



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

January 28, 2022

To: School Committee
Re: Recommendation for school year calendar for 2022-2023

Enclosed with this memorandum is a draft of the proposed calendar for the 2022-2023 school year.

This proposed calendar follows state law regarding not holding school on [legal holidays](#). The approach used for scheduling vacation periods is the same as in recent years, which is structured according to the [recommendations made in January 2016](#) by a Calendar Committee composed of staff and parents.

This calendar returns to the approach for the start of the school year that we utilized prior to the pandemic, with the first day for staff being the Monday before Labor Day (August 29), followed the next day by the first student day (August 30), and holding a professional development day that Friday (September 2).

Also of note is this calendar begins the December vacation on December 23. Data from this year showed a very high level of student absenteeism on December 23 (15% overall, almost 20% at SHS), which principals anecdotally believe was due to a large number of families traveling, which made this day a challenging one for instruction. Additionally, a review of surrounding communities' calendars that have already been approved for next year or are in draft form indicate that many also have this day as the start of the vacation, creating scheduling conflicts for SPS staff with children in those districts. For these reasons, I believe it makes sense to begin this vacation on December 23.

This draft calendar has the 180th day on Thursday, June 15, 2023. As a reminder, the relatively new state holiday, Juneteenth Independence Day, must be observed on Monday, June 19, 2023. This will only affect the school calendar if snow days require the school year to continue into the following week.

Finally, a reminder that last year the calendar included a change in language to acknowledge that the third Monday in October has become widely recognized in American society as Indigenous Peoples' Day in addition to its designation as the official state holiday of Columbus Day, and is listed in this year's calendar as "Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day." This approach both includes the legal name of the holiday under Massachusetts law that requires schools to be closed on this day, while also

recognizing that Indigenous Peoples' Day has become a more widely accepted and known holiday that honors the native peoples of America and commemorates their history. Given our school district's efforts to increase the sense of belonging and inclusivity for our students, families, and staff, last year I recommended this language change and the School Committee concurred.

This past October, the School Committee received a petition asking that the school district calendar only reference Indigenous Peoples' Day and not cite Columbus Day at all in its calendar. The text of the petition, which was signed by 114 individuals connected to the Shrewsbury community including current students, alumni, current and former SPS parents, and residents, is as follows:

Dear School Committee members,

As we look ahead to the 2022-2023 School Calendar, we respectfully ask the Committee to consider omitting Columbus Day from the Shrewsbury Public School Calendar like our neighbors have in Westborough and Grafton.

Last year, the School Committee recognized Indigenous day on the calendar however kept Columbus day alongside that recognition which, in our humble option, is an oxymoron. Indigenous day is about celebrating people instead of thinking about somebody who actually caused genocide on a population or tried to cause the genocide of an entire population. By bringing Indigenous Peoples' Day, we're bringing awareness that we're not going to allow someone like Columbus to be glorified into a hero, because of the hurt that he caused to Indigenous people of America.

There are multiple ways that this would benefit Shrewsbury families.

First, it would signal a commitment to teaching our history in a more inclusive and accurate way and to honoring the current and continued contributions of Indigenous Peoples to our community, nation, and the Americas. This is not only an urgent shift for the few Indigenous students we have in our district, but a beneficial one for Shrewsbury at large in our efforts towards creating a more just and inclusive community.

Second, the district is in ongoing discussions about equity and anti-racism and it is clear that heavy investments need to be made on these fronts. Adding Indigenous Peoples' Day to the district calendar AND omitting Columbus day takes minimal administrative labor, is free of cost, and will concretely demonstrate the district's commitment to these efforts.

Finally, this change will signal to the State legislature that Shrewsbury and communities like ours are ready to see this change at the State level. We hope this is something the School Committee is willing to discuss and thank you in advance for your reconsideration.

I believe it is important that the School Committee consider the argument put forth by this petition and discuss it as part of your deliberations about the school calendar. The draft calendar I am presenting continues the practice begun last year of listing both Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day, as this is the status quo. Questions the School Committee may wish to consider, in addition to those raised by the petitioners, could include the following (and I'm sure there are more):

- Columbus Day remains an official state holiday, as noted on the Secretary of State's website [here](#), and is the legal reason that the school district may not hold classes on that date. Does including the official name of a state holiday suggest

that the school district has taken a particular stance on the individual(s) or event recognized by that holiday? Should the district consider omitting the official name of a state holiday due to the objections of citizens regarding what that name signifies to them?

- Would removing the name of an official state holiday from the calendar signal that if our school district disagrees with an aspect of a state law, that the district can choose not to recognize it?
- Does the listing of the official name of a state holiday on the district calendar affect or influence how our schools teach the history associated with the namesake or origin of that holiday? Does including the title of a holiday that many find objectionable on the calendar affect whether the school district teaches history with accuracy, and with attention to the impact historical events had on different peoples, including indigenous peoples?

I feel I need to continue to consider the issues raised by these various questions, and I am interested in the School Committee members' perspectives. As is my responsibility, I will make a recommendation when the calendar comes up for a vote at a subsequent meeting.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have regarding this recommended calendar for the 2022-2023 school year.