

**DATE:** January 14, 2020

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Changes to the 2020-2021 School Year Calendar for Cost Savings (Response to Request for Information #58)

**ORIGINATOR:** Lisa Austin, Chief Communications Officer

**RESOURCE STAFF:** Sonia Boctor, Diane Brunton, Erin Cook, Vicki de Haan, Bob Morter, Rick Oldring

**REFERENCE:** [November 26, 2019 Board Meeting \(Trustee Dunn\)](#)  
[GCA.BP – Approval of the School Year Calendar](#)  
[GCA.AR – The School Year Calendar](#)  
May 28, 2019 Board Report [2020-21 School Year Calendar](#)

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## ISSUE

The following information was requested:

*“What changes could be made in the 2020-2021 school year calendar that may bring cost savings by having fewer instructional days, while maintaining overall instructional time and the quality of our students’ education. Please supply information on the following:*

- *What savings could be achieved*
- *How this might enhance professional development time for staff*
- *How much time would need to be added to each instructional day to meet provincial instructional time requirements*
- *If the opportunity to maintain alternative calendars for those schools that require them for certain programming needs could be preserved*
- *What engagement with families would look like”*

## BACKGROUND

Board Policy GCA.BP – Approval of the School Year Calendar requires that the Board of Trustees approve calendars for two years following the current school year. In May of 2019, the Board approved the 2020-21 school year calendar. The 2020-21 school year calendar included:

- A start date for students of September 2, 2020, prior to the Labour Day long weekend
- A fall break of three days: Remembrance Day, one Board approved non-instructional day and one day in lieu for reporting
- A total of two days in lieu for reporting
- Five professional development days
- Balanced first and second semesters

The calendar was developed in alignment with a number of Division Board policies and administrative regulations, most notably GCA.BP and GCA.AR. In addition, the calendar is aligned with the current Letter of Understanding - “Pilot Project on Revised School Year Calendar” between the Division and the Alberta Teachers’ Association. As such, the calendar is designed around an annual figure for teachers’

instructional duties of approximately 890 hours, but no more than 896.2 hours annually. The school year calendar aligns PD days and teacher days in lieu across the Division. The common PD sessions provide time for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues in professional learning settings.

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

In light of the provincial budget announced on October 24, 2019, and the fact that education funding has been announced as being frozen until 2022, a Request for Information was brought forward at the November 26, 2019 Board meeting. The request asks administration to explore any cost saving potential related to the school year calendar that will have no impact on the amount of instructional time, while maintaining quality teaching and learning. The request also references feedback gathered during the Division's annual Results Review process related to:

- creating more opportunities for staff to access and participate in quality professional development to continue the momentum that is in place around improved student achievement;
- increasing capacity of staff to support the needs of our students in our increasingly complex classrooms; and
- supporting the mental health and well-being of both students and staff.

The Division is required to provide 950 hours of instruction to elementary and junior high students and access to 1000 hours of instruction for high school students. However, there is no requirement around the number of days of instruction that students receive. By extending each instructional day by a small amount of time while meeting the required instructional hours, the Division would be able to generate additional days for professional development and staff and student wellness.

The following summary addresses each of the considerations requested:

#### What savings could be achieved

- Meeting the instructional hours over fewer days would provide the following savings:
  - Transportation costs would be reduced as buses would not be operating on as many days. This would reduce the Division's transportation costs by a conservative estimate of \$150,000 per day, which includes fuel and staffing costs. Reducing the number of days that the buses are on the road would also allow more time for preventative maintenance on vehicles.
  - Supply costs related to staff professional development may be reduced as staff would be able to attend professional learning opportunities on days when children are not in school. By shifting professional learning opportunities from instructional days to an increased number of professional learning days, there is the potential to generate savings in supply costs of up to \$2 million.
  - The number of potential sick days for staff may be reduced by concentrating instruction over a smaller number of days.

#### How this might enhance professional development time for staff

- Based on the Letter of Understanding—"Pilot Project on Revised School Year Calendar"—between the Division and the Alberta Teachers' Association, a survey of parents, staff and community was conducted in 2015 to gather input on the first year of the revised school calendar pilot to determine the impact the calendar had on teachers, students, families and system efficiencies.
- The results of the survey of teaching and non-teaching staff at the time indicated that staff felt that the structure of the revised calendar:
  - Increased the opportunities to enhance their professional learning

- Increased the number of collaborative opportunities they have with colleagues
- Improved the quality of collaboration with their colleagues
- Positively impacted student learning
- Improved the quality of professional learning opportunities in the District
- Improved their professional practice
- The structure of the calendar also allows staff who work directly with students to access professional development while reducing the amount of time that they are absent from class. Increasing the number of PD days would allow teachers to maintain instructional time with their students, and improve their practice through professional learning.
- In addition, the survey found that the structure of the calendar positively impacted staff health and wellness.

#### How much time would need to be added to each instructional day to meet provincial instructional time requirements

- As indicated, students in Grades 1 to 9 are required to receive 950 hours of instruction annually, while Grade 10 to 12 students have access to a minimum of 1000 hours annually. Currently, this time is distributed across 183 or 182 days respectively.
- Slightly less than two minutes would need to be added to each instructional day to account for the removal of one instructional day over the course of the calendar

#### If the opportunity to maintain alternative calendars for those schools that require them for certain programming needs could be preserved

- There are currently seven schools operating a modified calendar for the 2019-20 school year. It is anticipated that each of the schools may wish to continue with a modified calendar for the 2020-21 school year.
- Adjustments to the Division calendar for the 2020-21 school year will not impact the capacity of these schools to modify their calendars, and has the potential to reduce the need for some modified calendars.

#### What engagement with families would look like

- Should the Board choose to engage parents to inform future decisions, Communications could conduct a survey to gather parent input on preferences on how a calendar could be structured.
- A similar approach can be taken with a staff survey.

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The “Pilot Project on Revised School Year Calendar” allows for the annualization of instructional time for teachers, which provides flexibility to the school calendar.
- The pilot project also allows for the aligning of non-instructional days within a common Division calendar. This has allowed for greater efficiency in the Division’s operations.
- The survey conducted following the first year of the pilot indicated strong levels of support and benefits by staff.
- Cost savings can be realized by extending the instructional day by a small amount of time.

LA:sb