



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Directors

From: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

Date: April 17, 2025

Subject: **Monitoring Report for EL-8, District Calendar**

I certify that the following is accurate as of April 17, 2025. The reporting period is from April 18, 2024 through April 17, 2025.

Policy Type: Executive Limitation

Policy: **EL-8 District Calendar**

“The Superintendent, in preparing the district calendar, shall not fail to appropriately involve stakeholder groups and timely communicate the calendar and any changes.”

Adopted: September 10, 2009

Reviewed/Revised: January 10, 2013; April 21, 2016, April 20, 2017

Interpretation of Items: None in question.

Background Information: This report is about Executive Limitation 8 – District Calendar (EL-8). It was formerly known as EL-16 District Calendar. Information indicating compliance for each of the areas is presented below.

Some of the information in this report has not changed from previous reports but provides needed context for each area. **Bolded words** or phrases within the text of this report have been used to signal new initiatives, strategies and work.

Prepare a district calendar that optimizes teaching and learning throughout the year, supports whole child learning and considers typical family constraints.

The school calendar is a subject of bargaining and was a significant part of our discussion during our last negotiations with the Bellingham Education Association (BEA) in 2023. Those negotiations with the BEA resulted in a three-year contract and calendars for the years 2023-2024, 2024-2025 and 2025-2026. The district also meets with other union leaders representing those that are most affected by the school calendar, such as our paraeducators and administrative assistants who work the school calendar schedule.

On January 9 of this year, our annual calendar committee met to discuss the 2026-27 calendar. Our goal was to determine key dates such as the first day of school, winter and spring breaks and a tentative last day of school. The committee also applied other calendar components such as the specific dates for staff learning days (purple days), early releases and snow make-up days. Staff learning days and districtwide early release days continue to provide valuable time for staff professional development and collaboration to improve teaching and learning and engage with families.

The 2025-26 school calendar was also addressed by the calendar committee. Last year the committee established 2025-26 key dates which were communicated to staff, families and community. This year the committee applied the calendar components of the BEA contract and recommended placement of staff learning days and snow make-up days. Anticipating the application to waive up to three student days, the committee also created calendar versions reflecting 179 and 177 student days. In addition, families were surveyed regarding possible calendar changes for 2025-26 and the overall feedback was positive.

Subsequently, **the district and BEA agreed to extend the current collective bargaining agreement through 2026-27. The agreement impacted the calendar by reflecting 179 student days and removing the staff learning days in October and March.** The reduction of staff learning days are considered furlough days, thus achieving budget savings, and the days would return in future years. By eliminating two staff learning days and one student day, the school year calendar is shortened allowing the committee to recommend the **first student day to be on the Tuesday after Labor Day.** The committee is still finalizing the placement of snow make-up days. Final recommendations will be complete by the end of April.

Once the committee's recommendations for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 calendars are finalized they will be submitted to the superintendent and BEA president for review and approval. The calendars will be communicated to staff and families and can be viewed on our [calendars webpage on our website](#).

As shared in last year's report, there are common components of these calendars that are included in contract language with BEA. Many remained the same, but there were some changes.

The components in the BEA contract are:

- Parameters for school start date, winter and spring breaks.
- Three staff learning days (purple days) prior to the first day of school.
- **One staff learning day embedded into the calendar in the month of September.**
- Semester break day in January to allow staff to finalize grading and prepare for second semester.
- Treaty Day observed as a non-school day on January 22.
- Seventeen districtwide early dismissal days including the day before Thanksgiving and the last day of school (this is an increase from eight).
- Built-in designated snow make-up days in May and June and the option to convert the March staff learning day to a snow make-up day.

Prepare a district calendar that provides adequate collaborative and professional development time for staff in the pursuit of effective instruction.

Professional Learning for Effective Instruction

Last year, we noted the bargained work calendar included a new focus on embedding time specifically for collaboration¹ in service of teacher professional learning during Thursday afternoon early release time. That new calendar focus has continued into a second year. **Changes this year include the addition of two opportunities in the calendar for Professional Learning Community (PLC) time for grade levels in elementary schools to come together around a common focus.** These meetings occurred during October and March and included time set aside for each grade level, as well as specialist teams.

