

DATE: January 24, 2023

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Jan Sawyer, Chair, Policy Review Committee
Trustee Marcia Hole, Policy Review Committee
Trustee Saadiq Sumar, Policy Review Committee

SUBJECT: Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar

ORIGINATOR: Karen Mills, Director, Board and Superintendent Relations

RESOURCE STAFF: Naimo Bille, Kelsey Duebel, Bob Morter, Nancy Petersen, Wanas Radwan

REFERENCE: [Policy Review Committee 2022-2023 Work Plan](#)

ISSUE

The Policy Review Committee (PRC) is bringing an update on the direction being proposed for the review of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar to the Board of Trustees.

BACKGROUND

Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar provides direction on the development and approval of the Division calendar in alignment with provincial, legislative and collective agreement requirements (see Attachment I).

A review of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar is an item on the PRC's 2022-2023 Work Plan, and includes the consideration for how the policy may provide direction to administration on the inclusion of diverse days of significance.

The Division also supports the recognition of diverse days of significance in schools through the Multi-Faith Calendar. In 2021, the Division created a Multi-Faith Calendar for schools to use to support welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments for students, staff and families. The Multi-Faith Calendar is intended as a tool to support schools in their awareness of the many days of significance and to help schools in their planning of events or activities and the setting of exam dates or assignments.

CURRENT SITUATION

Through the Division Feedback Survey and comments shared at public Board meetings, staff, students and families expressed support towards the possibility of including diverse days of significance in the Division school year calendar. At its November 10 meeting, the PRC explored options around how a revised Board policy may provide direction on the inclusion of diverse days of significance in the calendar as breaks for students (see Attachment II).

After reviewing the benefits and risks for each option, committee members unanimously agreed upon one policy option for further exploration and discussion.

- **Selected Policy Option:** For a revised Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar to direct that the placement of breaks for students in the Division calendar will be aligned with days of significance after all legislative, provincial and collective agreement requirements are met.

Within this policy option, the revised policy would continue to articulate that the Superintendent of Schools has the authority to modify the school calendar for specific schools on an annual basis if the approved calendar does not meet that school's needs. In addition, the revised policy would continue to provide direction for the school calendar to be used by Division schools across all grade levels (i.e., elementary, junior high and high schools). This consistency will continue to support collaboration across catchments, Division-wide professional learning opportunities and predictability for families with children in different schools across the Division.

As the policy is being updated to reflect the newly determined direction for the revised version of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar, the PRC will continue to engage with stakeholders for feedback.

KEY POINTS

- The scheduling of breaks in the calendar aims to provide a feasible balance between the feedback shared by stakeholders and provincial, legislative and collective agreement requirements.
- After having collaborative conversations with subject matter experts and analyzing the stakeholder feedback through the lens of anti-racism and equity, three policy options for consideration were presented to the PRC for discussion and feedback (see Attachment II).
- While there are potential benefits and risks that will emerge from each policy option, policy option two (i.e., the policy directs that the placement of breaks for students will be aligned with days of significance after all legislative, provincial and collective agreement requirements are met) provides flexibility to align the scheduled breaks in the Division calendar with both stakeholder feedback and external requirements.
- To ensure that the Division has a strong understanding of the diverse days of significance that are meaningful to the EPSB community, changes to this policy may be informed by the student demographic data collected during the 2022-2023 school year and further engagement with stakeholders.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I	Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar
ATTACHMENT II	Considerations for the Review of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar

JS:wr

CODE: GCA.BP

EFFECTIVE DATE: (05-06-2014)

TOPIC: Approval of the School Year Calendar

ISSUE DATE: (16-06-2014)

REVIEW YEAR: (2016)

POLICY

The school year calendar is the calendar that is used by the majority of district schools that follow the September through June instructional year.

The Board of Trustees believes that a consistent school calendar should be used by schools offering instruction during the September through June time period. This allows the majority of the District's students to start and end the school year and to be dismissed for major recesses on the same dates. (*, while still allowing schools some discretion in scheduling and identifying professional development days and days-in-lieu*). * **See Addendum 1**

A standard calendar allows the Board to more easily undertake its responsibility to ensure that all students in Edmonton Public Schools have available to them as a minimum the amount of instructional time mandated by the Minister of Education and communicated in the Guide to Education.

