



Minimum Number of Instructional Minutes/ Hours in a High School Day

By Michael Colasanti

November 2007

Typical steps in establishing the school calendar

1. State policymakers typically define the length of time students spend in school through legislation of agency regulation. The most typical method used is to define the school calendar by setting the number of days required in the school year. This normally includes time designated for teacher professional development - time during which there is no pupil-teacher contact.
2. Once the number of days is defined, policymakers typically specify the number of hours of direct pupil-teacher contact time needed to qualify as a school day.
3. Finally, policy leaders define the activities that may and may not count toward the minimum hours in the school day. For example, Iowa includes passing periods as part of the instructional day but does not include lunch periods. Nearly all of these states allow for some level of accommodation for unforeseen emergencies.

The length of an average instructional day

The average minimum number of minutes in a high school day (9th-12th) across the 50 states is 314 minutes, which is 12 minutes longer than the average minimum day for elementary grades (1st-5th) and four minutes longer than the average middle school grades (6th-8th). It should be noted however that while allocated time does increase as grades progress, the increments are small and the differences are mostly insignificant.

Other means of addressing the school day

Sixteen states do not specify the minimum number of hours or minutes that constitute an instructional day. Instead, state leaders typically define the length of the school year and leave it to the local districts to determine how each day is spent.

In search of results

As policymakers across the country search for ways to improve the outcomes of education, they frequently revisit policies impacting the amount of time students spend in school. To help inform these efforts, we offer a note of caution: *To improve student achievement, policymakers should not automatically look only to extending the days or minutes of student learning time, but should also consider ways to make better use of the time they have.*¹

State	Minimum # of Min./Hr. in Instructional Day	Other Requirements and Notes	Citation
Alabama	6 hours	The six hours do not include recess and intermission periods.	ALA. CODE § 16-1-1(1)
Alaska	5 hours	The five hours do not include "intermissions." The commissioner is authorized to approve shorter days.	ALASKA STAT. § 14.03.040
Arizona	240 minutes	Arizona statute states that a "full-time instructional program" must total at least 20 hours per week.	ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 15-901(A)(2)(c)(vi)
Arkansas	6 hours	Districts may include travel time between public schools and "other educational programs" as a part of the minimum six hours.	ARK. CODE ANN. § 6-16-102(a)(1)
California	240 minutes	This requirement does not apply to evening high schools, opportunity schools, continuing education classes or vocational training programs.	CAL. EDUC. CODE § 46141
Colorado	---	1056 hours during a minimum of 160 days. The commissioner may waive the schedule requirements due to "extraordinary circumstances."	COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-32-109(1)(n)
Connecticut	---	900 hours during a minimum 180 days. Districts may count up to seven hours per school day towards the total required for the year.	CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-16
Delaware	3.5 hours	The 3.5 hours do not include lunch periods.	DEL. CODE ANN. tit. 14, § 1049(a)(1)
District of Columbia	6 hours	The six hours include lunch periods, recess and class breaks.	D.C. MUN. REGS. tit. 5, § 305.8
Florida	---	900 hours during a minimum of 180 days.	FLA. ADMIN. CODE ANN. r. 6A-1.09512

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Georgia	330 minutes	The 330 minutes do not include rest periods, recess, breaks, passing periods or lunch periods.	GA. COMP. R. & REGS. r. 160-5-1-.02(2)(d)
Hawaii	---	178 days; according to Hawaii teachers' contracts, the work year is no more than 190 days, and 12 of those days are non-instructional.	Greg Knudsen, Communications Director, Hawaii Department of Education
Idaho	---	990 hours, which include school assemblies, testing and "other instructionally related activities." The requirement excludes from the total time for transportation to and from school, passing periods, recess and lunch periods.	IDAHO CODE § 33-512(1)(a)
Illinois	5 hours	The five hours include time for when students are supervised by non-teaching personnel and engaged in activities such as study hall, use of technology and school-sponsored extracurricular activities.	105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/18-8.05(F)(1)(c), 5/10-22.34(a)
Indiana	6 hours		IND. CODE § 20-30-2-2(a)
Iowa	5.5 hours	The 5.5 hours include passing periods and parent-teacher conferences, but do not include lunch periods.	IOWA CODE § 256.7(19)
Kansas	5 hours	The five hours include time that dual-enrollment students spend taking postsecondary classes.	KAN. STAT. ANN. § 72-1111(g)(2)
Kentucky	6 hours	In the event of an unforeseen bus delay, schools that participate in the "Federal School Breakfast Program" may allow up to 15 minutes of the six hours to provide the opportunity for children to eat breakfast (may not occur more than eight times during the school year within the same building).	KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 158.070(1)

