

RIVERSIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT 96

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To: Dr. Martha Ryan-Toye, Superintendent
From: Angela Dolezal, Director of Teaching and Learning
Date: October 15, 2025
Re: 2026-2027 Half-Day Professional Learning Schedule Proposal

Background

Since the 2023-2024 school year, District 96 has included one half-day of professional learning in April. This addition has provided an important opportunity for districtwide collaboration, particularly for elementary grade-level teams, which otherwise only meet collectively during Institute Days. These sessions have proven valuable in supporting the continuity of instruction, strengthening assessment practices, and aligning professional learning with our district's strategic goals.

Before the start of this school year, teachers participated in eight after-school professional learning sessions (each lasting 75 minutes) throughout the year, totaling 600 minutes of collaborative professional learning time. While this structure provided consistent learning opportunities, the shorter sessions often limited the depth of conversation and planning that could be achieved within each meeting.

Proposal

This memo outlines a proposal for the inclusion of four half-day professional learning sessions in the 2026-2027 district calendar, one per trimester, in addition to continuing the current April session.

This schedule would restore the 600 minutes of collaborative professional learning time previously available while consolidating it into longer, more productive sessions that better support sustained professional growth and meaningful collaboration.

Rationale

Districtwide professional learning time is critical for:

1. Sustained Collaboration and Communication

Elementary grade-level teams currently collaborate districtwide only during our four Institute Days (two in August, one in October, and one in February) and the April half-day. The long intervals between these sessions, sometimes as much as four months, make it difficult to maintain momentum and coherence across teams and topics.

2. Alignment Across Key District Initiatives

These sessions allow teams to work on common assessments, standards-based grading practices, curriculum implementation, MTSS alignment, and other strategic plan priorities in a cohesive manner.

3. Restoring Lost Collaboration Time

The four proposed half-days (600 minutes total) would replace the time that was lost when after-school sessions were removed, providing the same total professional learning minutes but in more effective, focused blocks.

4. Improved District Continuity and Assessment Fidelity

Dedicated time for collaboration enhances consistency of expectations, instructional practices, and assessment scoring across classrooms and schools.

5. Efficient Use of Instructional Time

While the half-day structure slightly reduces the instructional minutes on those four days, the return on investment, through improved instructional quality, coherence, and student learning outcomes, makes the time exceptionally well spent.

Student and Family Considerations

To support families, the district has an agreement with the Riverside Parks and Recreation Department to provide childcare options during the half-day professional learning sessions. This partnership ensures that families have access to a consistent and convenient childcare option on these days.

Summary

The shift from eight short after-school sessions to four half-day sessions allows teachers the extended, uninterrupted time necessary to collaborate meaningfully on high-impact instructional priorities. This proposal is designed to regain our total professional learning minutes, align with our district strategic goals, and support the continued improvement of teaching and learning for all students.

Recommendation:

The proposed school calendar for 2026-2027 includes four half-day professional learning sessions, one per trimester, in addition to the April session, for the 2026-2027 school year calendar. The complete public school calendar will be presented to the Board of Education for approval in early 2026.