



# FAQs and Reasons Behind the Calendar Design

## 1. Why do you start elementary and secondary at different times?

- The decision to start elementary and secondary at different times was to allow secondary students to maximize the number of teaching days in first semester in order to better balance the semesters. Elementary schools could start with a three-day week since the curriculum is not semester-based. The majority of elementary representatives on the calendar committee preferred to start the younger students with a shorter week so they “eased in” to the transition from summer vacation.
- It is important in the secondary schools, and especially in schools on a block schedule to have as many 5-day weeks as possible. The calendar committee worked hard to devise a calendar that added more 5-day weeks in 2007-2008.
- Junior high and high school students must, by state law, have 70 hours more instructional time than elementary students, thus we have the option of a later start for them.

## 2. Why can't we begin after Labor Day?

As the calendar is developed, we must allow for 184 teaching days as required by employee contracts, 1080 hours of secondary instructional time and 990 hours of elementary instructional time as required by state law. Students must have 360 hours of pupil-teacher contact per semester as determined by class registration on October 1 in order to receive full funding. If we begin after Labor Day and fit the calendar around major holidays, spring break, testing schedules, etc. we would have students attending school into the middle of June. There were many arguments against a mid-June end to the school year and moving the calendar back in that way.

- The majority of secondary schools believe that it is most beneficial to students to have semester break prior to winter holiday.
- AP/IB testing is in early May so those students need to have completed a majority of their coursework prior to that testing window.

- CSAP testing is at the end of March and in early April. Students need to maximize learning time prior to that testing.
- All of the districts in northern Colorado and CSU are starting prior to Labor Day at this point.
- Attendance records show that attendance is very high in August and actually takes a minor dip the first two days after Labor Day.
- Teachers needing to attend summer school, students wanting to attend summer school or summer training camps prefer an early June release.
- Elementary schools believe that the quality of learning begins to drop off at the end of May and into June.
- Temperature drops from when we start in August and an after Labor Day start is about 2 degrees.

## 3. Why can't we start earlier in August so secondary schools can have balanced semesters of 90 days each?

- Starting even earlier in August would be a real hardship on our elementary and junior high students because the majority of those schools do not have air-cooling systems. We try to start as late in August as possible, take as few days off in the first semester and push the winter holiday start as late as possible while still allowing a good break period to accommodate the desire for balanced semesters.
- Second semester has more testing dates, more single-day holidays, and loses more teaching time in preparation for graduation so the imbalance is not as great as just counting the days makes it appear.

## 4. Why not have the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving off? Most kids are gone anyway.

- In fact, our attendance does not drop that significantly on those two days. Monday prior to Thanksgiving attendance is down from the Friday before by 2.67% to 92.06%. On Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving attendance is down -4.93% to 89.80%. On

the Monday after Thanksgiving attendance is down -7.37% to 87.36%. If we used the argument of attendance, we would have to take that Monday off.

- It would push the school start date earlier into August.

**5. Why do we have school on some holidays and not on others? It seems to devalue certain important days. What if my family is determined to participate in activities during a holiday when school is in session?**

- The school calendar is designed to provide the best instructional schedule for students. Some holidays fall at times it would be disruptive to have students out of class. Plus, if all state and federal holidays were honored, we would add seven additional holidays during the school year, forcing us to start earlier in August or go later into June. In addition to state and federal holidays many religions have holy days that members of those religions would also like to see observed.
- Having school on a holiday in no way devalues the importance of that day. It provides a wonderful opportunity to teach the significance of the contributors to our society of such people as Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Cesar Chavez, Christopher Columbus, Lief Erikson, and our veterans.
- Although school attendance is very important, the family ultimately makes decisions about how they will be observe important holiday and holy days.

**6. Why do the schools have so many days off here and there during the school year? And, why do junior high and high school have fewer days off than elementary kids?**

- Schools want to allow days for teachers to meet with parents to discuss their children's school experience.
- Because of different needs at different levels, the teachers' employee agreement requires that elementary teachers have 9 days without students, junior high teacher have 6 days without students and high school has 5 days without students. These days are for parent conferences, training, and time for teachers to prepare for the next quarter or semester. Our high schools have late starts once a week to allow those teachers additional work time without stu-

dents present. These days are scheduled to fall when they can best improve student learning and the timing was discussed through the district negotiation process.

- Junior High and High Schools are required to offer 1080 hours of instructional time during the school year. Elementary schools are required to offer 990 hours.

**7. Why should elementary have to choose between starting with a full-week and having more days off during the school year? We need both.**

- Although we recognize the need for teacher preparation time, the law requires that we have at least 990 hours of instructional time. Taking more days without students would jeopardize that time requirement.
- The employee agreement allows elementary teachers 9 days without students.

