

School Day & Calendar Requirements for Non-Public Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

(Revised February 2026)

This document addresses frequently asked questions about operational calendar requirements for Category I, II, III, and V private schools and Category IV church-related schools.

State Board of Education (SBE) Rules Chapter 0520-07-02

The Tennessee SBE requires non-public schools to maintain an operating schedule that includes the minimum number of instructional days (180) and minimum number of hours per day (6½) required of public schools. Schools that exceed the required minimum number of hours per day may be credited with additional instructional time up to 13 days to be used in accordance with Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004(e).

1. Does Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004 apply to non-public schools?

Yes, specifically Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004(e) includes public, private, and church-related schools in the statutory requirement for the instructional day minimum of six and one-half (6½) hours and the use of accumulated instructional time. A school day that is less than the required six and one-half (6½) hours for grades 1-12 and four (4) hours for kindergarten may not be counted as an instructional day unless it meets the requirements for the use of a stockpile day (see questions #5 and #12).

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-50-807(2), Category III non-public schools that are fully online, self-paced, and accredited by both the Distance Education Accreditation Commission and the State Board of Education approved regional accrediting agency are exempt from operating schedule requirements. All other approved non-public schools must comply.

2. Can non-public schools require 1,170 hours of instruction instead of 180 days of classroom instruction?

No, Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004 requires 180 days for classroom instruction. Additionally, the State Board of Education Rules Chapter 0520-07-02 requires all non-public schools to maintain an operating schedule of 180 days.

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3. Does the six and one-half (6½) hour instructional time requirement apply to all grades, including kindergarten?

The six and one-half (6½) hour instructional time requirement applies to students in grades 1-12. Kindergarten programs may meet this requirement; however, Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-201(b)(2) asserts that kindergarten programs shall not be less than four (4) hours. Any school day shorter than six and one-half (6½) hours for grades one through twelve (1-12) and four (4) hours for kindergarten is considered an abbreviated day.

4. Do non-public school calendars have to be approved by the Tennessee Department of Education?

Category I and V private schools and Category IV church-related schools approved by the State Board of Education are monitored by the department and submit their school calendars to the department's non-public school office during the annual review process. Category II and III private schools and Category IV church-related schools that are approved by an accrediting or membership agency are monitored by the school's accrediting or membership agency and are subject to the requirements established by the agency for school calendar approval. However, the department may require documentation from the agency regarding the monitoring of the agency's schools. [SBE Rule 0520-07-01-.04]

5. How can a non-public school utilize a stockpile day?

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004(e)(1), any public or non-public school that exceeds the required six and one-half (6½) hour instructional day by one-half hour for the full academic year shall accumulate up to 13 "stockpile" days. Schools may extend the instructional day beyond seven (7) hours, but only the 30 minutes above six and one-half hours may be accumulated as a stockpile day. Schools may not accumulate more than 13 stockpile days. Stockpile days may only be used in whole day (6½ hours); half (½) day; or one-third (⅓) day increments.

Stockpile days may be used to cover instructional days missed due to:

- Dangerous or extreme weather conditions;
- Serious outbreaks of illness affecting or endangering students or staff;
- Natural disaster or dangerous structural or environmental conditions rendering a school unsafe for use;
- School-wide or district-wide instructional planning meetings, parent-teacher conferences, or other similar meetings; or
- Faculty professional development that is in compliance with state law and the rules and policies established by the state board of education.

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6. Can unused stockpile days be used to end the school year early?

No, Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004(e)(4) asserts that unused accumulated stockpile days may not be used to end the school year early and cannot be carried over to another school year.

7. How should a school document their used stockpile days?

Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3004(e)(3) requires schools to maintain documentation of the purpose of each stockpile day used as required by the department of education, including reasons for school closures and agendas for professional development for audit purposes.

Non-public schools may be asked to provide this documentation at any time, so it should be kept up-to-date and maintained in a way that clearly identifies how each stockpile day was used.

Documentation can include, but is not limited to, agendas, conference schedules, certificates of attendance, logs, or meeting minutes.

8. What if my school has exhausted its stockpile days and cannot meet the required 180 instructional days?

Schools that are unable to meet the 180 instructional day requirement due to natural disaster or serious outbreak of illness affecting or endangering students or staff during the school year may request a waiver of the minimal instructional day requirement.

Category I and V private schools, and Category IV church-related schools approved by the State Board of Education must request a waiver from the Commissioner. The commissioner will only consider waivers of the 180-day classroom instruction requirement for events of nature that cause substantial damage or disruption to property or critical infrastructure impacting the community and school operations that are beyond regular inclement weather. Additionally, the Commissioner will only grant waivers of the 180-day instructional day requirement when absolutely necessary after schools have exhausted all options for providing the required number of instructional days, including use of stockpile days, converting unused professional development days to instructional days, remote learning, etc. The Commissioner will review the number of stockpile days the school has scheduled for PD. (see question #9).

State approved non-public schools may request the Commissioner to retroactively waive instructional days missed due to natural disaster or serious outbreak of illness. For example, if a natural disaster or serious outbreak of illness occurs in September, stockpile days should be used for the instructional days missed. The school can then request those days to be waived by the Commissioner to free up the stockpile days if instructional days are missed later in the school year.

State approved non-public schools may contact Private.Schools@tn.gov for assistance with requesting a waiver from the Commissioner when necessary. Category II, III and IV schools must request a waiver from the school's accrediting or membership agency.