¹ By way of reminder, specific parameters for the collaboration time for teachers is spelled out on page 50 of the BEA contract, in Article VIII, Section L.

Literacy and a focus specifically on guided reading and racial literacy have been the focus for these elementary PLC meetings this year.

A new series of professional learning opportunities for paraeducators and teachers they work with has also been implemented this year, led by school support lead Rebecca Sauter and other members of our district's Student Support Team (SST). This series of in-person trainings has been designed to increase knowledge of best practices for inclusive learning environments. Attendance by paraeducator and case manager teams (teacher, other support personnel) was encouraged, and the classes offered credits toward the General Paraeducator Certificate as well as clock hours for certificated staff. Classes offered included:

- Use of Positive Reinforcement, Dec. 5, 2024
- Make a Change: Strategies to Help Learners Make Daily Transitions, Jan. 9, 2025
- Strategies to Decrease the Incidence of Problem Behavior, Jan. 23, 2025
- Visual Supports and Strategies, Feb. 6, 2025
- Chaining, Shaping, and Prompting, Feb. 27, 2025
- Discrete Trial Teaching, March 6, 2025
- Data Collection for Paraeducators: Data Driven Decisions, March 27, 2025
- Pivotal Response Teaching Across the Day, April 3, 2025

The SST also ran multiple sessions of a course entitled "Supporting All Students: Effective Paraeducator Support in an Inclusive Setting for Learners with Complex Needs." This 1-hour asynchronous course provides introductory material that is relevant to all paraeducator positions but particularly student support paraeducators and their substitutes. Staff, including newly-hired permanent, temporary or substitute staff members, were offered the opportunity to complete the course asynchronously and receive General Paraeducator Certificate hours by completing a brief completion quiz.

Common District Goals, Systemwide Work and School Team Planning

We continued our focus on common districtwide goals for improving inclusive educational strategies and supporting positive student conduct through a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS). School professional learning leadership teams met August 15-16, 2024, for a team planning retreat. Firm goals established back in August of 2022 continue to guide our district's work in four categories for professional learning. These firm goals (see Figure A below) continued as our school district's key goals for ongoing work into the 2024-25 school year.

Figure A. Firm Goals for BPS Professional Learning 2024-25



Four specific goals have been our focus for this year's work: (1) Knowledge: making connections between academic and social/emotional learning; (2) Skills and Practices: providing access to grade level content for all students; (3) Implementation: teaching district adopted Tier-1 curriculum; and (4) Feedback: using data to measure student growth over time. School teams each developed plans coming out of the August retreat for their school specific focus for the year. The professional learning calendar includes periodic time for building-based professional development, and the plans that were made in August were designed to support the coherent use of this built-in time for buildings to focus on staff learning.

MTSS Districtwide Standing Committee

The MTSS Standing Committee was designed to encapsulate the work previously done by the Joint Committee on Student Conduct and the Inclusionary Instructional Strategies Committee, both of which concluded in fall 2024 with the start of this new standing committee. The purpose of the MTSS Standing Committee is four-fold:

1. To create a systematic, data-driven approach to supporting all students.
2. To prepare for state-mandated changes to the Special Education evaluation process that will require our schools to be consistent in the approach to core instruction.

3. To investigate, gather and disseminate instructional strategies, interventions and associated helpful practices in support of professional learning in our school district.
4. To support the key strategy of Great Teaching with Strong Support.

The goals of the MTSS Standing Committee include:

- Establish a vision for how to implement a strong, evidence-based multi-tiered system of supports for all students in Bellingham Public Schools.
- Use the collective expertise of the committee to develop a curated list of resources that demonstrate best practices.
- Investigate, review and recommend professional learning experiences that can be accessed by district employees in support of growing our work in inclusive instructional strategies.
- Focus on growing inclusive strategies and increasing the scope of inclusion over time, beginning with the early grades.

