



## SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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April 8, 2020

To: School Committee

From: Joe Sawyer

Re: Proposed revision to 2019-2020 school year calendar – change to April Vacation

Dear School Committee:

Given the circumstances of the pandemic, where students and their families are homebound, and given that our schools have just embarked on a new phase of remote learning, it is natural that the question of whether to hold the April school vacation week as scheduled has been raised by some families and staff.

First, it is important to note that Monday, April 20 cannot be a remote learning day (where educators would be working to support students) due to legal observance of the state holiday, Patriots Day. However, the remaining days of that week (April 21-24) could become remote learning days should the School Committee vote to change the school calendar. The Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education, Jeffrey Riley, has informed school districts that any days during the scheduled April school vacation that are converted to remote learning days would be allowed to be subtracted from the end of the school year in June, so long as no school district ends the school year prior to the 181st day of the scheduled year; in other words, remote learning days held during April vacation would “count” towards the state requirement.

Regardless of whether the calendar remains as is or is changed, the maximum number of days when educators may work is 184, per the collective bargaining agreement between the Shrewsbury Education Association and the School Committee. These days include the meeting day prior to the first day of school for students, two professional development days

held in September and October, and the parent conference day/professional development day held in November. The three snow days in December and the first two days of the pandemic closure were not work days for educators, which is why the final day of school had been rescheduled for June 19, as this would be the final paid contractual day for educators. Therefore, if any days are converted to work days during what is now April vacation, they will need to be subtracted from the current June 19 end date.

In order to determine the preferences of the largest possible number of families and staff on whether they prefer to alter the April vacation to have some number of remote learning days, an online survey was sent on the evening of Tuesday, April 7 and was kept open through 3:00pm today. The response was exceptional, with 2,304 families and 740 staff members providing their input, so there is no doubt of the statistical significance of the feedback. The survey results have been provided under separate cover, but the key findings are as follows:

- 1) 84% of families agree that the district should convert some April vacation days to remote learning days (65% strongly agree and 19% agree)
- 2) 71% of SPS staff agree that the district should convert some April vacation days to remote learning days (38% strongly agree and 33% agree)

Given this very strong preference by families and staff, and based on my consultation with the leadership team, I am recommending that the calendar be changed to convert some of the April vacation days to remote learning days.

It should also be noted that families and staff were asked whether they preferred to have three remote learning days or four remote learning days over the course of that week, and responses were as follows:

- 1) 65% of families preferred four days and 35% preferred three days
- 2) 57% of staff preferred four days and 43% preferred three days

However, it should be noted that when breaking down the data further, the preference of the educators who would be providing the learning experiences was 53% for four days and 47% for three days, and for the district leadership team it was 44% for four days and 56% for three days. Many staff and parents, in the survey comments, indicated that they would both like to see more days in June preserved for actual school days if we are back in session by then, and that ending the school year with a half day on Monday, June 15 would not be preferable. Additionally, several staff and families indicated that having some time during the April vacation week beyond Patriots Day to attend to their family needs would be important. As a result, my recommendation is that we convert three days to remote learning days (April 21-23) and end the school year on Tuesday, June 16.

I look forward to answering any questions you have regarding my recommendation at the meeting this evening.