

Shrewsbury Public Schools
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts 01545

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The Shrewsbury Public Schools Calendar Committee

I. Background

The calendar committee was formed to review the school calendar for the Shrewsbury Public Schools in light of concerns raised relative to interruptions in several school weeks (particularly the fall) and the tendency of the district to end the school year late each June. The following "no-school" days contributed to the concerns of parents and staff: four professional development days for teachers, two parent conference days, two Jewish religious observances, one Christian religious observance, and vacation weeks in February and April. (It should be noted that one professional day has been placed at the opening of the school year before students begin, one conference day has been eliminated, and one professional development day has been scheduled for the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.)

The committee, composed of 22 staff and parents, met five times from March to September of 2005. The committee divided its work among three subcommittees: research, surveys, and communications. The research subcommittee investigated the patterns in school calendars from fourteen area school systems, the survey subcommittee launched a web-based survey of parents and staff that yielded 2,101 responses, and the communications subcommittee wrote updates of activity and coordinated the publication of an article in the local press.

II. Survey Questions, Responses, Comment

The survey questions in italics are followed by response data and comment:

- *How important is it that the school year ends as early as possible?* 67% of the respondents indicated that an early June completion was important. This was not a surprise to the committee in that the question provided a context for the survey.
- *How interested are you in keeping Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur religious observances as no-school days?* 12% of the respondents indicated the desire to retain Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as no-school days. The subcommittee on research found that roughly half of the communities surveyed closed during these days. Systems that did not close included: Auburn, Chelmsford, Grafton, Holden, Hudson, Marlborough, Millbury, Worcester. Those that did close included: Ashland, Franklin, Natick, Northboro, Wellesley, and Westboro.

The Shrewsbury Public Schools, in partnership with the community, will provide students with the skills and knowledge for the 21st century, an appreciation of our democratic tradition, and the desire to continue to learn throughout life.

- *How interested are you in keeping Good Friday religious observances as no school days?* Despite the tradition of having no school in Shrewsbury on Good Friday, only 30% of the respondents suggested that this religious day should be a no-school day. The calendar committee found this response the most significant among the survey questions.
- *How important is it that the district continue to provide a parent-teacher conference day?* 55% of the respondents indicated support of the parent conference day.
- *Would you be in favor of a single March vacation versus separate vacations in February and April?* 56% of the respondents supported substituting a March vacation for the February and April vacation that are currently in the calendar. The research subcommittee, however, did not find another community among the 14 that had a March break. Additionally, the full committee felt that the days saved did not justify the disruption. (A total of 8 days would be saved by eliminating the February and April vacations since a holiday occurs in each of the two weeks. Adding 5 days back for a March vacation leaves a net savings of 3 days.) Finally, the Shrewsbury Education Association pointed out that such a change would compromise the schedules of all the teachers living in other communities whose children would have different vacation periods from their parents.
- *Would you be in favor of extended weekends (4-5 days) throughout the school year instead of full week vacations?* 26% of respondents supported this suggestion.

III. Recommendations

- The district has already taken steps to improve the school calendar. As indicated above, one professional development day has been scheduled before the beginning of the school year, another professional development day has been moved to the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, and the number of parent conference days has been reduced from two to one.
- The calendar committee does not recommend changing the major school vacations, even though a small majority of survey respondents favor the idea. The number of days actually saved, contractual issues associated with the Shrewsbury Teachers Association, and the very large disruption that the change would bring about, all point to retaining the winter and spring vacations.
- At the same time, the calendar committee does recommend that the school calendar be adjusted to eliminate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Good Friday as no-school days. The consensus among the participants and the committee members is such that this change is a very strong recommendation to the Shrewsbury School Committee. It is the hope of the calendar committee that the change can be implemented in the 2006-2007 school year.