

We're all getting these calls, so here's the FAQs:

S*N*O*W D*A*Y*S (and Other Calendar Issues)

The DE has a set of Frequently Asked Questions entitled School Year/Calendar at http://www.iowa.gov/educate/support/index.php?_m=knowledgebase&_a=view&parentcategoryid=76&pcid=0&nav=0. Here are some pertinent Q and As from that set.

Question: May a school district lengthen the school day to make up for days missed as a result of inclement weather?

Answer: Yes, if done prospectively only. A district may not go back and add up time exceeding 5.5 hours from each day *already passed* to achieve the equivalent of 180 days.

Question: May a school district make up snow days on weekends?

Answer: Yes. Iowa Code section 279.10 does not designate what days of the week are official "school days".

Question: A school district has parent-teacher conferences planned on a Tuesday and Thursday evening yet to come in the school's calendar. Staff and students will also go to the school on Friday of that same week. May the district count the hours spent on parent-teacher conference Tuesday and Thursday night as another day of student instruction on Saturday (a fifth consecutive day, Tuesday through Saturday) -- even though staff and students would not attend school on Saturday?

Answer: Yes. 281 IAC 12.1(9) provides for this exception as long as the five consecutive days equals 27.5 hours of student instruction. Remember, parent-teacher conference time counts as student instruction.

Question: May a school district make up parent-teacher conference time missed because of weather and count that time toward student instructional days?

Answer: Yes.

Question: May a school district add parent-teacher conference time that was not in the original school calendar and count that time toward student instructional days.

Answer: No.

Question: May local school boards forgive snow make-up days?

Answer: No.

Question: May a school district get a waiver from the Department of Education to NOT make up snow days.

Answer: No. The DE has no such authority.

Question: Must a district make up days when weather forces it to start late or let out early?

Answer: No. Iowa Code section 256.7(19) states that a full day of instruction may be recorded if "emergency health or safety factors require the late arrival or early dismissal of students on a specific day." However, a local school board could decide voluntarily to make up the time that is lost by late starts and early dismissals.

Question: Do all attendance centers in a school district have to provide the same number of student instructional hours?

Answer: No, building schedules may vary as long as each building accounts for 180 days of instruction. However, each building must provide a minimum of 5.5 hours of student instruction. To count a day of school, all grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students. Exception: If a classroom or attendance center is closed for emergency health or safety reasons, but the remainder of the school district is in operation, the day may be counted as a day of school.

Question: If "early bird" students come to school on what becomes a "snow day" but no other students are bused to the school, may a day of student instruction be counted?

Answer: No. 281 IAC 12.1(8) states that "a day of school is a day during which the school or school district is in session and students are under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff." In addition, all grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students.

Question: Does the school or school district have to run the buses to count the day as a day of student instruction?

Answer: Yes. Not only do the buses have to run, but students also need to be "under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff." All grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students. This implies that students must be in classes for some period of time prior to early release. See 281 IAC 12.1(8) and Iowa Code section 285.1(8). OAG #93-11-8.

Question: Do seniors have to make up "snow days"?

Answer: This is a local decision. Iowa Code 279.10 states, "the district may excuse a graduating senior who has met district or school requirements for graduation from attendance during the extended school calendar." NOTE, however, that rule 281—IAC 12.1(7) requires that there be a board policy to excuse seniors from making up "snow days."

Question: If a district has its seniors make up "snow days" and the additional time goes beyond the date set for graduation exercises, what should the district do?

Answer: There is no legal significance to the graduation ceremony. It is a public celebration, but there is nothing in the law that even requires that such ceremony take place. If it is not possible to conclude the seniors' days of instruction prior to the date set for commencement exercises, a district may proceed with the ceremony, giving the seniors blank documents or a carnation, etc., and distribute the diplomas at a later time.

Question: If a district closes due to health reasons (e.g., influenza contagion), does it follow the "snow days" rules?

Answer: Yes. Full days that are missed must be made up. If a district has early dismissal or late start due to emergency health issues, the district may count the day as a full instructional day. Remember also that if just a classroom or attendance center is closed for emergency health or safety reasons, while the remainder of the district is in operation, the day may be counted as a day of school.

Question: May a school district let out school for athletic tournaments and other competitions and still count the day as a day of student instruction?

Answer: Yes, but only if the district keeps each building open and available for attendance by all students, and students in all grade levels are "under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff" as described in 281 IAC 12.1(8). No, if an attendance center or district is closed. In addition, if school is dismissed before the minimum 5.5 hours of student instruction, the school must make up the time.

Carol Greta, Attorney 3

Iowa Department of Education

www.iowa.gov/educate

515/281-8661

FAX: 515/281-4122

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