

Office of the Chief Operating Officer
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

September 19, 2017

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Policy Management Committee

From: Andrew M. Zuckerman, Chief Operating Officer 

Subject: 2018–2019 School Year Calendar

Board of Education Policy IDA, *School Year Calendar*, calls for the Policy Management Committee to review the draft 2018–2019 School Year Calendar prior to its presentation for the full Board for adoption. The Policy Management Committee met on July 12, 2017, to begin this review, with an overview of the calendar parameters for the 2018–2019 school year, other scheduling elements that will need to be considered in developing the calendar, and next steps in seeking feedback from stakeholders. This memorandum provides an update on efforts to date since the July 12, 2017, Policy Management Committee meeting, as well as proposed next steps in the feedback and calendar development process. At today's meeting, the Policy Management Committee will review possible scenarios that illustrate the multiple calendar priorities that will need to be balanced in developing the 2018–2019 School Year Calendar.

Update on Development of the 2018–2019 School Year Calendar

On August 22, 2017, the State Board of Education approved an amendment to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.02.01.04, *Length of School Year*, that reduced from five to three the number of days by which school systems must extend their calendars in order to obtain a waiver of the 180-day school year requirement when necessary. This was an important first step in structuring the 2018–2019 School Year Calendar, as these two additional days will be critical in providing flexibility for scheduling educational and operational priorities in the school year. At the July meeting, the Policy Management Committee discussed this amendment and expressed that staff should not develop calendar scenarios until this structural piece of information was resolved.

Given the State Board of Education's action to amend the COMAR requirement, we convened an internal staff work group to begin to develop possible functional instructional calendars. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff, from a range of central offices as well as principals, teachers, and support staff, participated in three meetings to identify multiple possible calendars that would meet primary educational and operational requirements, including instruction, testing, conferences, state-mandated closures, and emergency make-up days. Staff from the areas of the organization listed below participated.

- Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement
- Office of Shared Accountability
- Office of Human Resources and Development
- Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs
- Office of School Support and Improvement
- Office of the Chief Technology Officer
- Principals
- Teachers
- Support Staff

Following the work of this internal staff group, we then convened a focus group of external stakeholders to provide preliminary feedback on several different possible instructional calendars. This group discussed the pros and cons of various calendar elements and priorities from their particular perspectives. Below is a list of the groups who were invited to send a representative to this discussion.

- Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA)
- Student Member of the Board (SMOB) Advisory Council
- Faith Community Advisory Council
- African American Student Achievement Action Group
- Asian Pacific American Student Achievement Action Group
- Latino Student Achievement Action Group
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Additionally, we met with the leadership of the employee associations to review the calendar parameters and elements for consideration. We have requested that each association provide formal comment in advance of the Board's discussion on the calendar, which is scheduled for October 10, 2017.

Preliminary 2018–2019 School Year Calendar Scenarios

Based on the input of MCPS central and school-based staff and the preliminary feedback from stakeholders, we have developed four calendar scenarios to present to the Policy Management Committee today. These scenarios are not intended to be final for decision making, nor are they intended to be an exhaustive set of possible options. Rather, they illustrate the various calendar elements that will need to be addressed and a range of approaches to combining these multiple priorities.

Once the calendar accounts for the permissible time frame for instruction, the minimum number of days required for instruction (180), the state-mandated days that schools must be closed, and the amended COMAR requirement for three days at the end of the school year, a total of six days remain that can be programmed for other, nonrequired educational or operational priorities.

Broadly speaking, these fall into the following categories based on current and past practice in the MCPS instructional calendars:

- **Days of instruction:** The state-required minimum is 180 days of instruction. For many years, MCPS scheduled 184 days. In the 2017–2018 calendar, it was not possible to schedule 184 days, and the 2017–2018 calendar includes 182 days of instruction. One important calendar consideration is whether and how many days of instruction to schedule above the state minimum.
- **Operational closures:** Historically, the Board has identified an operational need to close school on two days, Rosh Hashanah (September 10, 2018) and Yom Kippur (September 19, 2018). In 2018, both days fall on school days. These closings would add two noninstructional days to the calendar.
- **Spring break:** State law requires only that schools be closed on the Friday before and the Monday after Easter, which would result in a four day spring break (including weekends). MCPS traditionally has taken a longer spring break, usually one full week and the Monday after Easter, resulting in 10 total days of break (including weekends). Programming the same length of spring break would require an additional four noninstructional days in the calendar.
- **Professional days:** MCPS traditionally has scheduled one full noninstructional day for planning and grading at the end of each quarter, as outlined in the negotiated agreement with the Montgomery County Education Association. In the 2017–2018 school year, it was not possible to program all of these full noninstructional days within the student instructional school calendar. Instead, one full day is scheduled between the first and second semester, and half days for planning and grading are scheduled at the end of each quarter.

How the nonmandated six days are allocated affects the resulting structure of the calendar. For example, if a primary intent was to maintain the same number of required days of instruction as the current school year (182), one possibility for allocating the six days could appear as follows:

Two days above the state minimum number of instructional days; two operational closures (September 10 and 19, 2018); two additional days of spring break (April 17 and 18, 2019, preceding Good Friday/Easter Monday); and no full professional days.

Day Type	# of Days
Instructional Days	182
Operational Closures	2
Spring Break	2
Professional Days	0

As another example, if a primary intent was to maintain the same length of spring break as the current year, one possibility for allocating the six days could appear as follows:

The state minimum number of instructional days; two operational closures (September 10 & 19, 2018); four additional days of spring break (April 15, 16, 17 & 18, 2019, preceding Good Friday/Easter Monday); and no full professional days.

Day Type	# of Days
Instructional Days	180
Operational Closures	2
Spring Break	4
Professional Days	0

Again, these are only two possible scenarios that are illustrative of some approaches to allocating the remaining nonmandated days that are available for programming. Staff will present these and other scenarios to the Policy Management Committee for further discussion of the range of approaches that are possible to balance the calendar elements under consideration.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Another important element of the instructional calendar is the placement of parent/teacher conferences in Grades K–8. Traditionally, MCPS has scheduled parent/teacher conferences in conjunction with Veterans’ Day to facilitate attending conferences for families who may have the day as a federal holiday and thus could participate without interrupting work. When the school year started earlier, Veterans’ Day fell well after the end of the first quarter, allowing elementary and middle school teachers to close out the first quarter grades in preparation for the conferences.

With the post Labor Day start, the first quarter now ends right around the same time as Veterans’ Day. This creates two scheduling challenges: first, it creates the possibility of three early release days in a row or close together for the conferences and the end of the first quarter; and second, it makes it difficult to have time between the end of the quarter and the conferences. It may be helpful to discuss whether to maintain the traditional model of conferences connected to Veterans’ Day or to consider an alternative approach. For example, Howard County Public Schools schedules conferences the week of Thanksgiving and has shortened days that week.

Next Steps

We propose that an effective way to solicit community feedback is to reach out to schools and identify small groups of parents and employees who can engage in a discussion about the calendar parameters and priorities. We have identified 17 schools representing a broad range of the geography and communities in MCPS, and we are working with the leadership in these schools to convene parent and employee focus groups with each school. In addition, we will meet with groups such as the MCCPTA, the NAACP Parents’ Council, and the SMOB Advisory Group to have additional opportunities for discussion.

We propose to compile this feedback so that the full Board will have the benefit of this input for its discussion on the calendar, which is scheduled for October 10, 2017. The Board can then weigh the Policy Management Committee's discussion today, as well as the input and perspectives from various communities, as it considers how to balance the educational and operational objectives of the 2018–2019 School Year Calendar.

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