

Building a School Calendar:

The proposed school calendar must include a minimum of 185 calendar days. Should a district utilize 185 proposed calendar days, no more than 5 can be allotted as “Emergency” (School Closure) Days leaving a minimum of 180 calendar days for the school year. Of these remaining 180 days, no more than 4 days can be used as Teacher Institute Days which are not counted as the required attendance days for students. This results in a minimum of 176 remaining days of student attendance on the school calendar. School districts are also presented with a choice of scheduling an allowable configuration for parent/teacher conferences (e.g. 4 half-day conferences after a shortened student day, 1 or 2 full day conferences with parents in lieu of student attendance, evening conferences after a full school day, or a combination of these options as long as the number of student attendance days does not fall below 174). Such configurations must meet the criteria of ISBE and must also satisfy any local policy and agreements on file.

Why do we start on a Friday?

The “First Day Friday” approach that has been used in Gower for years is different from most districts. Parents and community members that are unfamiliar with this model might want to know why we do it this way. In short, it is a decision made with the students' interests placed at the top of the list. We start the school year for students on a Friday as a way to maximize a great start to the school year for each and every one of our students.

Every year, we welcome over 100 new students to Gower and we transition close to another 100 students from Gower West to Gower Middle School. Starting a school year brings a fair mix of excitement, nervous tension and energy, worry, stress, and anxiety. Gower welcomes the teaching and support staff back days ahead of the first day for students and we are proud of our Back to School Events such as the Meet and Greet and Open House (held on the Weds. evening before the first day of school). These events have become important to the Gower Community and the feedback from parents has been clear to keep them firmly in place prior to the start of the year.

The official first day of the school year may be on a Friday, but the days leading up to the ‘first day’ include important activities that help our staff, our parents, and most importantly our students, generally ease into the school year. The assemblies and building walk through activities carried out at both schools on the first day help everyone get acclimated to the start of the school year. This one day allows our students to begin the following full week with a degree of comfort and confidence to help ensure that they can benefit from a strong start. The Calendar Committee recognizes that Gower’s ‘First Day Friday’ approach has the students’ interests as the key priority while balancing the remaining alignment needs of a formal school calendar. It is something we have control over and can demonstrate what 'walking the talk' looks like when it comes to a simple element - the school calendar - across all of the complexities of effectively operating a school system.