

School Calendar for the 2021 – 2022 School Year

Legal Considerations:

Iowa Code §§ 279.10, School year — beginning date — exemption, places the school calendar in the sole authority of the board of directors of a school district. It further states that the board must hold a public hearing on any proposed school calendar prior to adopting it. Also stated in the law, the “school calendar shall begin no sooner than August 23” and include “not less than one hundred eighty days or one thousand eighty hours of instruction during the calendar year.”

Review of Research:

Research on school calendars is limited. The latest research simply says that students learn and retain better if they have breaks between their instructional terms. This may suggest some days off for students between each quarter.

Background:

Each year, it is the responsibility of the school board to approve a school calendar for the next year. The superintendent holds the responsibility to make recommendations to the board for calendar adoption. School board policy 601.1, School Calendar, reads in part, “It is the responsibility of the superintendent to develop the school calendar for recommendation, approval, and adoption by the board annually.”

Staff Survey:

I took a survey of staff on their preferences for a school calendar. Here is what the majority of teachers would like to see in their calendar for next year.

- a. 72% would prefer a week and a half break at Christmas over two full weeks.
- b. 45% want to see the semesters even in length and breaking in January; 21% prefer the split at the holiday break, with 35% with no preference.
- c. 57% like to see Presidents' Day as a professional development day.
- d. 62% like to see spring break in March; 35% want to see it connected to Good Friday.
- e. 52% would like to see a full week of spring break next year.

As a matter of personal importance, most teachers prioritize parts of the calendar as follows:

1. Most important is a full week of spring break.
2. Second most important is to end the school year as early as possible.
3. Third in importance is two full weeks of Christmas break.
4. Of least importance is both two weeks of Christmas break and a full week of spring break.

Draft of Calendar:

I put out two initial drafts of next year's calendar. One was based upon what we have done the last two years. Then I surveyed all staff to get their ideas and preferences in a school calendar.

After reviewing the survey results, I prepared the calendar that appears on the next page based upon the feedback from the survey.

I put this draft back out to staff with another survey. I collected further responses from our teachers and support staff and the findings for the board appear below:

- Is there any way the spring break could be moved one week earlier to March 14-18? This is the spring break for the Iowa Universities. This would allow parents with college kids to do a family trip.
- Oct. 11 and Jan. 17 are they Holidays off or are they work days?
- My only suggestion would be to consider at least a few more Wednesday afternoon early outs. Not necessarily every Wednesday, but perhaps one more per month? I'm assuming the currently planned early outs for those Wednesdays would be PD, and as I don't believe online learning will go away (I feel it is going to become a permanent option for schools if they want to keep enrollment up), that it is a very helpful time to check in with online learners. Almost weekly we utilize the Wednesday early out time to zoom one-on-one with our online learners, we have group/grade-level zooms to go over some SEL strategies (along with our core team teachers in attendance), and use some of the time for MTSS for our in-person learners. If the plan is that the scheduled early outs are for PD, we would lose those opportunities with students.
- Good.
- I appreciate the one day off a month for students to recollect themselves. I think this is a good schedule.
- No suggestions. I think this calendar look like a great option for the school year. Thanks!
- I think calendar C looks great!
- I would rather not have a week long spring break. I feel that it would be better to keep moving forward and maybe just have a long weekend. Then end the year a few days earlier in May.

Recommended Action:

I recommend the board only discuss the calendar at this time. Final action is currently scheduled for Thursday, February 18, and will be preceded by a public hearing.