ORGANIZATION, PHILOSOPHY, AND GOALS
Local School Organization and Administration
Standard School Year Calendar

This policy supersedes Policy 1344.3 and sunsets Policies 1350, 3415, 3380, 3840, and 4275.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a unified framework for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) to maintain annual calendars for student instruction in compliance with the Code of Virginia; to ensure the standardization of the school year and school day; to provide authority for emergency adjustments; to inform the Department of Human Resources in their development of the employee calendar; and to set guidelines for ceremonies, observances, and student performances.

II. SUMMARY OF CHANGES

The policy has been updated in its entirety.

III. DEFINITIONS

Academic Calendar: The official annual schedule adopted by the School Board that establishes the start and end dates of the school year, student instructional days, professional development days, and school holidays.

Full School Week: A school week consisting of five consecutive days of student instruction, typically Monday through Friday. This structure is prioritized to maintain academic momentum and provide schedule predictability for families.

Instructional Day: A day in which students are in attendance and receiving instruction under the guidance and direction of teachers for the 5.5 minimum number of hours required by state law.

Instructional Hours: The time during the school day when students are engaged in educational activities, excluding periods for meals and recess.

Religious and Cultural Observance: A recognized day of religious or cultural significance during which students may be excused from school attendance to participate in traditional ceremonies or practices. Such absences are considered verified and shall not result in academic or extracurricular penalties.

Standard Calendar Guidelines: A set of established criteria used to develop the academic calendar, ensuring consistency in the timing of quarters, breaks, and teacher workdays from year to year.

Verified Absence: A student's absence from school that is documented by a parent or guardian for a reason recognized by the Board, such as a religious or cultural observance, which allows the student to make up missed work without penalty.

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IV. PHILOSOPHY

The Fairfax County School Board is committed to an academic calendar that prioritizes full school weeks (five days of instruction weekly) to uphold instructional continuity and stability for families. Full school weeks enhance student engagement in learning while reducing the childcare and logistical burdens placed on families caused by school closures. The Board seeks to provide a clear, reliable framework that prioritizes rigorous learning, while respecting the diverse religious and cultural observances occurring in our community, as well as addressing community use needs of public school facility assets.

The School Board is also committed to aligning practices with neighboring school divisions whenever possible, reviewing attendance data, and providing opportunity for community and staff input in calendar development.

V. POLICY

The school year shall provide a minimum of 180 instructional days or 990 instructional hours for students in grades K–12, per *Virginia Statute 8 VAC 20-131-150*. Days closed for inclement weather or emergencies shall be made up as necessary to meet these minimums.

A. CALENDAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

1. STANDARD CALENDAR STRUCTURE

   The calendar shall be based on the consistent set of guidelines outlined below to ensure predictability for the school community. It shall include designated days for teacher workdays, professional development, student assessments, and emergency make-up days. Whenever possible, teacher workdays and staff development time will occur during weeks with student holidays.

   The school year comprises two (2) semesters. A semester consists of two (2) quarters of approximately equal length. The Board prioritizes full school weeks during each quarter. The calendar shall also include state and federal holidays, winter and spring recesses, and religious and cultural observances recognized by the Board.

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2. CALENDAR ADOPTION

   The School Board shall publicly adopt academic calendars that meet or exceed all instructional time requirements established by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

   The Division Superintendent shall present draft calendar(s) for consideration by the School Board that incorporate the priorities outlined below.

   The Division will maintain three years of approved calendars, with the third year adopted at the first regular School Board meeting of July.

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3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

   Feedback may be gathered through public surveys, community meetings, community advisory groups, or other appropriate strategies. Feedback may address start and end dates, timing of breaks, and alignment with regional school divisions. A summary of this feedback must be presented publicly to the Board and shall inform final calendar decisions.

4. EMERGENCY CLOSURES

   The Division Superintendent is granted the authority to declare emergency school closures on school days in whole or part, including due to inclement weather, in consultation with staff and local public safety officials. The Division Superintendent shall also develop a procedure to communicate these administrative decisions to the school community in a timely manner. FCPS has ## snow days available for use each school year.

