

2020-2021 School Calendar Guidance

Purpose

The 2019 Legislative session resulted in changes to North Dakota Century Code regarding school calendar length and high school unit time. Questions have arisen regarding these changes which prompted the formation of a committee to provide answers. Committee members included superintendents, principals, and representatives from ND United, North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders (NDCEL), North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA), and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). The following guidance is a direct product of the recommendations and decisions of that committee.

Days to Hours

History

Prior to 2019, the North Dakota school calendar required a minimum of 175 student days per year. These days were calculated at five and one-half hours of instruction per day at the elementary school level and six hours of instruction per day at the middle and high school level.

The 2019 State Legislature voted to change this requirement from a days per year formula to an hours per year calculation. This new calculation consists of 962.5 hours of instruction time at the elementary school level and 1,050 hours of instruction time at the middle and high school levels.

[\(NDCC 15.1-06-04. School Calendar – Length\)](#)

Guidance

Passing Time. Yes, passing time counts as part of the school day in the yearly calculation.

Reasoning: Students that enter a school building are in direct charge of North Dakota educators. In addition, passing time is an opportunity for students to develop social and emotional skills. Passing time is also an opportunity to build friendships and communication skills.

Zero Period and/or Eighth Period. Yes, zero and/or eighth periods count as part of the school day in the yearly calculation.

Reasoning: School is technically in session during this time and students are being served. Students who struggle and need one-on-one help from a teacher find this time invaluable. These time periods may be the only opportunity students have to get additional support and guidance in their education. In addition, this is a local decision. There are checks and balances in school systems to appropriately measure the value of this time.

Recess. Yes, recess time counts as part of the school day in the yearly calculation.

Reasoning: There is a myriad of learning and experiences during this time. Recess is a valuable time for students to grow socially and emotionally. It assists them in developing skills in conflict resolution, team building, communication, and problem solving. In addition, it is expected that teachers and administrators are monitoring and teaching during recess.

Lunch. No, lunch does not count as part of the school day in the yearly calculation.

Reasoning: Per Attorney General Opinion dated July 2, 1997, “Lunch breaks are not included in the minimum five and one-half or six hours of instruction time under Senate Bill 2173. The minimum number of hours of instruction time are to be provided to every student.”

Four-Day School Week

History

North Dakota Century Code states: *“If a school district intends to operate under a school calendar that consists of four days of instruction per week, the school district shall apply and be approved for a waiver by the superintendent of public instruction.”* ([15.1-06-04. School Calendar – Length](#))

Guidance

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction’s definition of a four-day school week is as follows:

“A four-day school week includes a school calendar that consistently has four student contact days per week over an interval of several months. This can be traditional four-day weeks in which the entire yearly calendar is comprised of four student contact days per week, or a hybrid four-day school week which consists of four student contact days per week in a chosen semester, or over a season such as winter. In addition, a district that implements a four-day school week will most likely have eight to nine hours of student contact time during the day within the four-day school week. Districts that implement a four-day school week must still create a contingency plan to provide services for students and families that are burdened by the four-day school week, such as provide breakfast and lunch.”

Contingency Planning: Parents are accustomed to, and plan for, their children to be cared for five days per week during the school year. It is recommended that schools create a plan for students in the event necessary services cannot be provided by parents. For example, many schools conduct STEM days, physical education days, or at the very least provide breakfast and lunch to students. This contingency plan must be created and implemented at the local level.

Any planned activity hours – academic or non-academic – on the fifth day of a four-day school week are not to be counted in yearly calendar hour totals.

Regardless of when and how the four-day school week is implemented, schools must still adhere to the minimum hourly requirement of 962.5 hours of instruction per year at the elementary school level, and 1,050 hours of instruction at the middle and high school level.

High School Unit Time

History

Prior to 2019, North Dakota high school unit time was calculated by 150 hours of instruction per calendar year in all CTE and science courses and 120 hours of instruction per year in all other general education courses.

The 2019 State Legislature voted to change this calculation from instructional time to a calculation of student engagement. The law now reads:

“Each general education course unit must consist of at least one hundred twenty hours of student engagement per school calendar and each CTE and science course unit must consist of at least one hundred fifty hours of student engagement per school calendar.”

([NDCC 15.1-21-03. High School Unit – Instructional Time](#))

Guidance

What is Student Engagement?

Student engagement occurs when a student is actively involved in learning essential material, driven by state content standards, and this learning is overseen or facilitated by a licensed teacher, either on or off school site.

- Up to 15 of the 150 hours of instruction per calendar year in all CTE and science courses can be spent by the student completing assignments outside of the classroom including an internship or at a work site.
- Homework does not equal student engagement and must not be included in this definition.