



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
GEORGE A. COLEMAN
ACTING COMMISSIONER



Series: 2010-2011
Circular Letter: C-9

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: George A. Coleman, Acting Commissioner of Education

DATE: January 31, 2011

SUBJECT: School Closures and the School Calendar

Due to inclement weather, many districts already have closed school and shortened the school day on numerous occasions during the current school year. The purpose of this communication is to review the pertinent law regarding the school calendar with respect to granting waivers of the 180-day requirement.

Connecticut law requires that public schools be in session for at least 180 days per school year.¹ School districts that enact a school calendar with more than 180 school days do so voluntarily, and need not seek approval from the State Board of Education (the "SBE") to shorten or otherwise modify the school calendar, provided that school is in session on at least 180 days. Due to the large number of school closings that have occurred thus far this school year, it may be necessary for some districts to modify their school calendar in order to comply with this legal requirement. In such situations, please be advised that Connecticut law prohibits rescheduled school sessions from being held on Saturday or Sunday. In addition, a district may not make up the time by extending the hours of school days. Schools may be in session on legal holidays, however, except for those legal holidays falling in the months of January or December. In the event school is held on a legal holiday, districts are required to offer a nonsectarian educational program in observance of such holiday.

We have received a number of inquiries regarding whether the SBE will consider waiving the 180-day requirement. Connecticut law allows for the SBE to authorize boards of education to modify the school calendar to have fewer than 180 days of school due to "unavoidable emergency." Please be advised that school closures due to inclement weather generally will not constitute unavoidable emergencies. When closures due to inclement weather occur early enough in the school year (such as in the winter months), local boards will have sufficient time throughout the remainder of the school year, through June 30, to make up lost days. Therefore, the State Department of Education ordinarily will not support waiver requests for snow days. As a result, boards of education should anticipate that the SBE will not ordinarily consider waiving the 180-day requirement this year due to school closures as a result of inclement weather.

¹ Although the law does not define the term "school day," please note that school districts are required to provide in each school year (1) 900 hours of actual work for full-day kindergarten and grades 1 through 12, and (2) 450 hours of half-day kindergarten. School districts may not count more than 7 hours of actual school work in any school day towards the total required for the school year. Connecticut General Statutes § 10-16.

In addressing issues relating to the school calendar, districts may also grapple with when to hold graduation. As a general rule, because school is required to be in session for at least 180 days, graduation may not be held until this requirement has been satisfied. One exception to this general rule is that boards of education may, at the beginning of the school year, adopt a school calendar with a specified graduation date, provided the calendar contains at least 185 school days. Graduation may then be held on that date, regardless of the number of school closings that occur during the year. If school has not been in session for at least 180 days at the time of graduation, however, seniors would be required to return to school after graduation to complete the 180 required school days. Another exception allows a school district, after April 1st, to establish a graduation date that would provide for 180 school days. Thereafter, if the school must be closed due to inclement weather or other emergency, graduation may be held on the designated day. As is the case above, however, if at the time of graduation school had not been in session for at least 180 days, seniors would be required to return to school after graduation to complete the 180 required school days.

The foregoing analysis is intended to provide a brief overview of the legal considerations regarding the school calendar and modification thereto. Please note that districts may need to address additional considerations when modifying the school calendar, including but not limited to collective bargaining concerns. Those concerns are not within the purview of the SBE, however, and should be handled on the local level.

If you have any questions, please contact my office at 860-713-6500 or the Office of Legal and Governmental Affairs at 860-713-6520.

Thank you.

165 Capitol Avenue • Hartford, Connecticut 06106
Tel: (860) 713-6500 Fax: (860) 713-7001
Email: george.coleman@ct.gov