5. MODIFIED SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR

   Subject to approval of the School Board and the state Board of Education, certain Fairfax County Public Schools may adopt either the standard modified elementary school calendar or the standard modified middle and high school calendars.

B. CALENDAR DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

The calendar shall be based on a consistent set of guidelines to ensure predictability for the school community. It shall include designated days for teacher workdays, professional development, student assessments, and emergency make-up days. Whenever possible, teacher workdays and staff development time will occur during weeks with student holidays.

The Division Superintendent shall utilize the following guidelines when developing a proposed calendar for School Board approval. These guidelines shall be updated as necessary to reflect changes in statutory requirements or recognized legal holidays.

1. START OF SCHOOL

   As mandated by *Code of Virginia 22.1-79.1*, the first day of student attendance shall be no earlier than 14 days (two weeks) before Labor Day. As such, per law, schools must be closed from the Friday immediately preceding Labor Day through Labor Day. School shall begin on a Monday.

2. LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

   The last day of school shall be before Juneteenth, and not on a Monday or a Tuesday.

3. LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL DAY

   The Division Superintendent is authorized to establish the length of the school day in accordance with state law and school system needs.

   a. Daily Schedules

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The Division Superintendent shall issue regulations establishing minimum hours per school day (excluding meals and recess) for elementary, middle, and high schools.

b. Establishment of Daily School Start and End Times

The Division Superintendent shall issue regulations establishing guidelines for daily school start and end times.

c. Adjustments

The Division Superintendent may authorize early closings or other adjustments to the school day, provided these changes do not result in noncompliance with state requirements for total instructional hours or days.

There shall be no more than four (4) division-wide early release days per school year. Currently, these are designated for all quarter ends. All early release days must be included on the student calendar when it is published three years in advance.

4. STUDENT HOLIDAYS AND OBSERVANCES

a. Student Holidays

The following shall be designated as student holidays (in alphabetical order):

- Diwali
- Eid al Adha
- Eid al Fitr
- Election Day
- Friday before Labor Day
- Independence Day
- Indigenous People's Day
- Juneteenth
- Labor Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Memorial Day
- Presidential Inauguration Day
- Presidents Day
- Rosh Hashanah
- Spring Holiday (Shall be five business days long, and always a full Monday through Friday. It shall be determined in alignment with most of the surrounding jurisdictions to account for staffing and operational concerns. If alignment is not possible, it will be the first full week of April.)
- Thanksgiving Holiday (Shall consist of the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving Day and the Friday after Thanksgiving.)
- Winter Holiday (Shall be ten business days long, whenever possible, and shall include Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, News Year's Eve and New Year's Day.)
- Yom Kippur

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Additionally, the Division Superintendent shall establish a process to identify other cultural and religious observances that will be recognized as student holidays. Consideration shall prioritize data about expected student and staff absences.

b. Recognition of Cultural Observance Days

Recognition includes designation as a student holiday, or as a cultural observance day ("O" Day) with school in session, yet bringing awareness so as to prevent scheduling significant school and community events at those times. The student calendar will abide by FCPS Policy 1460, *Religion*. Veteran's Day will be designated as an "O" Day.

c. Commemoration

Commemoration of special days or events shall be planned as an integral part of the school instructional program. National, seasonal, and patriotic observances shall enhance the instructional program. Regular class work shall be maintained and not excluded by such activities.

For planning purposes, school personnel shall refer to the Calendar of Noteworthy Events, which is updated annually by the Office of Communication and Community Relations, and the Calendar of Religious and Cultural Observances, which is updated annually by the Office of Equity and Employee Relations.

5. SUMMER HOLIDAY

Schools shall be closed for regular programming from the last day of school to the first day of school, as defined above.

6. COUNTY-WIDE ELECTIONS

To ensure the safety of students and staff, the Division shall close schools to students on days when elections, including general elections, primaries, and special elections, are conducted in a substantial number of school facilities. Teacher workdays may be conducted on these days.

Legal reference: Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-79.1, Opening of the school year.

Policy
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