



Shrewsbury Public Schools School Calendar & Start Time Committee

January 20, 2016

Presented by Mike Albertson, Parent & Lisa Robinson, Director Preschool Programs

School Calendar

Purpose & Goals

- Convened by Superintendent
- Advise on changes to the school year calendar or the scheduled start times of schools
- Consider alternatives for the most effective calendar to meet education needs of students, professional development of educators, need and preferences of families and staff

2016 Calendar Committee - Factors

Weather



Religious Holiday Observances



Relevant Factors

- Massachusetts law
- The current contract between the School Committee and the Shrewsbury Education Association
- SPS 2005 Calendar Committee recommendations

The Committee's Work

- Research - 18 nearby districts
- Survey - students, parents, staff
- Review - research and survey data
- Recommend - most effective school calendar

School Calendar
Findings &
Recommendations

Start of the School Year

Public schools in Massachusetts must be in session for a minimum of 180 days. The earlier the school year starts, the less likely it is that the school year will run late into June (especially if there are multiple snow days), and vice versa. Please indicate your preference regarding the start and end of the school year.	Students	Staff	Parents
I prefer to start the school year prior to Labor Day in order to have the school year end earlier in June	69%	80%	58%
I prefer to start after Labor Day and have the school year end later in June	17%	13%	30%
No preference	13%	7%	12%

Recommendation

The Committee recommends the district continue the current practice of the school district beginning the school year the week prior to Labor Day.

Religious Holidays

The State of Massachusetts requires public school districts observe the following legal holidays: Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, M.L. King Day, Presidents Day, and Memorial Day. Outside of these days, please rate the importance of students having the days listed below as no-school days.

% of respondents rating each religious holiday as <u>Very Important or Important</u>	Students	Staff	Parents
Yom Kippur	26%	7%	7%
Rosh Hashanah	27%	7%	6%
Diwali	29%	5%	17%
Eid al-Fitr	27%	4%	6%
Eid al-Adha	27%	4%	5%
Good Friday	64%	26%	28%

Recommendations

The Committee recommends the district continue the current practice of having school in session on religious holidays, and

Increase awareness of students, parents and staff about the various religious holidays celebrated by members of our school community, and School Committee's policy for students who miss school for a religious observance.

Wednesday before Thanksgiving & Christmas Eve Day

% of respondents rating each holiday as <u>Very Important or Important</u>	Students	Staff	Parents
Wednesday before Thanksgiving	90%	87%	58%
Christmas Eve	96%	94%	85%

Recommendation

The Committee recommends the district continue the current practice of not having school in session on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve day.

School Vacations

Which of the following traditional school vacation weeks would you be interested in modifying, if any?

% of respondents preference of not modifying vacations	Students	Staff	Parents
December vacation break	94%	98%	88%
February vacation break	79%	69%	41%
April vacation break	84%	77%	52%

Additional Comments & Findings

Majority of comments in favor of eliminating the February and April vacations and adding a March vacation related to ending school earlier in June, planning for childcare, and cost savings for families traveling

Majority of comments opposed to eliminating the February and April vacations and adding a March vacation were related to logistical challenges for educators

Research of 18 neighboring school districts did not find another community among the 18 that had a March break

Modifying the traditional school break calendar would have a limited impact on how far the calendar would stretch into June (net reduction is 3 days)

Recommendation

The Committee recommends the district continue the current practice of having three school vacations in December, February and April.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

<i>How important is it for there to be scheduled parent/teacher conferences at a time when school is not in session?</i>	Staff	Parents
Very Important	32%	19%
Important	16%	21%
Not Important	27%	30%
No Preference	25%	30%

<i>What is your preference for when parent/teacher conferences should be scheduled?</i>	Staff	Parents
% of respondents rating as <u>Highly Preferred or Preferred</u>		
During school hours by appointment when teachers are available	35%	44%
On a day when there is no school scheduled for students	49%	34%
On an early release day	38%	33%
Maintain the current practice of having PreK-8 parent conferences on a no school day for students on Election Day in November	63%	50%

Parent Teacher Conferences

Comments

- Majority of comments from parents were related to scheduling parent-teacher conferences in the evening and/or during times that are more convenient for working parents

Recommendations

- The Committee recommends that Election Day remain a day when school is not in session and dedicated to PreK-8 parent-teacher conferences, and
- The Committee recommends that the district further explore alternative options for parent-teacher conferences. The district may want to consider an additional, future survey seeking input from parents and staff regarding parent-teacher conferences.

Professional Development – Full Days

Shrewsbury educators are currently required to participate in two full days of professional development. What is your preference for when these days should be scheduled?

% of respondents rating as <u>Highly Preferred or Preferred</u>	Students	Staff	Parents
One or more prior to the first student day of school	17%	36%	43%
On the Friday prior to Labor Day weekend after the school year has begun (same as this year)	60%	63%	56%
On the Friday prior to Columbus Day weekend (same as this year)	65%	68%	64%
On the Friday prior to Martin Luther King Day weekend	56%	46%	45%
One or more attached to a full school vacation week	48%	16%	39%

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the district maintain the practice of holding the full professional development days on the Fridays before Labor Day and Columbus Day.

Professional Development – Early Release

Shrewsbury educators are currently required to participate in five early release days for professional development. What is your preference for when these early release days should be scheduled? (Note: The current practice of early release days on Tuesdays aligns with days that educators stay an additional hour beyond the normal end of a workday, which allows for longer professional development sessions to help meet state mandates for continuing education required to maintain educators' licenses.)

% of respondents rating as <u>Highly Preferred or Preferred</u>	Students	Staff	Parents
Monday afternoons, no more than once per month	31%	8%	13%
Tuesday afternoons, no more than once per month (current practice)	36%	69%	37%
Wednesday afternoons, no more than once per month	30%	9%	10%
Thursday afternoons, no more than once per month	23%	9%	8%
Friday afternoons, no more than once per month	70%	21%	49%

Professional Development – Early Release

Comments

The Committee carefully considered and discussed the strong preference of students and parents for holding professional development for educators on Friday afternoons and understands that this might be the most convenient time for students and parents.

However, it does not endorse holding professional development on Friday afternoons because, like other industries with traditional Monday-Friday workweeks, the efficacy of holding training on Friday afternoons is poor.

The goal of professional development is to engage educators in high-quality training that will have a positive impact on student learning.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the district continue with the current practice of scheduling early release days for professional development on Tuesday afternoons, aligned with the Tuesday afternoons educators work an additional hour beyond the normal workday in order to provide sufficient time for this work.

Conclusion

- Significant changes are not recommended relative to the school district calendar.
- However, despite this outcome the Committee would like to emphasize that the recommendations to maintain current practices reaffirm the significant changes made to the school year calendar in 2005.
- The recommendations made by the committee is what the Committee believes is, given the constraints involved, the most effective calendar for meeting the needs of students, professional development needs of educators, and the various needs and preferences of families and staff.

School Start Time

- The Committee will continue its work of:
 - examining current start times for our schools
 - researching other school districts' practices, and
 - recent research from the medical field.

The Committee would like to thank all of the stakeholders for providing input for consideration and members of the School Calendar & School Start Committee for their research and collaboration.