**8. Why do elementary teachers get more days without students than secondary teachers?**

- The law requires secondary students to be provided 70 more hours of instructional time than elementary students.
- High schools have late starts one-day each week for staff meetings, training, collaboration and planning.
- The employee-negotiated agreement allows 9 days without students for elementary, 6 for junior high and 5 for high school teachers.

**9. Why are there no in-service days during the school year?**

- Another committee, the Time Usage Committee is studying options for a late start for all schools to allow for in-services without reducing the instructional time for students, which is currently close to the minimum required by the state.

**10. Why can't days off be grouped in order to provide an entire week off?**

- Because these days are designed with specific purposes in mind – i.e. conferences, preparation for the next semester classes, study of data from previous testing – they are not just randomly put into the calendar.

- The teacher employee agreement requires that a day before the start of each semester be available for the teacher to prepare their lessons and classrooms for the next semester.

different groups, such as parents, teachers, classified staff, principals, primary and secondary education. This year's committee is:

**Parents/Community:**

- Cathy Kipp
- Laura Walker
- Marie Krizanovic

**Administrator Representatives:**

- Chuck DeWayne
- Brett Larsen
- Brian Carpenter
- Mark Eversole
- Brad Beauprez (TOSA/Administrator)
- Mark Werthheimer

**Classified Representatives:**

- Katy Montoya, ACE President
- Pat Hermann
- Pam Wade
- Connie Klibbe

**Teacher Representatives:**

- Mary Lynn Jones, PEA President
- Sylvia Ahermae
- Scott Kemp
- Alissa McEachern
- Jenni Russell
- Karen Tigges

**11. Why can't Spring Break be moved?**

- The Calendar Committee has recommended moving Spring Break several times over the years, and always came up against a great deal of public resistance to moving the District Spring Break away from CSU's. Many people feel that moving Spring Break might help our students prepare for CSAP testing, but since the testing window has changed somewhat in the past, it is not clear that the window will be constant in the future, and we do not have data on the impact this would have on the test results.
- Despite the public resistance, the survey results in 2005 indicate that having Spring Break coincide with CSU is not important to 57% of the respondents.

**12. Has PSD considered year-round school?**

- Many people feel there would be advantages to year-round school calendars. However, many of our schools do not have cooling systems and become extremely hot during the summer months. This problem would need to be resolved before we tackle the issue of year-round schools.
- On the survey, 56% do not want the district to consider a year-round school calendar.

**13. It feels like secondary or elementary dominates the calendar decision.**

- The calendar committee has representatives from all levels and listens and tries to meet the needs of all levels. It is a matter of compromise. Each group listens to the needs of the others and tries to design a calendar that will address the most important learning issues.

**14. How can I influence the calendar?**

- Apply to serve on the PSD Calendar Committee. New applications are taken each August for that year's committee. Employees should apply through their employee group. Parents should apply through the District Advisory Board and Community members should apply through the Partnership office.
- Communicate with your Calendar Committee representative. Representatives are chosen to represent

**15. Why were decisions on the calendar made in June this year? Why was it changed after we left for the summer?**

- Although the calendar committee begins working on school calendars in August for the calendar two years in the future, not all adjustments can be anticipated. We establish a basic "footprint" for the calendar and then adapt to changes.
- Changes in the 2006-2007 calendar were precipitated by a recommendation from a Time Usage Study Committee and the Board of Education's approval to add time for teachers to work together collaboratively to analyze student learning and improve teaching strategies. The recommendations were to continue late starts for high school and selected elementary and junior high schools and to have four days without students for all other elementary and junior highs and to standardize the day of the week as Wednesday.
- In May, the employee groups and the Board of Education completed the employee agreement and

salary negotiations. These negotiations follow the finalization of the State budget. This year and last, the negotiations team decided to fund additional instructional days. Once that negotiated agreement was reached, the calendar committee was charged with recommending the dates for those added days. Since this was late in May, the calendar committee met electronically to determine how best to include those days in a way that would provide meaningful instructional time. Their recommendations were presented to the Board, which approved the Employee Agreement and the calendar in June.

**16. I don't see collaboration days on the 2007-2008 or the proposed 2008-2009 calendars. Is that because they are to be eliminated?**

- Decisions on those days will not be made until after an evaluation, which is being conducted by the CSU/PSD Research and Development Center, is completed and presented to the Board of Education in January. At that point, a decision will be made whether to continue with the collaborative days, go to a district-wide late start, or explore other options. If necessary, the calendar will be amended then. We would not change the number of teacher workdays but could add additional days without students.