(Whereas) [T]he Board believes that it is ideal for students to commence their instruction on the Tuesday after Labour Day. (, there will be years in which the number of available instructional days during the September through June timeframe may preclude this. In such years the Board will endeavour to ensure that instruction commences after August 31).* * **See Addendum 2**

The Board believes that parents, students, staff and community need to be made aware of future planned school calendars to allow time to appropriately plan ahead to ensure that students are given the optimum opportunity to access instruction. During each school year, the Board shall:

1. Approve an additional school year calendar, thereby giving staff, students, parents and the public access to approved school year calendars for two years after the current school year.
2. Approve any changes to any previously-approved school year calendar made necessary by information not available at the time the calendar was approved.

Should circumstances arise at a school where the approved calendar does not meet the school's needs, the Superintendent of schools is given the authority to modify the school calendar for that school on an annual basis.

NOTE: The 2012-2016 *Teachers' Collective Agreement* contains a [Letter of Understanding](#) (LOU) – Pilot Project on Revised School Calendar that provides for piloting a revised district calendar for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. The LOU has some requirements that take precedence over existing board policy and administrative regulations for the duration of the pilot project. Italicized text in parenthesis and noted by an asterisk * and corresponding numbered addendum is suspended for the duration of the pilot.

***Addendum 1:** Effective August 31, 2014 to August 31, 2016, the italicized text in this section is suspended.

The LOU provides for centrally set dates for professional development and days in recognition of duties for reporting of student achievement.

***Addendum 2:** Effective August 31, 2014 to August 31, 2016, the italicized text in this section is suspended.

The LOU requires that classes start after Labour Day and therefore the option to start instruction prior to Labour Day, if needed, is suspended.

REFERENCES

FCBD.AR - Time in Recognition of Duties Related to Reporting Student Achievement

FLC.AR - School Professional Development Days

GCA.AR - The School Year Calendar

GCAA.AR - Dismissal Times Before Vacation Periods

GCAB.AR - Remembrance Day

GD.BP - Instructional Time

GE.BP - Organization for Instruction

GEA.AR - Semester Changeover - Senior High Schools

Alberta Education - Guide to Education - ECS to Grade 9 Programming, Senior High School Programming

School Act Sections 39(1)(a),39(1)(c), and 56(1) - (6)

Considerations for the Review of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar

Policy Review Committee

January 24, 2023

Background

As part of its 2022-2023 Annual Work Plan, the Policy Review Committee (PRC) is reviewing and revising the Board policy related to the school year calendar and scheduling. Currently, [Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#) does not provide direction on the scheduling of specific breaks in the Division's calendar. This policy review considers how days of significance are recognized by the Division.

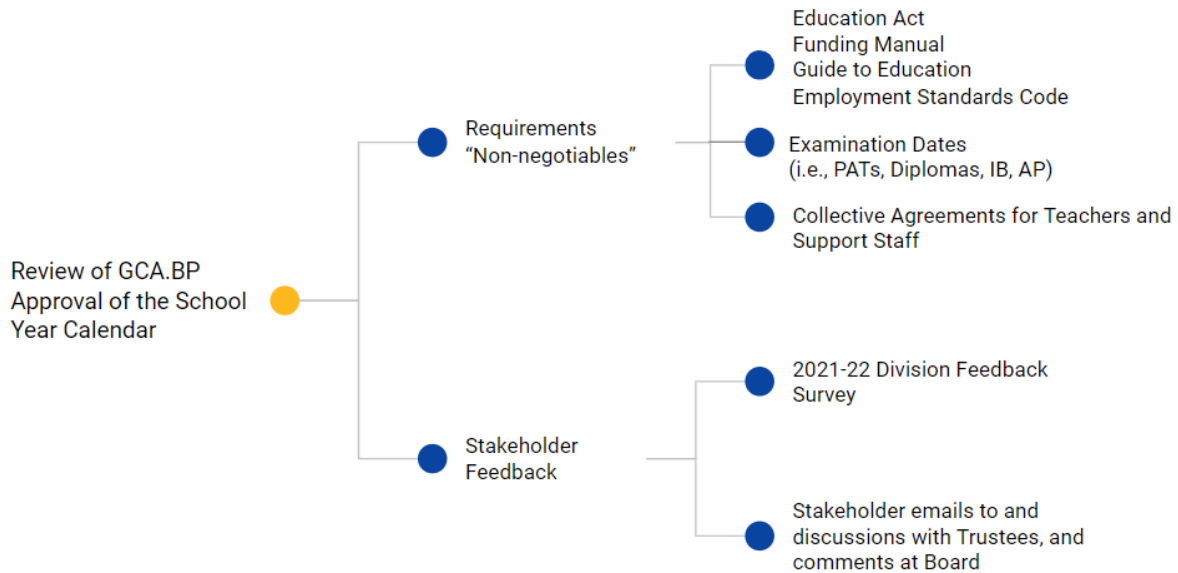
To support the planning for the review of Board Policy GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar, the PRC engaged in focused discussions beginning in February 2022 to establish the goals and guiding values supporting this work. As well, questions related to the school year calendar were included in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey to understand staff, family and student perspectives on the development of the calendar. These comments, along with the comments shared at public Board, were analyzed through the lens of anti-racism, equity and reconciliation to further support the review of this policy.