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Louisiana	360 minutes	The 360 minutes do not include recess.	LA. REV. STAT. ANN. § 17:154.1(A)(1)
Maine	3 hours	Schools do not have to be in session the same number of hours each day as long as the total amount of instructional time in any two consecutive school weeks is an average of five hours per day.	CODE ME. R. § 05-071-125(6.02)
Maryland	3 hours		MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-103(a)(2)
Massachusetts	---	990 hours during a minimum of 180 days. The 990 hours do not include time for school meals (breakfast and lunch), passing periods, homeroom time, recesses, non-directed study periods and optional school programs.	MASS. REGS. CODE tit. 603, §§ 27.03, 27.04
Michigan	---	900 (or 990) hours during a minimum of 180 days. The 900 hours include time for passing periods but not for lunch periods or study hall. A school may count up to two study hall periods per day if they use a minimum of 990 hours during the year.	MICH. ADMIN. CODE r. 340.10(5)
Minnesota	---	Local school boards have flexibility in setting the school calendar but must include at least the number of days set by the state board as they had at the beginning of the 1996-97 school year.	MINN. STAT. § 120A.41
Mississippi	5 hours	This requirement will be repealed effective June 30, 2009.	MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-13-67
Missouri	3 hours	During the three hours, students must be under “the guidance and direction of teachers in the teaching process.”	MO. REV. STAT. § 160.041(1)
Montana	---	1080 hours during the school’s fiscal year. Graduating seniors need only complete 1050 hours.	MONT. CODE ANN. § 20-1-301

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Nebraska	---	1080 hours (an instructional hour is defined as "a period of time, at least sixty minutes, which is actually used for the instruction of students.")	NEB. REV. STAT. § 79-101(7)
Nevada	330 minutes	The 330 minutes include time for recess and passing periods, but does not include time for lunch.	NEV. ADMIN. CODE ch. 387, § 131(1)
New Hampshire	6 hours		N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 189:40
New Jersey	4 hours	The four hours do not include recess or lunch periods.	N.J. ADMIN. CODE tit. 6A, § 32-8.3(b),(e)
New Mexico	6 hours	The secretary may waive the minimum length of the school day in districts where the minimum would create "undue hardships."	N.M. STAT. ANN. § 22-2-8.1(A)(3),(D)
New York	5.5 hours	The 5.5 hours include time for "study activities," but not for lunch periods.	N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 8, § 175.5(a)(3)
North Carolina	---	1000 hours during a minimum of 180 days. According to statute, "the number of instructional hours in an instructional day may vary according to local board policy and does not have to be uniform among the schools in the administrative unit."	N.C. GEN. STAT. § 115C-84.2(a)(1)
North Dakota	6 hours		N.D. CENT. CODE § 15.1-06-04(5)(a)(2)
Ohio	5.5 hours	The 5.5 hours do not include time for lunch periods or interscholastic athletics.	OHIO ADMIN. CODE § 3301-35-06(F)
Oklahoma	6 hours		OKLA. STAT. tit. 70, § 1-111(A)

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Oregon	---	990 hours, which include time for school assemblies, student orientations, testing, parent-teacher conferences and other instructionally related activities, but do not include time for transportation to and from school, passing periods, recess or lunch periods.	OR. ADMIN. R. 581-022-1620(1)(a),(3)(a),(4)
Pennsylvania	5.5 hours	Instruction time is defined as "time during the school day which is devoted to instruction and activities provided as an integral part of the school program."	22 PA. CODE § 51.61(a)(4),(c)
Rhode Island	330 minutes	The 330 minutes do not include lunch, recess, study halls, homeroom, common planning time, passing periods, "pre- and post-teacher time," and "any other time that is not actual instructional time."	R.I. CODE R. 08-010-010(1.2)
South Carolina	6 hours	The six hours do not include lunch periods.	S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-1-425(E)
South Dakota	---	962.5 hours; statute requires that the local school boards establish the length of the school day. The 962.5 hours that are required do not include lunch periods or recess.	S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 13-26-1
Tennessee	6.5 hours		TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-3004(e)(1)
Texas	7 hours	The seven hours include recess and "intermissions."	TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.082(a)
Utah	4 hours	The four hours include time for recess periods "that include organization or instruction from school staff," but do not include lunch and passing periods.	UTAH ADMIN. CODE R277-419-1(N)(2)(a)
Vermont	5.5 hours	The 5.5 hours do not include time for recess or lunch periods.	VT. CODE R. 22-000-005 § 2312.1(d)

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Virginia	5.5 hours	The 5.5 hours do not include recess and "breaks for meals."	8 VA. ADMIN. CODE § 20-131-5
Washington	---	1000 hours during a minimum of 180 days. School districts may arrange their calendars in any way they determine as long as the district-wide annual average instructional hour requirement is met (1000 hours).	WASH. REV. CODE § 28A.150.220(1)(b),(3); WASH. ADMIN. CODE § 180-16-200(1)(b)
West Virginia	345 minutes	The 345 minutes include time for cocurricular and extracurricular activities.	W. VA. CODE § 18-5-45(a)(1)(B); W. VA. CODE ST. R. § 126-13-6(1.13)
Wisconsin	---	1137 hours during a minimum of 180 days. The 1137 hours include recesses and passing periods but do not include lunch periods.	WIS. STAT. § 121.02(1)(f)
Wyoming	---	1100 hours during a minimum of 175 days. School districts establish the length of the school day.	WYO. STAT. ANN. § 21-4-301; WYO. CODE R. § 005-000-022(5)(a)(iv)

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Helping State Leaders Shape Education Policy

¹ Aronson, Julie, Joy Zimmerman and Lisa Carlos. *Improving Student Achievement by Extending School: Is it just a Matter of Time?*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd, 1998.