

A state leader asked for information on statewide requirements related to instructional time, specifically minimum school days versus instructional hours. Additionally, this resource offers evidence supporting or challenging shifting school calendars by reducing required days while still meeting hour requirements.

### **Our Response:**

Comparison of instructional time policies across states is complicated by varying definitions of instructional time. Instructional time requirements may be specified in days per year, hours or minutes per year, and/or hours or minutes per day.

Last updated in 2023, Education Commission of the States' [50-State Comparison: Instructional Time Policies](#) presents each state's statutes and administrative codes on instructional time and school calendar requirements for kindergarten through grade 12, including requirements for days or hours or minutes per year and hours or minutes per day, as well as school start and end dates. We found that most states have both **days per year** and **hours or minutes per year requirements**. While 31 states and the District of Columbia require 180 days, there is a variation in the number of hours or minutes required that would be spread across those days.

What is counted toward minimum school year or school day requirements also varies. For example, some states' minimum school year requirements may specify whether things like non-student contact days or parent-teacher conferences are included. And some states exclude things like recess and/or lunch from hours-per-day calculations, while others may count it. Some states' policies provide flexibility to districts, allowing them to set some of their own requirements.

Below you will find examples of states' instructional time policies, examples of recent legislation, a summary of relevant research, and links to additional resources.

### **State Examples**

#### ***Minimum Day, Hour and/or Minute Per Year Requirements***

The table below contains examples of a variety of state policy approaches to instructional time requirements. To compare policies across all states, please refer to our [50-State Comparison](#).

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

### ***Minimum Day, Hour and/or Minute Per Year Calculations***

Some, but not all, states have statutory or regulatory provisions on what may or may not be counted toward minimum day or hour or minute per school year requirements. For example, in **Alaska**, up to **10 days** of in-service training may be counted toward the required 180 days. **Kentucky's** **policy** specifies that the required 170 days must include 4 professional development days. In **New Mexico**, some hours may be **used** for home visit or parent-teacher conferences at some grade levels.

### ***Minimum Day, Hour and/or Minute Per Day Calculations***

Just over half of states have statutory or regulatory provisions setting a minimum number of hours in a school day. As is the case with minimum requirements for the school year, requirements on minimum length of a school day often vary by grade level. And like school year calculations, school day requirements sometimes specify what may or may not be counted toward the requirement. For example, in **Arkansas**, the 40 minutes of **recess** for elementary school students can be counted toward the six-hour requirement. **California's** requirements are in minutes rather than hours, with different requirements for **kindergarten**, grades **1 through 3**, and grades **4 through 12**. Lunch and recess are excluded, except for kindergarteners. **Oregon** is one of two states that sets a **maximum**, rather than a minimum number of hours and it varies by grade level.

## Recent Legislation

At least two states have enacted legislation making changes to their policies since our 50-State Comparison was published in 2023. **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.

## Instructional Time Research

A [2024 study](#), “Time in School: A Conceptual Framework, Synthesis of the Causal Research, and Empirical Exploration,” explored the role time plays in learning. The researchers synthesized the findings of 74 studies to estimate the effect of total time on students’ academic achievement. They found that the research shows increasing total time results in improved academic achievement, though it is important to note that the degree of the impact depends on 1) *the existing amount of time*, 2) *how it is increased* and 3) *how it is used*.

While they found that the academic gains were small to moderate, when combined with other reforms (e.g., efforts to increase student engagement or improve instructional quality), the effect of increasing instructional time was larger. The study presents policy considerations grounded in their research synthesis. They note that, “[m]inimum time requirements are blunt instruments, but they offer a feasible top-down policy reform that is within the control of policymakers. Given that research suggests time in school has diminishing marginal returns, focusing on those schools that offer the least amount of time might also produce the largest returns.” Further, they acknowledge that extending time in school can be an expensive option and point to some lower-cost, complementary policies that could maximize existing time in school. Finally, the researchers suggest that concentrated efforts to use instructional time more effectively may offer greater returns.

## Additional Information

[Instructional Time Policy 101](#) – This Policy Outline provides an easy reference for top-level information on instructional time, including trends in policies and legislative examples. (Education Commission of the States, 2021)