Considerations

The scheduling of breaks in the calendar aims to provide a feasible balance between provincial, legislative and collective agreement requirements, feedback shared by stakeholders and factors agreed upon in the current Letter of Understanding with the Alberta Teachers Association. A broad overview of these considerations is highlighted in [Figure 1](#).

The Division also supports the recognition of diverse days of significance in schools through the Multi-Faith Calendar. In 2021, the Division created a Multi-Faith Calendar for schools to use to support welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments for students, staff and families. The Multi-Faith Calendar is intended as a tool to support schools in their awareness of the many days of significance and to help schools in their planning of events or activities and the setting of exam dates or assignments.

Figure 1. Parameters and Considerations for Review of GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar



Summary of Requirements:

- Scheduled breaks must adhere to provincial, legislative and collective agreement requirements (i.e., *Education Act, Funding Manual, Employment Standards Code, Guide to Education* and the *Collective Agreements* for teachers and support staff). Among other directives, these requirements provide parameters for instructional hours, statutory holidays and school funding.
- Certain examination dates are mandatory (i.e., Diploma examinations, Provincial Achievement Tests) and are scheduled by Alberta Education.
- Any revisions to this policy will ensure that the scheduling of breaks in the Division’s calendar remains consistent across all grade levels.
- The current Letter of Understanding specifies that classes will begin no earlier than September 1 and end prior to Canada Day, and the Division calendar shall include eight professional development days.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback:

Division Feedback Survey

A series of closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions related to the EPSB school calendar were asked in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey, which was open for stakeholders to complete from April 4 to May 6, 2022. (Number of respondents: Students 40,453; families 3,724; and staff 5,942; additionally there were 3,055 staff and families who responded to the open ended question)

Broadly, the responses from the survey indicated the following:

- Many students, staff and families support the inclusion of diverse days of significance in the Division calendar.
- Many staff and families prefer breaks with days that are grouped together to create long breaks (e.g., scheduling a day off to extend the weekend), with few mid-week breaks.
- Generally, fewer breaks away from school is preferred. Stakeholders shared challenges that may emerge from frequent breaks, including establishing consistent routines, potential loss of learning time and difficulty accessing childcare.
- Many staff and families prefer that breaks align with scheduled breaks in other Divisions.

Stakeholder Comments at Public Board

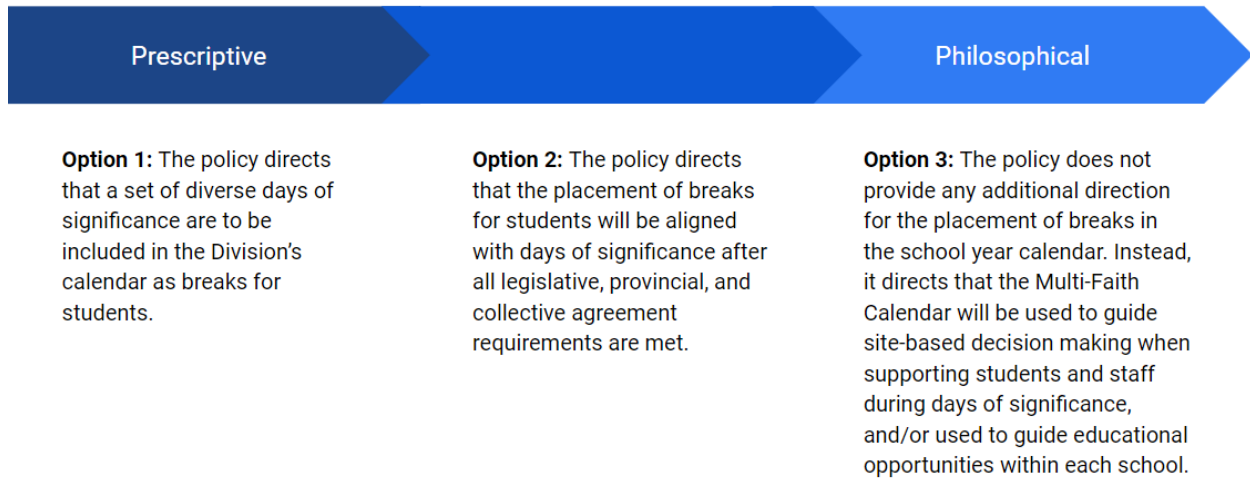
The following themes emerged from the stakeholder comments at the November 30, 2021, Board meeting, regarding the inclusion of diverse days of significance in the Division calendar:

