

# SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR GUIDANCE

## MINIMUM DAYS AND MINIMUM INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS



### INTRODUCTION

Each year school districts across the state contact the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) seeking clarification regarding the statutory requirements for minimum student contact days and instructional hours. In an effort to assist districts, the following guidance addresses some commonly asked questions related to these requirements. As always, districts are encouraged to refer to the corresponding state statute and board rules outlining these requirements.

Pursuant to state statute and board rules, the local board of education shall provide for the adoption of a district calendar (and individual school calendars, where appropriate) that meet the following minimum requirements for each school within the district:

- Each school is in session for a minimum of 160 days (“student contact days”), ***and***
- Each school is scheduled a minimum number of hours of planned teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact during the school year (“instructional hours”)

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

Planning next year’s schedule: Districts must ensure that all schools are scheduled in compliance with both requirements. In no case shall a school fail to meet these requirements “without the specific prior approval of the commissioner of education.”

During the school year: Districts must ensure that all schools continue to be in compliance during the school year. In extraordinary circumstances set forth in statute, the school district may apply to the commissioner to waive the minimum statutory provisions.

*“If the Department determines that a school district has not complied with the provisions ... the Department shall notify such district in writing of the specific violation and shall state that the district’s accreditation may be revoked or withheld by the Board for such violation.” 1 CCR 301-39-2.01(1).*

We hope you find the guidance helpful in setting your school district and individual school calendars for the upcoming year.

The 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 represent some commonly asked questions received from school districts.

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.

[Contact Us](#)



## MINIMUM SCHOOL DAYS IN SESSION - 160 DAYS

As stated above each school of the district must be in session for a minimum of 160 days (“student contact days”).

The following two points provide answers to most commonly asked questions:

- Half-days may be included as student contact days when determining the 160 day minimum requirement
  - Example. High School A is scheduled to be in session (a) 158 full-days and (b) 2 half-days. In this scenarios, High School A is in compliance since the school is scheduled to be in session for 160 days (158 + 2)
- Student led conference days should not be included when determining the total number of student contact days

## MINIMUM INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS

Each school within a district must be scheduled for 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

The minimum instructional hours may be reduced, by up to 24 hours, 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. The resulting hours, assuming full use of the 24 hours, are shown below:

- 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
- Colorado Preschool Program (CPP): 351 hours

## Defining Elementary and Secondary Schools

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 (1 CCR 301-39-2.06(4)). 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:

- 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

### Defining Planned Teacher-Pupil Instruction and Teacher-Pupil Contact

The district is responsible for defining teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact, and what may be considered in calculating the hours within an instructional day under local board or district policies.

In addition to local board and district policies, the following required limitations must be considered when determining the length of the instructional day:

- Lunch is not part of the instructional day (1 CCR 301-39-2.06(2)(a))
- Passing periods between two classes, and between a class and lunch, can be included as part of the district's instructional day (1 CCR 301-39-2.06(2)(b))
  - Passing between the end of lunch and the next class is not part of the instructional day

### General Guidance and Considerations

In the absence of contradictory local board or district policies, the following should be considered:

- The inclusion of breakfast or "healthy snacks" in the instructional day may vary by school
  - Example. Breakfast or snacks picked up during a passing period and eaten during class time may be included in the instructional day
  - Example. If instructional time is suspended while students go and pick up, and eat, their breakfast or snack (similar to lunch time), this time may not be included in the instructional 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.



- Example. 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. A district offers a period “0” in order to offer a weight lifting class to student athletes that begins at 6:45 a.m. In this case, period “0” 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
- 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
- Recess and passing time between classes 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
- In the event a school has breaks or passing periods, as indicated by their bell schedule, lasting longer than 7 minutes, and if the school must include these “breaks” or passing periods to meet the minimum instructional hour requirement, the district must be prepared to provide an explanation as to why these breaks or passing periods should be included in the instructional day
- 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.

## Determining Total Number of 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.



## Illustrative Example

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:

- 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 days
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 1: 56,550 minutes (435 minutes times 130 days)**

### Bell Schedule 2:

- 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 days
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 2: 9,000 minutes (300 minutes times 30 days)**

### Bell Schedule 3:

- 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 days
- **Total instructional minutes for Bell Schedule 3: 2,400 minutes (240 minutes times 10 days)**

### Total the 3 Bell Schedules:

- Bell Schedule 1 = 56,550 minutes
- Bell Schedule 2 = 9,000 minutes
- Bell Schedule 3 = 2,400 minutes
- **Total scheduled instructional hours for High School A = 67,950 minutes or 1,132.5 hours**

### Summary:

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



## E-Learning Days

In the event a district implements “E-Learning Days” *in lieu of canceling a scheduled student contact day for any reason (such as weather, etc.)*, the following criteria must be met and documented:

- District board of education definition of educational process (e.g., in board policy, board resolution, governance document, etc.), which includes E-Learning Days (with corresponding definition)
- Documentation (e.g., regulations, course syllabus, handbook, etc.) outlining district policy (if not included in board policy) that describes the following:
  - Acceptable ways in which teacher-pupil instruction and contact time can occur outside the classroom during E-Learning Days, including how teacher-student interaction will be documented
  - Acceptable ways in which attendance/participation should be documented

Further, the district must ensure that all students have the appropriate electronic equipment and resources, including but not limited to hardware and internet access, to participate in the E-Learning Days.

*If E-Learning Days are being used for any purpose other than described above, the district should contact the School Auditing Office.*

## 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

## 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