

January 16, 2009

Dear Parents,

By now I am sure that most of you are aware that the Wachusett Regional District School Committee adopted a revised calendar this week in order to comply with the 180 school day requirement mandated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I want to use this letter to provide you with a brief rationale for our decision and to provide you with a revised calendar for your reference.

When we returned to school after holiday break, our first task was to address the need to revise our calendar. Each day we received scores of calls from families who expressed anxiety about the problem of make-up days. Sensing this urgency, we began to look at the logistics of alternatives, especially those with contractual implications. Knowing that a decision had to be made by the School Committee, we targeted their January 12th meeting as the date to make our decision. This left us with no time to solicit input from the community because to wait until the January 26th meeting of the School Committee did not seem feasible considering the volume of callers looking for answers.

With that said, let me explain the rationale for our decision. In making our decision, we came to Saturdays as a last resort. Having to make up four days, we first considered February vacation, but rejected it for two reasons. First, we were concerned about the short notice we would be giving families, especially those with vacation plans. Secondly, because February sits right in the middle of the snowy season, we were reluctant to use it for make-ups. Perhaps the weather will cooperate, but imagine the anger of people who altered plans only to have a day—or days—cancelled during the February break. Once we decided against February, we rejected April simply because we believe that the stretch between February and June 26th would be too great. Finally, concentrating make-ups during a vacation period was seen as problematic because inevitably some students would have to be absent because of important prior commitments. In these cases, a full week of school would be missed and work make-up would be a formidable task, for both students and their teachers. By spreading the days as we have, we do not eliminate the conflict for students unable to attend, but we limit the impact of their possible absence.

At present the District has been closed for nine days bringing our last scheduled day of school to July 2, 2009. In order to bring us back into June we will conduct classes on March 20th, a previously scheduled professional development day, and April 10th, which is listed as Spring Recess on the original calendar. The District will also schedule four Saturdays which will be full days. School will definitely be held on March 7th and March 21st. April 4th and May 2nd will be full school days if required based upon the conditions that are encountered over the course of the winter months that remain. In that our plan must be flexible based upon the weather, the scenarios listed on the bottom of the calendar on the opposite side of this sheet may better illustrate the direction we have taken.

To summarize, the District will be in session on March 7th and March 21st regardless of future closings and we will hold school on subsequent Saturdays as needed. The District will also cancel remaining half days for professional development in order to maximize student-learning time.

In closing, let me thank you for your cooperation during this difficult time. We plan to do our best to provide students with quality instruction during the days that remain in this school year, including our make-up days. This is our plan for now, but in that it is based upon weather and state regulation, it may have to be revised in the future.

Sincerely,

Thomas G. Pandiscio, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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