



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

February 22, 2024

To: School Committee
Re: Recommendation for school year calendar for 2024-2025

Enclosed with this memorandum is a draft of the proposed calendar for the 2024-2025 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.

Same approach as past years: 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 26), followed the next day by the first student day (August 27), and holding a professional development day that Friday (August 30). It maintains the other full professional development day in early October, a monthly early release day for professional development from December through April (five total).

Parent Conference/Professional Development Day Election Day: This draft calendar also returns the November parent conference day for grades PreK-8 to Election Day (this is a professional development day for SHS and some special subject departments). Given that it is a presidential election year, this is highly beneficial for Coolidge and Spring Street Schools, as they are polling places where parking and visitor control can be particularly challenging when there is a large turnout of voters. This year there was no November election and so this date was situated adjacent to the Veterans Day state holiday.

Return of Kindergarten Screening Days: Another change in this draft is the return of holding two no-school days for kindergarteners on May 1 & 2 so that staff may conduct screenings of incoming kindergarten students. A different approach that did not require no school days was used for kindergarten screening in recent years, but the consensus of the K-4 principals is that returning to this approach will be more effective. Screenings for incoming preschool students are also scheduled for these same two dates, which is the same approach preschool has used for many years.

Approach to Religious Holidays: Last year, the School Committee received many emails and heard public comment requesting that the school district not hold school on the Hindu religious holiday of Diwali. My recommendation remains that our school district calendar continue to follow the longstanding practice of having school in session on religious holidays

related to different faiths, whether Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or any other, as recommended by the Calendar Committee in 2016. This could change in the future if it were determined that there would 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. As a district I believe we should continue to emphasize to families that we strongly encourage them to observe their religious obligations, including when students may miss a day of school in order to participate, while communicating clearly accommodations will be provided to make up missed work where necessary and that there will be no repercussions for missing school, per state law and [our own district's policy](#).

“No Homework” Calendar: We have taken formal steps this year to have “no homework” dates aligned with school vacations, state holidays, and various religious holidays. A formal, district-wide “no homework” calendar was approved by the Committee last spring, as part of the adoption of an [updated district homework policy](#). Because we are only a bit past the halfway mark of the first year of this updated policy, and feedback on the “no homework” calendar for this year will be collected in the near future, my recommendation for next year’s “no homework” calendar dates will be made in the spring.

Juneteenth: This draft calendar has the 180th day on Friday, June 13, 2025. As a reminder, the relatively new state holiday, Juneteenth Independence Day, must be observed on Thursday, June 19, 2025. This will only affect the school calendar if there are snow days or other closures that require the school year to be extended by four days or more beyond June 13.

Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples’ Day: Finally, I wish to remind you that 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 in the past 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 in past years, 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 2024-2025 school year.