

Parent Calendar Survey Feedback

Thank you to all of our parents who participated in the calendar survey and provided us with excellent feedback. The number of people participating in the survey was phenomenal and your feedback was exceptionally useful in developing the first draft of the calendar presented to the Calendar Committee of the School Board on January 3, 2012. Now, the committee is working with your ideas and thoughts, as well as the legal parameters for the calendar and area comparables, in order to develop the calendar for 2012-13. It is our hope that the published, final calendar will be on the website and distributed through schools in March of 2012.

With any survey, we find there is an ongoing opportunity to share information. Here's a quick Q & A to help both parents and staff understand some of the parameters of creating a calendar:

When can school start? By law, school must start on or after September 1 each year. This is a state statute that all schools in Wisconsin must follow.

Is it possible to start on September 1 (as required by law) and complete the school year before the Memorial Day weekend? Yes. It is possible. However, in order to meet the 180 days and hours of instruction, we would need to eliminate or move the professional development days and dramatically shorten the holiday breaks to account for around fifteen days. This was not the preference of parents as indicated in the survey.

When can school end? By law, students must have 180 days of school and at each level (elementary, middle and high school) there are a required number of hours. There are some exceptions to this. However, the exceptions are unique and rare, due to extraordinary circumstances or for specific, documented and measured professional development. So, there is no specific end date, but we must meet BOTH the number of days and total hours per school year.

When students are not in school, are teachers off? Generally, the teacher schedule follows the student schedule for major holidays. However, the school calendar also includes a number of days where teachers are at school learning, analyzing data, and collaborating to provide quality instruction. These are times when students are not at school.

Can these professional development days happen before the school year and after the school year? Like any professional organization, we focus on continuous improvement for staff, students and programs. If a plan is developed at the beginning of the year and only revisited at year end, the opportunity to analyze and adjust the plan for students doesn't happen. We need the opportunity to adjust the plan periodically in order to ensure that we are providing the best opportunities for student learning. Examination along the way to check student progress shows us where our plans are working and where the plan can be improved for students. So, no, our organization cannot simply plan at the beginning and evaluate at the end. Further, new mandates from the state level are requiring the implementation of many new pieces of our puzzle such as reading initiatives, new student information systems, new state tests, or new teacher effectiveness models. These mandated, state-imposed time lines are often set beyond the control of the District.

Can the time for this be after school? Yes and much of it is currently done in the after school hours through committee work such as curriculum coordination, technology teams, staff meetings, etc. However, when we need the entire staff to learn a new skill or collaborate across buildings and grade levels having staff participate in a data retreat or learning opportunity would be an added cost as employees are working well beyond the eight hour day. Further, staff members who coach or advise co-curriculars would have difficulty attending creating a need for replication of the learning at additional times and added costs.

Additionally, the following is a summary of the parent survey data:

- Parents predominantly prefer early release over the late start we tried earlier in the year.
 - Late start allows for longer blocks of building collaboration on a schools individual improvement plan.
 - Early release allows for collaboration across and among buildings and student grade levels.

- Eighty-two percent of parents prefer to continue fall parent teacher conferences and the preference for the timing was slightly greater for nine weeks into the year.
- The format of for parent-teacher conferences responses revealed a preference for teacher-led conferences with a wide margin. Student-led conferences were the next favored format for parent-teacher conferences. Video chats and Skype as well as e-mail and phone ranked lower.
- Parents also responded to their preferred time of day for parent-teacher conferences.
 - Ninety-nine percent of parents prefer a parent-teacher conference after 4:00 p.m.
 - Twenty-four percent of parents prefer a parent-teacher conference between noon and 4:00 p.m.
 - Fourteen percent of parents prefer an AM time (8-12 noon).
- When asked about the October long weekend, parents preferred both Thursday and Friday off. However, this is contradictory of the thought of ending school earlier in the year. Thus, this may not be possible to do both.
- Parents prefer to have Spring Break change with Easter each year. However, again, this is contradictory with the desire to have the break set with other districts, university calendars, and less expensive travel times.
- When asked about the best way to provide for staff professional development, parents prefer to have students off for a full day while teachers are learning. The second choice was early release.
 - Parents predominantly would like the full day or early release to extend a holiday or weekend.
- Back to School, Open House and other orientation nights are preferred to be offered the week of August 27 with the first week of school as the second favorite. Please know that the decision on scheduling these nights is made by each building.

Again, thank you for your comments related to the development of the calendar. Your feedback is helpful as the School Board Calendar Committee develops the final draft to move forward to the full School Board for approval.

Dr. Borden