



Frequently Asked Questions: School Calendar

Who sets the school calendar for each school year?

Local school boards establish the school calendar. In 2012, changes to the provincial school calendar regulations eliminated the standard school calendar which was previously published by the Ministry of Education. Boards of Education now establish local calendars for their school districts.

Why does SD 79 create a three-year school calendar, instead of one?

The [School Act](#) and the [School Calendar Regulation](#) allows school districts to develop school calendars for up to three years if they choose to do so. Developing school calendars takes a lot of work and consultation, so our district chose to move to a three-year cycle for operational efficiency and to facilitate better long-term planning for the district, families, and independent schools in the Cowichan Valley. This is the second time the district is consulting on a three-year calendar cycle.

What happens if the calendar has to change?

If a school calendar requires any kind of change, the Board of Education must follow the amendment process outlined in the *School Calendar Regulation*. Basically, any proposed change would be made publicly available before the change is made. However, not all change requires the district to go through a new consultation or approval process (i.e. changing the date of a non-instructional day).

Does the *School Act* require a set number of days for each school year?

No, the *School Act* only sets a minimum number of hours for instruction that must be offered to students. It is up to the school district to determine how those hours are achieved throughout the school year.

For the 2018/19 school year, the minimum required hours have been adjusted by the Ministry of Education to allow for an additional non-instructional day for curriculum implementation support. The minimum required hours are:

- Kindergarten: 848 hours
- Elementary: 878 hours
- Secondary: 948 hours

For the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school year, the minimum required hours are returned to:

- Kindergarten: 858 hours
- Elementary: 883 hours
- Secondary: 952 hours

Who decides when holiday breaks are?

The dates for our school district's winter and spring break are determined by our local collective agreement. These are determined during bargaining and are not subject to change.

Who decides when the school year starts and ends?

Again, these dates are determined through our local collective agreement.

How are non-instructional days determined?

The Ministry of Education sets the number of non-instructional days required each year. This is usually set at six.

The dates for three of the six non-instructional days (teacher professional development) are determined by our local teachers' union, as outlined in the collective agreement. Historically, these have taken place in October, February and May each year. The final dates for the following school year are not confirmed until their Spring Annual General Meetings, so scheduled dates in the calendars are always subject to change until then.

The school district determines the dates for the remaining three days (district days) in consultation with education partners and parents. We do our best to ensure all non-instructional days are spread evenly in each semester.

Why are there non-instructional days to begin with?

Aside from non-instructional days being required through provincial regulations, these days provide our teachers and staff with important opportunities to continue their own professional learning and stay current in their practice.

They also provide important opportunities for staff to meet, discuss and plan, collaborate on learning practices, and work together as we all continue our journey towards being excellent educators, and having a world-class public education system.

Why do we still have district closure?

The school district initially implemented district closure as a cost savings measure when we were in a time of declining enrolment. Attaching a second week of closure onto spring break saved the district \$300,000. While we are now continually increasing enrolment, we are not yet in a position to add that cost back into the budget.

Provincially, most school districts have moved to a two-week spring break as part of their routine practice. Even with this extra week of closure, we are still able to meet the required instructional hours for students.

Are parents consulted before the calendars are created?

Parents have an opportunity to provide feedback on proposed calendars during open consultation periods, which took place in February 2018 for this current three-year calendar cycle. When a new calendar is being created, consideration to past feedback is given, and we also incorporate feedback received throughout the year.

Once feedback for the current calendar process is gathered, it is reviewed and the district looks at the feasibility of implementing suggestions received.

What changes were made to the calendar, as a result of the survey results?

We heard from participants that they preferred for early dismissal days to occur on a Friday or prior to a long weekend, as it would be less disruptive for working families and for students. While the district understands this viewpoint, educators felt that it was important to ensure that the time selected was going to be optimal to ensure deep thinking and collaboration. As a result, we opted to keep our early dismissal days on Wednesday afternoons, with the exception of a couple of times where lining it up with a holiday Friday or an existing pro-D day would make sense.

We also heard that Friday's were the most preferred day for non-instructional days, with Monday close behind. As a result, a majority of non-instructional days occur on a Friday, with the exception of two. The reason for keeping a couple on Monday was to ensure we catch staff who do not work on Friday's, and to ensure Friday instructional time is not always impacted by these days.

Why do we have early dismissal days?

Early dismissal days accomplish two things. One, there are two one-hour early dismissals that support teachers in their planning for communicating student learning. The district has moved away from parent-teacher interviews and towards a model of ongoing communication between parents and teachers. This prep time is a requirement in our collective agreement.

The second set of early dismissals are for what is called Professional Learning Community, or PLC. These are to support our school communities in collaborating for student success.

What is a PLC (Professional Learning Community) and how does it benefit students?

Over 40 years of effective schools' research demonstrates that one of the most effective ways to improve student learning is through the systematic and innovative work of Professional Learning Communities. These sessions are for school-team collaboration and deep thinking about improving student learning, ensuring students are supported, and ensuring all in our school community are communicating and collaborating together.

Educational experts and research recognize that the collaborative, focused work of PLC's contribute to high levels of student learning.

Can this collaboration and preparation time not take place after the school day?

Teachers already put in many hours outside of the school day for planning, prepping, assessing, marking, coaching, etc. The collaboration and preparation time offered through PLC's is an opportunity to support dedicated time for all teachers to have focused discussions around ways to support and improve student learning.

Why does the district ask for feedback, when much of the calendar is determined by the local collective agreement?

School districts are required to share proposed calendars with the public for feedback before they are submitted to the Ministry. The feedback is important to us, and although we cannot always make changes, the information is useful—particularly during local bargaining. We do our best to balance feedback with our requirements.