupils, High School A has a buffer that will allow for it to remain in compliance.



Emergency School Closures

In the event that an entire school has to close for an unplanned reason (such as a snow day, facility emergency, illness outbreak, etc.), the school may choose to cancel classes. **As long as the school's actual number of student contact days and instructional hours do not fall below the minimums defined in statute**, no further action is needed. If a school, as a result of multiple such closures, will (or may) fall below the defined minimum hours for a given school year, the district must add instructional days to the end of the school year or apply for a waiver from the commissioner (see the "[Waivers to the Required Minimums](#)" section above).

Remote Learning Option as a Result of Emergency School Closure

In certain circumstances, a district may choose to reduce the amount of time lost due to unplanned school closures by implementing a Remote Learning Option as a Result of Emergency School Closures ("Remote Learning Option"). The purpose of the Remote Learning Option is to provide districts and/or schools with an alternative to cancelling or rescheduling student contact days and instructional hours in the event of unexpected emergencies which traditionally have required school closure for the entire student body.

A school may use a maximum of **five (5) Remote Learning Option days** during any school year (July-June). If a school must use more than the maximum days because of extraordinary circumstances, the district must add additional instructional days at the end of the year or follow the normal process for requesting a waiver from the instructional days/hours requirement from CDE (see the "[Waivers to the Required Minimums](#)" section above).

Remote Learning Option days are not a regular part of a school's calendar and should never be scheduled ahead of time. Instead, the Remote Learning Option should be considered a protocol for providing remote instruction when unforeseen circumstances prevent in-person learning and the normal operation of a school. In order to meet the requirements for instructional hours, teaching staff must be available and providing some **synchronous** instruction on Remote Learning Option days, just as they would during a normally scheduled in-person student contact day (see "[Important Considerations](#)" below for details).

For the purposes of this guidance, "synchronous learning" is real-time teacher-to-student instruction.

- This could be in the form of whole class, small group, or one-on-one instruction.
- Examples include live-streaming classes (via Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Conference Calls, etc.), reading groups through a virtual platform, peer-to-peer breakout rooms, other peer-to-peer learning activities, etc.

When the Remote Learning Option Is Appropriate to Use

Remote Learning Option days are only meant to be used in lieu of cancelling a scheduled student contact day deemed to be necessary for the health, safety, or welfare of pupils. Remote Learning Option days are only appropriate in response to unexpected circumstances (such as a weather event); they may not be used to replace student instruction and contact time for scheduled building closures.

Examples of appropriate reasons for using the Remote Learning Option:

- Inclement weather, such as excess snow
- A school flood due to a water main break
- A nearby wildfire makes attending a school unsafe for students
- A security threat has been identified which would prevent students from coming to school
- A school's cafeteria roof collapses



- An infectious disease outbreak requires an entire school to close.

Examples of inappropriate reasons for using the Remote Learning Option:

- A planned construction project does not complete on time
- A teacher Professional Development training is planned
- The school is being used as a voting site during an election or for other planned community functions
- A local festival or event is being held and students are encouraged to attend

Before Implementing a Remote Learning Option Day

Prior to implementing a Remote Learning Option day, districts must meet certain criteria and prepare the following documentation:

- A local board of education policy or resolution that includes Remote Learning Option as a Result of Emergency School Closure in its definition of educational process
- Board policy, resolution, or other governance documentation that describes acceptable ways in which synchronous and asynchronous teacher-pupil instruction and contact time may occur during Remote Learning Option days
- Acceptable ways in which attendance/participation should be documented during Remote Learning Option days

Each school must have a plan in place for how a Remote Learning Option day will be implemented, and this plan must be communicated to all teachers, building staff, parents, and students. This includes but is not limited to:

- Remote Learning Option day bell schedules, which may or may not align with the “normal” bell schedule(s) for that school
- How a Remote Learning Option day will be called and communicated (e.g., email, local radio/news announcement, student portal, etc.)
- Expectations and training for staff members regarding the preparations for and implementation of a Remote Learning Option day
- Training for family members and students (how to access online instruction, how to submit assignments, etc.)
- How devices will be distributed or the expectation for families to access devices during Remote Learning Option days

Important Considerations

- Implementing Remote Learning Option days may not be possible or appropriate for all districts. If a district does not have the resources to provide some synchronous instruction during Remote Learning Option days as described in this document, it is recommended that the district plan for the possibility of falling below the [required instructional hours](#) (due to emergency school closures) by adding time/days to its annual calendar.
- Remote Learning Option days are to be implemented at the school level and may or may not be appropriate for use district-wide, depending on the reason the Remote Learning Option was determined to be necessary.
 - Charter schools can implement Remote Learning Option days independently of their authorizing district, provided that:
 - 1) The charter school meets all of the above requirements for both districts and schools
 - 2) The charter school’s use of a Remote Learning Option Day does not violate the contract between the school and its authorizing district



3) The charter school provides notice to the authorizing district of its intent to implement Remote Learning Option days prior to alerting families

- The expectation for Remote Learning Option days is that student attendance is required and will be taken by the school as described in the district's governance documentation.
- Should a district choose to exercise the Remote Learning Option, it must ensure that all students have equitable access to electronic equipment and resources, including (but not limited to) computer hardware, internet access, and instructional materials required to participate in Remote Learning Option days.
 - *It is important to note that students may not have equitable access to the devices, internet service, and/or family support needed to most effectively engage in a virtual remote learning model that is reliant on technology. The district must work to ensure equitable access to virtual remote learning--particularly for students of color, students/families living in poverty, English language learners and their parents/family, students with disabilities, migrant students, and students experiencing homelessness or in the foster care system.*

Equitable access refers to each student having access to technology, information, and support regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, physical ability, or any other characteristic. In determining equitable access, districts should keep in mind that all applicable federal laws for services for students with disabilities and English language learners are still in effect and should be considered when developing plans for remote learning.

The district will ensure that students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) or Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) who are participating in remote learning will receive accommodations per their IEP or ALP, and districts will do everything possible to provide equitable and appropriate access to instruction and services to these students.

Use of Remote Learning Option Days in Determining Total Instructional Days and Hours

If incorporated as described above:

- Remote Learning Option days may be treated as student contact days when determining if a school has met the minimum 160-day requirement.
- Instructional hours delivered during a Remote Learning Option day may be included in a school's total instructional hours for the year when determining if said minimum requirements have been met.
 - For example, if a Remote Learning Option day offers a total of 5 hours of required participation as described in the [school's plan](#), these hours can be included in the school's overall instructional hours for the year.