- When diverse days of significance are not recognized in schools, families must then navigate competing priorities (i.e., academics and cultural connection).
- Currently families may choose to excuse their child from school on a day of significance. However, promoting anti-racism in the Division may not be achieved solely through the use of an excused absence system, but through an approach which recognizes diverse days of significance.
- The learning community within a school is strongest when all families feel heard and seen. The Multi-Faith Calendar encourages staff and students to honour the unique identities of members of the school community, and can be used to better support students in school.

Options

Three policy options were presented for consideration at the November 10 PRC meeting ([Figure 2](#)). The options ranged from prescriptive and directive policy content (i.e., policy option one) to content that offered high-level and philosophical direction (i.e., policy option three).

Figure 2. Spectrum of Policy Options



Potential Benefits and Risks

Option 1: Prescriptive Policy Direction - Selection of Specific Days

In this approach, the policy would direct that a set of diverse days of significance are to be included in the Division's calendar as breaks for students. The specific set of diverse days of significance would be determined after further stakeholder engagement.

- **Benefits**
 - This option may allow students to participate in days of significance that are meaningful to them because they will have the day off school.
- **Risks**
 - There are several mandatory requirements that are set outside of the Division that must be accounted for when scheduling the breaks. Certain days of significance do not have fixed dates (i.e., the date may change yearly), which may create challenges when aligning breaks with these requirements.
 - The prescriptive nature of this option may not provide the flexibility to consistently address stakeholder preferences and/or concerns around the scheduling of breaks, as indicated in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey.

Option 2: Prescriptive Policy Direction - Placement of Breaks

In this approach, the policy would direct that the placement of breaks for students will be aligned with days of significance after all legislative, provincial and collective agreement requirements are met. There is opportunity for the Board to continue to advocate for students, staff and families when external requirements do not align with the needs of the community (e.g., a provincial examination scheduled during a day of significance).

- **Benefits**

- There are several mandatory requirements that are set outside of the Division that must be accounted for when scheduling the breaks. This option would provide sufficient flexibility to meet these requirements.
- At times, this option may provide greater flexibility to address some of the preferences and/or concerns around the scheduling of breaks, as indicated in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey.
- *Risks*
 - Certain days of significance do not have fixed dates (i.e., the date may change yearly). Therefore, there is no guarantee that all diverse days of significance will be included as breaks in the calendar every school year, and this may create potential equity concerns.
 - At times, this option may not be able to address some stakeholder preferences and/or concerns around the scheduling of breaks, as indicated in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey.

Option 3: High Level Philosophical Policy Direction

In this approach, the policy would not provide any additional direction for the placement of breaks in the school year calendar. Instead, it would direct that the [multi-faith calendar](#) will be used to guide site-based decision making to guide educational opportunities within each school.

- *Benefits*
 - This option may provide additional flexibility in the scheduling of breaks to more frequently address the preferences and/or concerns indicated in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey.
- *Risks*
 - Accountability measures may be necessary to ensure that decisions made around days of significance are equitable and feasible for students across all schools.
 - The high-level nature of this policy provides philosophical, rather than action-oriented, direction.

Regardless of which policy option is selected, a revised policy would continue to articulate that the Superintendent of Schools has the authority to modify the school calendar for specific schools on an annual basis if the approved calendar does not meet that school's needs. In addition, this policy option would continue to provide direction for the school calendar to be used by Division schools across all grade levels (i.e., elementary, junior high, and high schools). This consistency will continue to support collaboration across catchments, Division-wide professional learning opportunities and predictability for families with children in different schools across the Division.

Next Steps

The PRC plans to move forward, through the perspective of Option 2, with work on a policy that directs that the placement of breaks for students will be aligned with days of significance after all legislative, provincial and collective agreement requirements are met. To ensure that the Division has a strong understanding of the diverse days of significance that are meaningful to the EPSB community, changes to

this policy may be informed by the extended student demographic data collected during the 2022-2023 school year and from further engagement with stakeholders.