The committee has met monthly since November 2024, and meeting notes and minutes can be viewed [here](#). This committee's work will include menus of tiered intervention supports in various content areas (e.g. SEL, literacy, attendance) that can be used by school teams in their collaboration time, in child study team meetings, in attendance team meetings and other planning settings that are part of the regular work to support student learning needs in schools.

Reduce Time That Teachers are Out of the Classroom for Professional Development

A goal when our calendar was created several years ago with embedded staff learning days was to significantly reduce the time that teachers are out of the classroom for professional development. Our goal was a 50 percent reduction in absences related to professional development. **Based on the final data for the 2023-24 school year, it shows an overall decrease of 49 percent.** The chart below illustrates the total certificated staff absences for professional development and the percentage decrease from the 2013-14 baseline. Over the past two years, our ability to fill these absences with qualified substitutes has significantly improved. Despite this progress, we remain committed to minimizing the number of absences for professional development. Our priority is to reduce the disruption students experience when their teacher is absent from class.

Certificated Staff Absences by Year for Professional Development and Collaboration		
School Year	No. of Certificated Absences	Percent Decrease from Baseline Year
2013-14 Baseline Year	4,958	
2014-15	4,495	9%
2015-16	3,799	23%
2016-17	3,287	34%
2017-18	3,060	38%
2018-19	2,818	43%
2019-20 Prior to Covid Closure in March	1,650	49%
2020-21 Covid School Closure		
2021-22	1,211	76%
2022-23	2,104	58%
2023-24	2,550	49%

Engaging All Families with Calendar Changes

Weather and other unplanned events can unexpectedly change the school calendar, and the district works diligently to ensure all families are informed promptly. We understand the importance of timely communication and strive to keep everyone updated with the latest information.

At the end of November, family liaisons connect with **families experiencing homelessness** to ensure they know how to access information about inclement weather, school closures, late starts and specialized transportation.

In the event of a school closure due to inclement weather, the district uses **ParentSquare** to notify families. This system ensures that all families receive timely updates. Additionally, the **Translated Weather Line (360-647-6815)** provides updates in Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Punjabi and English, ensuring language barriers or internet connectivity do not prevent families from staying informed.

To further support families who speak languages other than English, we update the **Family Resource Center** line, provide **separate special notifications to families experiencing homelessness**, and post updates on the **Padres Unidos de las Escuelas de Bellingham Facebook page** for Spanish-speaking parents. These efforts are part of our commitment to

ensuring that all families, regardless of their primary language, have access to important information.

When the district makes any planned changes to the calendar, such as making up snow days, the family engagement team creates special messages for families who may not be reached by the regular messages sent by our communications department. This includes targeted **translated messages, posts on our Family Resource Centers, Facebook posts and individual phone calls.**

When a new immigrant family enrolls their students we provide a **family handbook**, taking extra time to go over the school calendar, making sure they know and understand **bell times, early dismissal times, vacations and holidays, the A/B calendar for the secondary level, Purple Fridays, and built-in weather make-up days.**

The family engagement team attends **events like the Block Party and all open houses** in the fall, with resources in different languages, including ParentSquare, Skyward, SeeSaw, and extra calendars and family handbooks for easy access to the families.

We recognize that not all families are the same, and we need to approach communication differently to ensure everyone feels included and informed. Our Family Resource Centers receive **over three hundred visitors every month**, and each visit is an opportunity for families to share their experiences and opinions and for us to provide information. We are committed to engaging every family and that engagement goes beyond mere communication. It involves listening to families, understanding their needs and providing the support they require.

We also encourage families to **provide feedback on our communication efforts.** This feedback helps us understand what is working and where we can improve. Our commitment to engaging all families with calendar changes is unwavering. By utilizing multiple communication channels, providing information in various languages and continuously seeking feedback we strive to create a community where all families feel valued, informed and engaged.



Above: Members of the family engagement team attend the 2024 Back to School Block Party

Timely communication of calendar and calendar changes to all stakeholders and the board.

We work diligently to share calendar updates as quickly as possible with the board, staff, students and other stakeholders.

During this reporting period, we utilized our regular communications channels about our calendar, and we closed school for one day due to weather in February 2025. A make-up day was used on March 14, 2025.

