



State Instructional Time Policies

Oregon's House Education Committee

January 13th, 2026



EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES

| ecs.org

SPEAKER

Joel Moore

DIRECTOR OF STATE RELATIONS

Education Commission of the States



WHAT WE DO.

We believe in the power of learning from experience, and we know informed policymakers create better education policy.



SPEAKER

Jennifer Thomsen

PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT

Education Commission of the States



- Overview.
- Highlights from our 50-state comparison.
- Recent legislation.
- Q&A.



Instructional Time

- Instructional time policies vary from state to state.
- Time requirements are specified in days per year, hours or minutes per year, and/or hours or minutes per day.
- Some states specify what is counted toward the minimum school days per year requirement.
- Some states specify what is counted toward the minimum minutes or hours per day requirement.



Instructional Time

- Instructional time requirements are specified in statute and regulation.
- State policy may allow adjustments to instructional time requirements and definitions.
- Some states allow districts to set their own requirements.



School Calendars

- Many states allow districts to set their own start and/or finish dates for schools.
- Some states set start and/or finish dates in statute or charge the state board of education with setting them.
- Some states' policies are silent on the issue.



50-State Comparison: Instructional Time Policies

(Compiled February 2023)

Big Takeaways:

- **31** states plus the District of Columbia require at least 180 days of instruction per year.
- **35** states differentiate based on grade level.
- **29** states allow districts to set their own school year start and end dates.



State Examples:

Minimum Days, Hours/Minutes Per Year Requirements

State	Minimum # of Days	Minimum # of Hours/Minutes
Alabama	180 days	1,080 hours
California	180 days	Kindergarten: 36,000 minutes Grades 1-3: 50,400 minutes Grades 4-8: 54,000 minutes Grades 9-12: 64,800 minutes
Colorado	160 days	Half-day K: 450 hours Full-day K: 900 hours Grades 1-5: 990 hours Grades 6-12: 1,080 hours
Idaho	Set by school district	Kindergarten: 450 hours Grades 1-3: 810 hours Grades 4-8: 900 hours Grades 9-11: 990 hours Grade 12: 979 hours
Nevada	180 days	Not specified in state policy
South Dakota	Set by school district	Kindergarten: 437.5 hours Grades 1-5: 875 hours Grades 9-12: 962.5 hours



State Examples:

Minimum Days, Hours, or Minutes Per Year Calculations

Alaska: A day of ***in-service training*** for teachers can substitute for one of the required 180 days, up to a maximum of 10 days.

Kentucky: The required 170 days must include 4 ***professional development*** days.

New Mexico: Some hours may be used for ***home visits*** or ***parent-teacher*** conferences for some grade levels.



State Examples: Minimum Hours or Minutes Per School Day Calculations

Arkansas: 6 hours including at least 40 minutes of **recess** for elementary school.

California: 180 minutes for kindergarten; 230 minutes for grades 1-3; and 240 minutes for grades 4-12. **Recess** and **lunch** breaks are excluded.

New Hampshire: Sets maximums rather than minimums. Elementary: 5.75 hours. Middle and high: 6 hours. **Lunch, homeroom, passing time, and breaks** are not included. Up to 30 minutes of **recess** for elementary school may be included.



State Examples:

School Start and End Dates

Iowa:

- **Start** no sooner than Aug. 23 and no later than the first Monday in December.
- **End** date not set in state policy.

Maryland:

- **Start** no earlier than Labor Day.
- **End** no later than June 15.

Tennessee:

- **Start** no earlier than Aug. 1.
- **End** date not set in state policy.



Recent Legislation

Oklahoma H.B. 1087 (2025): Increases the required number of school days in a year from 180 to 181 and increases the required number of school hours from 1,080 to 1,086.

New Mexico H.B. 65 (2025): Clarifies that local school boards and charter school governing bodies are responsible for setting the number of instructional day per year and number of instructional days per week. Statute still provides the minimum number of instructional hours.



RESOURCES

from our presentation.

50-State Comparison: Instructional Time Policies

<https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-instructional-time-policies-2023/>

Instructional Time Policy 101

<https://www.ecs.org/instructional-time-policy-101>

State Education Policy Tracking

<https://www.ecs.org/state-education-policy-tracking-new/>





**EDUCATION
COMMISSION**
OF THE STATES

Your education policy team.

THANK YOU

Jennifer Thomsen

Email: jthomsen@ecs.org



EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES

| ecs.org