



## Treehouse Tips: Shortened School Days

There may be times when a parent, caregiver, or school district requests a shortened day for a student. Such requests should be rare and temporary, as they can impact the student's right to a free and appropriate public education, as defined by [WAC 392-172A-02000](#). For students experiencing foster care, shortened days can pose additional challenges by creating barriers for caregivers and contributing to instability in their living situations. Therefore, maintaining a consistent school schedule is vital to supporting their stability and educational progress, making it essential to address any requests for shortened school days with careful consideration.

### **When is a temporarily shortened day permissible?**

- When a medical event or disability impacts a student's stamina and ability to participate in a full day of school.
- When an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that the shortened day is required to meet a student's unique disability-related needs.
- When requested and/or agreed upon by a parent, caregiver, or court appointed educational decision maker.

### **When is it not appropriate to shorten a student's school day?**

- When the decision is influenced by budgetary concerns, staffing shortages, scheduling conflicts, or other non-student-driven reasons.
- When the decision is a result of or punishment for a student's behavior.
- When the decision results in the denial of the student's right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).
- When the IEP team has not considered an IEP that includes use of trauma-informed positive behavioral interventions, supports, and strategies to address the student's needs and enable them to participate in a full day of school.

### **What questions should the team consider before shortening a student's day?**

- Is there data that demonstrates a unique and individual need for a shortened school day?
- Would an alternative instructional methodology (such as remote/online learning) or an alternative school placement be more appropriate than shortening the student's school day? If so, what are the next steps to transition the youth to an alternative program?

- What is needed to support progression towards a full day? What is the plan for the student to return to a full day of school?
- Does the student have a known or suspected disability? Should the student be evaluated for special education services, or provided with a 504 plan?

**If the student has an IEP, what further questions should the team consider?**

- Does the shortened school day result in a change of educational placement or violate the least restrictive environment mandate for students with an IEP?
- Is a reevaluation or functional behavioral assessment (FBA) needed?
- Is there already a behavior intervention plan (BIP) in place, and could it be improved?
- Is the district following all policies and procedures to develop an IEP, amend an IEP, and/or change a student's placement?
- Has the district provided proper documentation, such as a prior written notice, that includes evidence that the shortened day is necessary or a response to a parent/caregiver request?

**Additional Considerations:**

- **General Education:** Students in general education, with no special education, who have a 504 plan, and/or related services, are entitled to a full day of school; shortening the student's day is considered a classroom exclusion when the student is excluded for longer than the balance of the school day. When a classroom exclusion occurs, the school district must follow typical discipline procedures for suspensions, expulsions, or emergency expulsions per [WAC 392-400-330](#).
- **Special Education or other Related Services:** Students who receive special education or other related services are entitled to a full day of school unless it is decided by their IEP (Individualized Education Program) team that a shortened day is necessary. Regardless of the reason, the decision to shorten a student's day should be made through a process that follows requirements of the [Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act \(IDEIA\)](#), and the IEP should document the unique needs that justify a shortened day. Districts should take steps to ensure that any shortened days are limited in duration. While this is specific to students who receive special education, similar protections apply to all students with disabilities under [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#).

**Resources:** For more information, review the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's document: [Tips from the Special Education Division Shortened School Days](#)

**Make a referral for Educational Advocacy!**



If you have any questions or concerns about a student's education, make a referral to Treehouse's advocacy program! To qualify for Educational Advocacy, youth must have an open dependency or have shelter care status. Scan the QR code or click the link below to complete the referral process: <https://referrals.treehouseforkids.org/>