

FAQ: School Closing & Required Instructional Time

Diocese of Madison

Who defines required hours of instruction?

- The Diocese of Madison governs this for Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese. It bases its policy on the requirements of both the Wisconsin Religious & Independent Schools Accreditation (WRISA) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requirements for public schools.

How many hours of instruction are required?

- Diocesan Policy requires 1,050 hours of instruction per year. This aligns with the WRISA requirement and the DPI requirement for public elementary and PK-8 public schools.

Why does the Diocese base its policy on the DPI requirements for public schools?

- In the Code of Canon Law, Canon 806 §2 states that in Catholic schools “...*the instruction which is given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area.*” Instructional time is a tangible metric that, although not indicative in and of itself of the quality of an education, is often considered an important element of a quality education. This is evidenced by the fact that WRISA adopted this DPI rule for public schools as a requirement of accreditation. Catholic schools should at least meet, if not exceed the requirements of the public schools and those of accreditation.

What counts as instructional time?

- Time that students are in class.
 - Only the hours in which instruction is provided to all students/grades may be counted.
- Recess
 - NOTE: No more than 30 minutes of recess may be counted in a single day.
 - EXAMPLE: If students have a 15 minute recess in the morning, again at lunch and again in the afternoon, they have 45 minutes of recess a day. For the purposes of instructional hours however, only 30 minutes of that recess time may be counted.
- Passing periods between classes
- One passing period either before or after lunch (ONLY if you schedule passing periods at lunch)

What does NOT count as instructional time?

- Lunch
- Recess in excess of 30 minutes per day
- Teacher in-service days
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Any day that school has been canceled (due to inclement weather, flooding, broken boilers, broken pipes, bad well water, disinfecting the school against swine flu, etc.)
- Hours that students are not in school for a full day due to a late start or early release

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Do we still have to schedule a 180 day calendar now that we count instructional hours?

No. However, WRISA does require that the “normal instructional day” is a least six (6) hours. (If you add 30 minutes for lunch, the day would be 6 ½ hours, but only 6 hours would be instructional.)

Based on a day of 6 instructional hours, you would need 175 days in order to meet the required 1,050 hours. Therefore, the Diocese suggests that you schedule a minimum of 175 school days.

When would we have to “make-up” for canceled school days?

- You need to make-up hours if at any point you project that you will not meet the 1,050 hour requirement by the end of the school year.

If we miss school during a declared, statewide, “State of Emergency,” do we still need to make-up the days if we would otherwise fall short of the required hours?

- Yes. There is no provision in Wisconsin state law to exempt schools from the required hours of instruction, even during a declared “State of Emergency.”

What are the ways we could use to make-up hours?

- Hold school for a full day on previously scheduled half days
- Hold school on previously scheduled in-service days
- Shorten planned breaks (i.e. hold school on Easter Monday or shorten spring break)
- Add instructional minutes to either the beginning of the day, end of the day or both

Would public school districts need to bus our students if we added days to the end of the year?

- Yes. They would need to do this regardless of whether or not they also added days. The district would have to bus your students and pay for it.

Would the public school districts need to adjust the bus schedules if we changed our start and end times by adding minutes to the beginning or end of the day?

- NO. Public schools are not required to accommodate changes in start and end times.
- If your students rely on public school buses, we strongly recommend that you work with your public school district when determining how best to adjust the calendar/schedule to make-up for canceled days.

If we have to adjust the calendar to make-up time, do we have to resubmit our “Days & Hours Worksheet to the DPI?

- No. You should revise the diocesan school calendar (quarters or trimesters) and resubmit it to the Office of Catholic Schools. This will be used as evidence of meeting diocesan policy and the instructional hours requirement for accreditation.
- This should be submitted no later than May 1st.

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What if we can't add enough days at the end of the year to make-up for the snow days before the end of the teachers' last contracted work day?

- Make up as many days as possible before the teachers' last contracted work day.
- Document this effort by revising your diocesan school calendar worksheet for quarters and semesters. Include a short explanation of the measures you took to try and make-up the hours you missed.
- Send this to the Office of Catholic Schools by May 1st. This will serve as documented evidence that you attempted to comply with the requirement and took measures to comply with both diocesan policy and WRISA requirements for accreditation.
 - EXAMPLE: If the teachers' contracts state that June 5th is their last day, but you can get only 1,037 hours in before then, would you need teachers to work until June 7th so that you can get in all your hours?
 - ANSWER: NO. Adjust your diocesan school calendar and add an explanation detailing the measures you took to meet the 1,050 hour requirement. (i.e. held school on scheduled half-days and in-service days, added a day, etc.). Submit this to the OCS by May 1st.

If we try everything, but still can't meet the 1,050 hours before the last contracted day for teachers, will the school lose its accreditation for falling below 1,050 hours?

- No. As long as you revise your diocesan school calendar documenting the steps you took to try and meet the requirement and submit this to the OCS, the school will not lose accreditation.
- HOWEVER, it is critical that you do this as this documentation will serve as evidence that you place a premium on instructional time and did all that you could to try and meet the requirement so as to maintain a high quality education for your students and maintain the standards of accreditation.