



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

February 15, 2023

To: School Committee
Re: Recommendation for school year calendar for 2023-2024

Enclosed with this memorandum is a draft of the proposed calendar for the 2023-2024 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, which included surveys of students, families, and staff.

This draft maintains the same approach we have typically utilized for the start of the school year, with the first day for staff being the Monday before Labor Day (August 28), followed the next day by the first student day (August 29), and holding a professional development day that Friday (September 1).

A difference from the current year's calendar is that the parent conference day for preschool through grade 8 in November, which is a professional development day for high school staff, is proposed to be held on Thursday, November 9. This recommendation is because a) there is not an election this November, and so there are no issues with the space use of Coolidge and Spring Street Schools, and b) the proposed observation of Veterans Day is Friday, November 10, so it would result in two consecutive days of no school rather than dividing the week with a stand-alone day. This approach was used in a past year when dates fell similarly.

I am aware that the School Committee has received many emails requesting that the school district not hold school on the Hindu religious holiday of Diwali. This important religious festival date falls on Sunday, November 12, 2023, and so this is not something that will come into play for this coming school year. It is serendipitous that Diwali will be at the end of a long weekend, should the recommendation for parent conference day and Veterans Day dates be approved. I do want to note that even with Diwali falling on a weekend this coming year, it is not my recommendation to move away from the longstanding practice of having school in session on religious holidays related to different faiths, whether Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or any other, unless there were going to be such a large population of students and staff who would need to miss work for their

religious observance that we would not be able to reasonably operate schools. Instead, as a district I believe we should emphasize to families that we strongly encourage them to have their students miss a day of school in order to celebrate a religious holiday, while communicating clearly that there will be no repercussions for doing so, per state law and our own district's policy. We have taken steps this year to have "no homework" dates aligned with various religious holidays to make this process easier to navigate for our students. I will speak to this when I present the draft calendar at the meeting.

This draft calendar has the 180th day on Wednesday, June 12, 2024. As a reminder, the relatively new state holiday, Juneteenth Independence Day, must be observed on Wednesday, June 19, 2024. This will only affect the school calendar if there are snow days or other closures that require the school year to be extended by five days or more beyond June 12.

Finally, a reminder that beginning in 2021 the district calendar included a change in language to acknowledge that the second 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. This date is again listed in this year's draft calendar as "Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day." This approach both includes the legal name of the state holiday 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. Because of our school district's efforts to increase the sense of belonging and inclusivity for our students, families, and staff, in 2021 I recommended this language change and the School Committee concurred. I understand that those who have petitioned to remove the verbiage of "Columbus Day" have strong feelings that the district's calendar should not include this reference. My recommendation remains the same as what I communicated last year, which is that the district continue the practice of listing both, with the understanding that the listing on a calendar of state holidays that are determined outside of the control of the School Committee or School Department should not be seen as the school district's endorsement of the holiday itself, or the origin or history of the name of the holiday. While I understand some see this differently as a matter of importance regarding symbolism, I do not agree that the listing of a holiday name on a calendar is coupled with how students are taught about a holiday, its subject, or its history – which in all cases should be done accurately and thoughtfully.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have regarding this recommended calendar for the 2023-2024 school year.