



School Calendar FAQ

Q. When did the District adopt the current calendar format?

A. The District adopted the current calendar format beginning with the 2012-2013 school year.

Q. How did the District decide to recommend the current calendar format?

A. Many school districts around the country began adopting what has been referred to as a “balanced calendar” during the time of our calendar adoption. In a balanced calendar, schools typically take two consecutive weeks of vacation in the fall, winter, and spring. Schools that enjoy this calendar have found students more engaged and ready for school when there is a longer break built in to the calendar year. Some schools also use part of their two week breaks to offer academic assistance for students or to create enrichment opportunities.

Prior to the 2012-2013 school year, we surveyed our stakeholders to determine if a balanced calendar, traditional calendar, or a calendar somewhat in between the two concepts was preferred. The feedback indicated that our stakeholders were not comfortable with extended two week breaks in the fall but felt that periodic one week breaks would benefit students and faculty.

Additionally, our principals indicated that attendance would often drop on the days prior to vacations that started midweek (such as breaks beginning on a Wednesday or Thursday). There was a hope, in changing to one week breaks, families would be less inclined to remove students from school on the days prior to breaks.

Q. Did student attendance improve?

A. Yes. We tracked student attendance for the days prior to fall break and Thanksgiving break for three years. Compared to breaks beginning midweek our attendance improved, on average, 3.5%. With over 11,000 students in the District, this percentage means that several hundred student days were recovered when changing to a calendar that begins breaks following a full week of school.

Q. Why is it not possible to start the school year closer to Labor Day?

A. Technically speaking, the school year could start at any point. Issues arise when attempting to address many academic requirements and stakeholder priorities.

Starting later in the summer, (mid-August or near Labor Day) while incorporating week long breaks, would push the end of first semester past winter break and into the new calendar year. Our high school administration, faculty, and many parents have expressed a desire to end the first semester prior to winter break. Parents were very vocal in stating opposition to their students being required to study, complete projects, and prepare for final exams during winter break.

Pushing the end of school into mid-June would result in high school students in Advanced Placement and IB courses to sit for the exam (determining eligibility for college credit) more than a month prior to the end of school as the exam dates fall in early May. The dates of these exams are set by outside entities and cannot be altered by schools. The faculty and many parents prefer that the students be afforded more days to learn and prepare for these exams.

The third grade IREAD exam is administered in late March (a date that is set by the Indiana Department of Education). Students who fail to meet the IREAD benchmark are required (by Indiana law) to repeat third grade. Students need as many days as possible prior to this exam during their third-grade year to prepare. If school starts later in the calendar, the students will be in school less days prior to the test.

iLearn (the replacement for ISTEP) will be administered in the spring. Students need as many days as possible prior to this exam to prepare.



School Calendar FAQ

Q. Why not schedule more breaks during second semester?

A. As stated above, many state required exams and exams with college credit implications are administered in the spring. Schools need the entire state required testing windows to administer the tests. Schools are required to administer make-up tests to students who may be absent when their classroom tests at the scheduled time. Therefore, we want to be available to support all students during the entire testing window. Testing windows overlap, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to schedule a period of time for vacation during this time.

Q. What feedback has the District received from parents concerned about their students' ability to participate in summer activities?

A. The feedback has included positions on both sides of the calendar debate. Many camps and student activities have adjusted their summer calendars to coincide with a growing number of districts ending school prior to or near Memorial Day and beginning school in early August. Therefore, we have heard from parents that do not want to end school in June.

Conversely, we have heard from parents of students wishing to participate in camps and activities that take place in early and mid-August. In these cases, parents want to end school in mid-June and start the school year later in August.

Q. Can the District "bank" the number of hours and minutes used for instructional time and reduce the number of required student days?

A. No. State law requires public schools to provide 180 instructional days.

Additional Thoughts

It is extremely difficult to create a schedule that meets the needs of every stakeholder. Those wishing to end the school year prior to Memorial Day are just as passionate and vocal as those wishing to start school later in August and end the year in mid-June.

Standardized testing schedules, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exam schedules create restrictions in the springtime regarding times available for vacations.

In Indiana, where weather can impact the safe transportation of students to and from school, we must also consider the need to schedule make-up student days. When attempting to create breaks (especially during second semester) and be sensitive to make-up day requirements, building a calendar becomes even more challenging. This is why we typically schedule and utilize make-up days at the end of the academic calendar.

If you have a specific calendar question, you may contact Dr. Jon Milleman, Assistant Superintendent by email at jmilleman@msdwt.k12.in.us.