



# Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

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## Hurricane Days FAQ – 2024-2025

### Why did our district close on a day the storm(s) did not impact us?

Florida Statutes require that public schools be made available for hurricane evacuation shelters at the request of local emergency management agencies ([FS 252.38](#)). The decision to close is a collaborative process between District and County leaders, although the emergency management director has the final authority to call for school shelters to open and when the shelters close

*sec. 252.38 (1)(d) During a declared state or local emergency and upon the request of the director of a local emergency management agency, the district school board or school boards in the affected area shall participate in emergency management by providing facilities and necessary personnel to access such facilities or perform other duties related to the facilities as may be required pursuant to the county emergency management plan and program. Each school board providing transportation assistance in an emergency evacuation shall coordinate the use of its vehicles and personnel with the local emergency management agency.*

### Information about instructional days/hours/minutes:

- [Florida Statute 1001.42](#) restricts public schools from opening no earlier than August 10<sup>th</sup> of each year. Normally that means that school always starts on August 10<sup>th</sup> which allows the district to work in a few more “cushion” days into the total number of school days to gain instructional minutes in the first semester.
- The desire by most stakeholders to end the first semester before Winter Break is rooted in having semester exams before Winter Break to decrease learning loss before exams, support school and student achievement, and give student and educators a true rest between semesters. Additionally, the timing of state assessments in the spring makes it highly preferable to end the fall semester before Winter Break.
- As authorized in [section 1011.60\(2\), Florida Statutes](#), schools must operate for 180 actual teaching days or the equivalent on an hourly basis to participate in the Florida Education Finance Program. [Rule 6A-1.045111, Florida Administrative Code](#) specifies the hourly equivalent as not less than 720 net instructional hours for kindergarten through grade 3 and not less than 900 hours for grades 4 through 12.

Provided this statutory requirement is met, school boards have the authority to adopt an alternative calendar without authorization or approval by FLDOE. This will not affect the district’s funding

through the Florida Education Finance Program, nor will it affect the survey count of full-time equivalent students.

- **Note:** An academically high-performing school district under [Section 1003.621, F.S.](#) may provide up to two days of the required one hundred eighty (180) actual teaching days or the hourly equivalent through virtual instruction. The hourly equivalent is based on the student's daily instructional schedule as reported in the full-time equivalent student membership surveys required by [Rule 6A-1.0451, F.A.C.](#) Florida Education Finance Program Membership Surveys. But... Hillsborough does not qualify for this designation.
- Florida law gives the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education the authority to alter the instructional hours requirement when the loss of instructional hours is caused by a bona fide emergency and when it is not feasible to make up the lost days or hours. However, [Rule 6A-1.09533, Florida Administrative Code](#) provides that the Commissioner will consider requests from district school boards to reduce the length of the school term **only if:**

*No teacher planning days, excluding a maximum of three (3) planning days at the end of the school year, remain in the official school year calendar as approved by the district school board, and no school holidays, other than authorized national or state holidays, remain in the official school year calendar as approved by the district school board.*

The existence of Early Release Mondays (which some districts may not have or have only on a sporadic basis), other teacher planning/workdays, and other holidays present clear challenges in appealing to the Commissioner and the Board of Education to consider the request to waive instructional time.

- The State Board of Education as well as the Governor could authorize a reduction in the number of instructional hours for the year. Under previous Governors' administrations, this has been the case for specific districts and emergencies for past hurricanes, but the current commissioner, who is appointed by our current governor, stated at a State Board of Education meeting this year that he is unwilling to entertain requests for flexibility in meeting the requirements for this year's storm events.
  - HCPS has reported to HCTA that the requests have been discussed by phone. FDOE guidance memos ([Helene](#) & [Milton](#)) sent to all districts in response to requests to waive instructional hours specifically state: "*Currently, the department does not anticipate waiving any instructional hours.*"
  - The Florida Education Association has confirmed that no school districts in Florida have been granted a waiver of instructional hours due to the recent storms.

## Why is there not enough time in the first semester to create a “cushion” of instructional time?

As referenced above, there are many factors, including August 10, 2024, falling on a Saturday which meant that school couldn't start until August 12, 2024, which cost our district two vital days in the tightly packed fall semester. Another main issue impacting HCPS is the fact secondary student schedules run on a 7-period day. [Florida Statute 1003.436](#) defines a course “credit” as a minimum of 135 hours, therefore one semester must equal no less than 67.5 hours. Currently, each period is 48 minutes on a regular day and 40 minutes on an early release day. This equates to 67.6 hours by period for the first semester, therefore creating only a 6 minute “cushion” of time in the first semester calendar.

- Breakdown of instructional minutes by day:
  - Elementary = 325 minutes on a regular day / 265 minutes on an ERD
  - Secondary = 336 minutes on a regular day / 280 minutes on an ERD
  - Period for Secondary = 48 minutes on a regular day / 40 minutes on an ERD
- The original first semester calendar has 87 days (72 full days and 15 Early Release Days) for totals as follows:
  - 27,375 minutes for Elementary (*a “cushion” of 375 minutes for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>*)
  - 28,392 minutes for Secondary (*a “cushion” of 1,392 minutes for MS/HS*)
  - 4,056 minutes for Secondary by Period (*a “cushion” or 6 minutes for MS/HS credit hours*)
- In the first semester Hurricane Helene and Milton caused HCPS to lose approximately:
  - 3,190 minutes for Elementary
  - 3,304 minutes for Secondary
  - 472 minutes for Secondary by Period

## What about time in the second semester?

Currently the second semester does have more time built in which could be used to reduce the number of first semester instructional minutes/hours needed to be made up that were lost due to Helene and Milton.

- The second semester calendar has 93 days (78 full days and 15 Early Release Days) for totals as follows:
  - 29,325 minutes for Elementary (*additional “cushion” of 2,325 minutes for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>*)
  - 30,408 minutes for Secondary (*additional “cushion” of 3,408 minutes for MS/HS*)
  - 4,344 minutes for Secondary by Period (*additional “cushion” or 294 minutes for MS/HS credit hours*)

However, even if the additional “cushion” minutes in the second semester are applied to the first semester, HCPS will still need to make up instructional time to meet the total annual requirements:

- **Elementary must make up 490 minutes to meet state requirements for instructional hours for the year.**
- **Secondary must make up 172 minutes in each period to meet the state requirements for credit hours for the year.**

## Why are other districts not having to make up as many/any days?

There are a variety of factors that impact this such as: number of periods in the day, number of early release days, number of days off (i.e. Fall/Winter break), and many districts build their schedule with a few minutes extra each day. This could allow them to meet the statutory requirement for the minimum number of minutes without altering their calendars and schedules. As stated above, the Florida Education Association has verified that no other districts in Florida have been granted a waiver of instructional time due to the recent storms by the FDOE.