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9. How many stockpile days can be scheduled into the calendar in advance? Does my school calendar need 180 instructional days or 167 instructional days to be approved?

SBE Rules 0520-07-02 require non-public schools to maintain a term of at least 180 days for classroom instruction.

Days that are designated as professional development, school-wide instructional planning meetings, or parent/teacher conferences should be scheduled into the calendar prior to the school year. Stockpile days may be applied to these days to equal 180 days when combined with instructional days. These days may also be converted to instructional days if required later in the school year to free up stockpile days for the other allowable purposes (see question #5).

Stockpile days allocated for missing instructional time due to dangerous or extreme weather conditions (i.e. "snow days"), serious outbreaks of illness, or natural disasters are not predetermined and should be scheduled as instructional days in the school's calendar.

The total number of stockpile days allocated for professional development, school-wide instructional planning meetings, or parent/teacher conferences, dangerous or extreme weather conditions, serious outbreaks of illness, or natural disasters shall not exceed 13 days.

10. What if my school does not have any stockpile days left and must miss additional days for a reason in which a waiver does not apply or is not granted by the Commissioner or accrediting agency?

A make-up day is an instructional day that is used to make up missed instructional time. The following methods may be used to make up a missed instructional day:

- Revert previously designated stockpile days for professional development, instructional planning, or parent-teacher conferences back to instructional days;
- Extend the length of the school day by a minimum of 30 minutes for a period adequate to accumulate the equivalent of the days lost;
- Schedule classes on Saturday or Sunday;
- Schedule classes on a day previously designated as a holiday;
- Reduce time scheduled for a previously scheduled break, such as spring break; or
- Extend the school year. The school year may legally be extended to June 30.

If stockpiling, the department recommends that non-public schools designate a ***minimum*** of ten (10) stockpile days for inclement weather or school-wide illness to ensure enough days are available should the need arise.

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11. What if my school chooses not to stockpile?

Non-public schools that choose not to participate in the stockpile option must ensure the school calendar meets the requirements for 180 instructional days and six and one-half hours (6½) of instructional time for grades 1-12 and a minimum of four (4) hours for kindergarten. Any days missed due to inclement weather or illness would need to be made up. Instructional days may not be exchanged for professional development, instructional planning or other similar meetings, or parent-teacher conferences.

12. Do late start days count as an instructional day? Can a school start late or end early one day per week to allow for faculty professional development?

If participating in stockpiling, a school can use late start or early dismissals for students to schedule professional development, parent-teacher conferences, or other similar meetings in accordance with the allowable uses for stockpile days. However, the accumulated time used shall not exceed 13 days and must be used in whole day (6½ hours), half (½) day, or one-third (⅓) day increments. Late start or early dismissal dates that do not meet the requirements for stockpile use cannot be counted as instructional days if they are less than the required six and one-half hours required for an instructional day.

13. Do half days count as full instructional days?

Any school day shorter than six and one-half hours (6 ½) for grades 1-12 and four (4) hours for kindergarten is considered an abbreviated day. Schools may schedule any three of the 180 instructional days as abbreviated days and should include them in their school calendar.

14. What if school has been in session for at least half the day before dismissal necessitated by dangerous or extreme weather?

Schools may dismiss students early when dangerous or extreme weather conditions arise. If students are dismissed early from school, determination of whether the day can be counted as a full instructional day is based on the earliest class in session within your school(s). Example: School is in session, and the students were released due to snow at 10:30 a.m. The earliest class started at 7 a.m. at the high school. Therefore, the entire school is credited for an instructional day because some students were in class for the minimum three and one-half (3.5) hours.

If a school has met the minimum requirement for half the state minimum school day and must be dismissed for inclement weather, the day does not have to be made up. However, if school must be dismissed because of inclement weather prior to the school having met the half-day requirement, a stockpiled day must be used, or the entire day must be made up.

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15. Do field trip days count as full instructional days?

If the field trip is school sponsored and occurs on a school day, during school hours, then the time spent on the field trip would be considered an allowable out of school activity. [State Board of Education \(SBE\) School Attendance Policy 4.100.](#)

16. Can lunch be counted in the required six and one-half (6½) hours?

Yes, so long as the students remain at school and are under the school's direction, then lunchtime is counted within the six and one-half (6½) hour instructional day requirement. "Instructional day" also includes activity time, assemblies, recess, etc. However, activities that occur before or after the school's official attendance start and end time are not counted, such as time to be transported to or from school or before/after school clubs or sports.

17. How do schools with separate grade bands/schedules meet the requirements?

All schools with grades K-12 must attend school for 180 instructional days. Instructional days must be six and one-half hours (6½) in duration unless an abbreviated day or stockpile time is being used. Kindergarten classes must meet at least four (4) hours per day. Schools may have separate schedules for the grade bands they serve but must meet the requirements for each grade/school.

18. Can a non-public school adopt the same school calendar as the local public school system?

No. The non-public school must establish its own operational calendar each school year; however, non-public schools may choose to align their own operational calendar with that of the local public school district so that certain aspects match such as attendance start and stop dates or breaks and holidays. Public school calendars are set in compliance with additional requirements determined by the school district that may differ from non-public schools.

19. Who can I contact if I have additional questions?

Schools with additional questions may contact the department at Private.Schools@tn.gov or, if appropriate, the school's accrediting or membership agency.

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