

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 25, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: School Year Calendar

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant to the Superintendent
B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services

INFORMATION

The School Act RSA 2000 Section 56 establishes the requirements for the setting of an annual school calendar. Up until last year Alberta Learning had allowed the district to average the instructional time delivered to students over a five year period in meeting the requirement of 950 hours of instruction for grades 1 to 9 and access to 1,000 hours of instruction for grades 10 to 12.

In 2001-2002 the district was advised that averaging was unacceptable and the 2003-2004 school year calendar would need to meet the annual instructional hour requirement. The instructional component of a school year can be increased in two ways:

1. By adding instructional days to the year
2. By increasing the hours of instruction on the instructional days available

The approved 2003-04 calendar provides for 197 operational days of which 191 days are instructional. The instructional days can be reduced by 2 professional days and one of the closing operational days can be used as a day in lieu for interviews. For this calendar to meet the required instructional hours of 950 (57,000 minutes) and still maintain an instructional year commencing September 2, 2003 and ending June 25, 2004, one professional development day has to be omitted. As well, the day in lieu for interviews has to be taken on a year end operational day.

Given the requirements of the province for instructional time for students, limits created by provincial exams and days available for instruction, very little time is left for staff professional development. Staff development is critical to the development of teacher knowledge and skills if we are to ensure that increasing numbers of our young people achieve a high school diploma.

Our district has made a commitment to "Superb Results From All Students". It is superb teaching that will enable us to reach this goal. The research is clear that this kind of teaching requires that teachers have access to professional development opportunities.

"Staff development cannot be separated from school development." (Fullan 1991)

"The logic of investing in professional development is... straightforward: there is no more effective way to change schools substantially." (Hawley and Valli, 1999.)

Our own district experience supports these statements. Through AISI, it was found that teacher expertise is best developed through professional development and teacher collaboration that is ongoing, directly linked to teaching practice and student learning needs and provides opportunities for feedback and coaching. Finding time and resources to create opportunities for this kind of professional development during the school day is a significant challenge for our schools.

As a result of the need to increase student instruction time and to increase the opportunities for professional development and teacher collaboration, the administration is modifying the school year calendar for the 2003 – 2004 school year. This calendar incorporates a teacher's teaching week that would average 1,430 minutes per week and a student's instructional week that would average 1,520 minutes of instruction for each student in grades 1 - 9 and access to an average of 1,620 minutes of instruction for students in grades 10 - 12.

Introducing an average of 1,430 teaching minutes per week would allow for a great deal of flexibility in organizing and planning the school year. Teachers would be teaching a maximum of 53,625 minutes per year which would be the same number of teaching minutes that a teacher would deliver in a year that had 191.5 teaching days at 1,400 minutes per week. Teaching an average of 1,430 minutes per week or 286 minutes per day would allow for a school year of 187.5 teaching days. Increasing the students' week to an average of 1,520 minutes per week for grades 1 - 9 (304 minutes per day) would meet the Alberta Learning requirements for student programming of 950 hours (57,000 minutes). The differential in time between teaching time and student time would allow for specialist time tabling in grades K – 9.

Increasing the students' instructional day for high school by four minutes would meet the requirements of Alberta Learning in that students would have 1,000 instructional hours (60,000 minutes) available to them and would also provide additional time to accommodate examination weeks and semester changeover. Alberta Learning auditors have recently identified a concern related to counting full exam weeks as instructional. The details of the High School calendar will need further exploration to ensure that all requirements are being met.

Using the total teaching minutes in the school year for teachers and the total instruction minutes for students creates a much more flexible system for delivery of programs and maintains the total teaching time for teachers as the same for some other years.

This more flexible system would provide two and one half professional days, retention of four operational days that can be used for preparation, planning and collaboration and would allow schools to have a day during the school year in lieu of time spent in student, teacher, parent conferences.

Establishing a minute driven calendar would also provide greater flexibility in setting calendars for our alternative programs such as Talmud Torah, Eastwood and Donnan. It would also alleviate some potential increased costs with out increasing class size.

APPENDIX I - 2003-2004 School Calendar

BH/DB:hc