Our typical communications protocol is to send reminders about planned days off and early dismissals via email, website and social media, such as [this announcement](#). We continue this practice throughout the school year and reporting period.

Below: Sample of October 2024 web slider. Every month graphics are created for district and school web sliders highlighting important calendar dates and early dismissals that month.



The first day of school and back-to-school events and orientations are sent in many ways, including email, text, school-based communication and within the annual Family Handbook and Calendar, mailed to all families. The handbook includes both a long form calendar and the “bubble calendar.” We update and maintain our [calendar webpage](#) regularly.

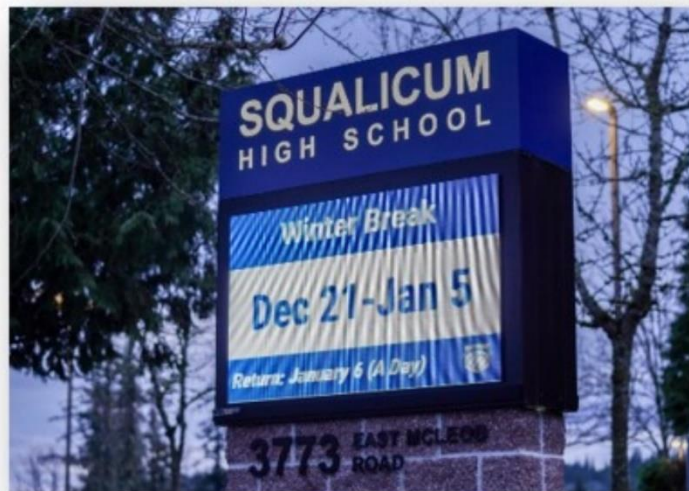
Below: Sample of a calendar page from the [2024-25 Family Handbook and Calendar](#) and the one-page 2024-25 “bubble calendar.”



Important calendar notes during this reporting period

- In May 2024, we [shared updated calendars](#) for 2024-25 and 2025-26. We made note of eliminating our typical mid-year semester break in January 2025 and offered subsequent reminders about our [unique schedule](#) in January 2025, which included the MLK, Jr. holiday, a built-in weather make-up day and Treaty Day. We shared an updated [Promise Story about Treaty Day](#) to help provide context for this important day of recognition. January 2025 was the second school year we did not have school in commemoration of Treaty Day.
- In November 2024, we sent a message to families after a significant windstorm affected Sudden Valley (and other areas around Western Washington) confirming schools were open, but we had limited bus service to Sudden Valley due to downed trees and power lines.
- In the first week of February 2025, [school closed for one day](#) and we saw [delays](#) and [snow routes](#) throughout the week due to snow. See below for more.
- We shared a [calendar update in February 2025](#) with finalized graduation dates, the last day of school for seniors and the last day of school for all other students.

Below: School reader boards remind families of upcoming calendar dates. The Squalicum High School reader board is one of eight in the district and was added in December 2024.



Inclement Weather Impact on Calendar

We saw snow and cold temperatures the first week of February 2025, [which caused school to be closed Feb. 3](#). We utilized snow routes and a delayed schedule that week, as well.

When our schedule is impacted or buses are delayed, we utilize a checklist that includes multiple communication methods, including our website; media outlets; direct texts and emails to staff, students and families via the district's notification tool ParentSquare; reception voicemail and multi-language phone line, which provides information in four languages.

Our templates and plans are developed and utilized by communications and family engagement; our updates are accessible, thorough and timely. Important announcements regarding our schedule are also shared on social media and reader boards.

For context, inclement weather decisions are made in collaboration with the transportation director, chief of operations, superintendent and executive director of communications and community relations.

After that snowstorm, we sent an [announcement about the make-up day](#) and revised the “bubble calendar” in both English and Spanish. For the March make-up day, we shared additional reminders via email, reader boards and social media. Family engagement sent additional messaging to those who speak languages other than English.

Below: Weather-related closures and/or snow routes were posted on social media in this reporting period during the week of Feb. 3, 2025.



Statement of compliance:

The superintendent is **in compliance** with EL-8 District Calendar.