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.

Student Holiday: A day on which students will not be at school, but staff ~~are~~ may be expected to work a normal day.

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.

IV. PHILOSOPHY

The Fairfax County School Board is committed to a clear, reliable academic calendar that prioritizes full school weeks (five days of instruction weekly) to uphold instructional continuity and stability. Full school weeks enhance student engagement in learning while reducing the childcare and logistical burdens placed on families caused by school closures. The School Board acknowledges the diversity of cultural and religious observances that impact the calendar throughout the year.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Calendar Development

1. **Instructional Time**: 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.

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

3. **Teacher Work Days and Professional Development**: The calendar shall include designated days for teacher workdays and professional development~~, student assessments, and emergency make-up days~~. Whenever possible, teacher workdays and professional development time will occur during weeks with student holidays.

4. **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.

5. **Last Day of Schoo**l: The last day of school shall be before Juneteenth, and not on a Monday or a Tuesday.

6. **Summer Holiday**: Schools shall be closed for regular programming from the last day of school to the first day of school.

7. **Student Holidays**: All Federal holidays, except for Veterans Day, are designated student holidays. Additionally, the Superintendent, in consultation with the Chief Academic Officer, Chief Equity Officer, and Chief Experience and Engagement Officer, will recommend other cultural or religious dates to be student holidays. These recommendations must be based on feedback from the impacted communities, survey data, and projected absenteeism among students and staff.

8. **Observance Days**: The Division Superintendent will designate specific cultural and religious holidays as observance days on the school calendar. The observances shall be designated in consultation with the Chief Academic Officer, Chief Equity Officer and Chief Experience and Engagement Officer. On these dates, staff should avoid scheduling major tests or activities whenever practical. Students who observe these holidays will be granted a verified (“excused”) absence and must be given the opportunity to make up any missed classwork. Veterans Day will be classified as an observance day and include educational programming about the contributions of Veterans to society.

9. **National Day of Mourning**: In order to recognize a national day of mourning when it is declared by the President, schools shall acknowledge the action of the federal government and recognize the person(s) who has (have) died. Flags shall be flown at half-mast during the time as established by the federal government.

B. Length of School Day

1. **Daily Schedules**: The Division Superintendent shall establish minimum instructional hours per school day (excluding meals and recess).

2. **Establishment of Daily School Start and End Times**: The Division Superintendent shall issue regulations establishing guidelines for daily school start and end times.

3. **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.

4. **Early Release**: There shall be no more than four (4) division-wide early release days per school year. Elementary schools shall be provided up to four (4) additional division-wide early release days. All early release days must be included on the student calendar when it is published three years in advance.

C. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Division Superintendent shall provide the community the opportunity to provide feedback on the school calendar at least every other year. Such 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.

D. 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 of this policy and shall maintain three years of approved calendars, with the third year adopted at the first regular School Board meeting of July.

E. CLOSURES DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

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. There will be no less than the equivalent of seven emergency closure days snow days available for use each school year.

Elections: To ensure the safety of students and staff, the Superintendent 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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FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD