



*The number one most asked question we field is how many days do I have to have in my calendar? This comes up when inclement weather wreaks havoc on the calendar or when laying out the school calendar for the next year. So, are there actually 180 days of school required?*

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You are wondering what to do? You planned for a mission appropriate calendar and then days were unexpectedly missed because of treacherous road conditions and unsalted roads in front of the school. And now parents are calling to try to get you to tell them if they should reconsider their travel plans for the long weekend you have designated as the makeup days: they were really looking forward to that trip. You are in a pickle, probably a frozen one! Let's take a quick look at the SAIS accreditation standard that applies to the calendar, SAIS Indicator 3.7.

The indicator reads:

**Plans a mission-appropriate academic calendar with a minimum of 170 days, or more if required by state law, during which students and teachers engage in teaching/learning activities (Note: for half-day kindergarten programs, one-half day is equivalent to one full day in meeting the 170-day standard).**

*Evidence of compliance with state law is adequate, along with a copy of the school's calendar. Note that although state law differs, generally the requirement is a minimum of the equivalent of 180 days of instruction at 4-6.5 hours per day (720-1170 total hours).*

OK – so first, do you have a calendar that was planned for at least 170 days? Let's hope that you have actually planned for closer to the norm of somewhere between 175 and 180. If not, well, then maybe we should have a little talk! Second, have you planned more days "if required by state law?" And what exactly is the law in your state? We are glad you asked.

The law that fixes the length of the school year in your state is probably part of the compulsory attendance law. These laws were originally enacted between 1852 (Massachusetts) and 1929 (Alaska) with numerous revisions and exemptions enumerated in statutes or administrative code. They came to prominence in the late 1960's and early 1970's because, with the good old spending clause, the federal government tied funding of government public schools to measures that included compulsory attendance. Independent schools got caught up in the laws in most states, although there were fights for exemptions. These days, most states require attendance of all school age students to be 180 days or its equivalent. The equivalency is defined either in state statute or in administrative code as somewhere between 4 hours on the short end to about 6.5

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hours on the long end – the difference is usually that one includes only direct instruction time and the other includes the entire school day. There are a handful of states in which independent schools are required to have calendars “roughly equivalent” to the local public school calendar or in which state statute is completely silent on any requirement at all.

When you do the math on equivalency, you come up with somewhere between 720-1170 total hours. In a typical independent school, the days are a little longer and there tends to be more direct instruction. Realistically, you could plan a calendar of about 145 days and meet the requirements of the laws in your state – although the parents enrolling their children are likely to question your tuition! This is where the SAIS accreditation indicator comes in – we require a minimum of 170.

Even after letting your students sled for a few days, if your calendar still allows you to meet north of 175, chances are you are just fine. If you are sinking pretty close to 170, you might want to get your calculator out and take a good look at what you have planned. If you are south of 170, you should pay close attention to Punxsutawney Phil and probably start figuring out how to tell that family they should cancel their trip.

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Feel free to contact us if you have questions – [accreditation@sais.org](mailto:accreditation@sais.org)

Below is a list of the pertinent part of state statute or administrative code related to compulsory attendance or exemption statements for independent schools.

Alabama: §16-28-3

Arkansas: §6-18-201(a)

California: EC 48222

Florida: Rule 6A-1.09512, F.A.C.

Georgia: §20.2.690

Kentucky: §159.030(1)(b)

Louisiana: §17:236

Mississippi: §37-13-91(2)(e)

North Carolina: §115C-554 and 562; §115C-548 and 556

South Carolina: none referenced in state law

Tennessee: none referenced in state law for Category III schools (SAIS accredited schools are Category III); “stockpiling” concept for other categories: T.C.A. 49-6-3004(e)(1).

Texas: §2.E.25.086

Virginia: §22.1-254

