Policy 1344.4
School Board

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, 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, teacher workdays, and school holidays.

Full School Week: A school week consisting of five (5) consecutive days of student instruction.

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 shall be recorded as all school absences but shall not result in academic or extracurricular penalties.

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

IV. PHILOSOPHY

The Fairfax County School Board is committed to a clear, reliable academic calendar that prioritizes academic and instructional continuity, to the greatest extent possible in the form of full school weeks. Instructional continuity enhances student engagement in learning while reducing logistical burdens placed on families caused by school closures. The School Board respects the diversity of cultural and religious observances that may impact the calendar.

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 Administrative Code 8VAC 20-132-150*. 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. To the greatest extent possible within the confines of School Board policy, each quarter shall prioritize instructional continuity and avoid fragmented weeks. While full school weeks should be prioritized, alternative calendar structures may be used when they better support instructional continuity, including by providing a more balanced distribution of instructional days across consecutive weeks. The calendar shall also include state and federal holidays, winter, spring, and summer breaks, and religious and cultural holidays or 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.

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, schools shall be closed from the Friday immediately preceding Labor Day through Labor Day.

5. **Last Day of School:** The last day of school shall be before Juneteenth.

6. **Winter, Spring, and Summer Break:** Winter break shall be two (2) full weeks, inclusive of Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Spring break shall be one (1) full week and aligned to the greatest extent possible with surrounding school divisions. During summer break, schools shall be closed for regular K-12 instructional 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. The Wednesday before and the Friday after Thanksgiving Day shall be designated as student and staff holidays.

8. **Religious Holidays:** There shall be no school on the following religious holidays:

    a. Christmas
    b. Diwali
    c. Eid al-Adha
    d. Eid al-Fitr
    e. Rosh Hashanah
    f. Yom Kippur

9. **Observance Days:** The Division Superintendent shall designate specific cultural and religious holidays as observance days on the school calendar. The observances shall be designated in consultation with appropriate staff (e.g., the Chief Academic Officer, Chief Equity Officer, Chief Experience and Engagement Officer, etc.). On these dates, staff should avoid scheduling major tests or extracurricular activities whenever practical. Instruction of new material shall be permitted. Veterans Day shall be classified as an observance day and include educational programming about the contributions of veterans to society.

10. **Elections:** To ensure the safety of students and staff, the Division Superintendent shall close schools to students on days with regularly scheduled division-wide primary and general elections. The Division Superintendent shall make arrangements to minimize staff use of school buildings on these days, which may be used as teacher workdays.

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. **Early Release:** There shall be no more than four (4) division-wide early release days per school year, held at the end of each academic quarter. These quarterly early release days shall be included on the academic calendar when it is published three (3) years in advance. Elementary schools shall be provided up to four (4) additional division-wide early release days. Whenever possible, these dates shall be announced before the end of the preceding school year. The Division Superintendent may also authorize additional early release days for secondary schools for testing, graduation, or other limited purposes. Whenever possible, these too shall be announced before the end of the preceding school year.

C. Community Engagement

The Division Superintendent shall provide the community with the opportunity to provide feedback on the school calendar at least every other school year. Such feedback may be gathered through various methods (e.g., public surveys, community meetings, community advisory groups, etc.). A summary of this feedback shall be presented publicly to the Board to help 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) to the School Board for consideration that incorporate the priorities of this policy and shall maintain three (3) years of approved calendars, with the third year adopted at the School Board's regular organizational meeting each July.

E. Unplanned Closures During the School Year

1. **Emergency Closures:** The Division Superintendent may declare emergency school closures on school days in whole or in part, including due to inclement weather, in consultation with staff and local public safety officials. The Division Superintendent shall develop a procedure to communicate these decisions to the school community in a timely manner. There shall be no fewer than the equivalent of seven emergency closure days available for use each school year.

2. **Special Elections:** The Division Superintendent shall close schools to students on days when special elections are conducted in a substantial number of school facilities. The Division Superintendent shall make arrangements to minimize staff use of school buildings on these days, which may be used as teacher workdays.

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

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FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD