



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Directors

From: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

Date: April 14, 2021

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

I certify that the following is accurate as of April 14, 2021. The reporting period is from March 1, 2020 through April 14, 2021.

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.

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

In the winter and spring of 2020 the district negotiated a new contract with Bellingham Education Association (BEA) that was set to expire August 31, 2020. The school calendar is a subject of bargaining and was a significant part of our discussion. Our new agreement with the BEA resulted in a new three-year contract and calendars for the years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The common components of these calendars include:

- Parameters for school start date, winter and spring breaks.
- Two staff learning days (purple days) prior to the first day of school.
- Staff learning days embedded into the calendar. One in each month of September, October, November and March.
- Semester break day in January to allow staff to finalize grading and prepare for second semester.
- Eight all district early dismissal days including the day before Thanksgiving and the last day of school.
- Specific time for conferencing and family engagement in November
- Built-in designated snow makeup day in May

Many of these calendar components are somewhat consistent with past years and the staff learning days and districtwide early release days continue to provide valuable time for staff professional development to improve teaching and learning and engage with families.

A new calendar component is the addition of snow makeup days in March and May. If needed, the May date would be the first makeup day used followed by the conversion of the March staff learning day into a school day. The purpose of “building in” snow makeup days is to help keep the last day of school more consistent. In the past, if we had snow days, we added them onto the originally scheduled last day of school. These changes often conflicted with other priorities of families and staff and often caused us to adjust graduation dates. Our new plan allows us two days in the calendar to add before adjusting the last day of school. Since the development of our calendar, we have had a pandemic and developed remote learning options. The district will be further examining these remote options for inclement weather conditions in compliance with OSPI guidelines.

Even though the calendars were completed as part of bargaining, there were many additional processes involving the calendar development. Our calendar committee, comprised of labor leaders, district staff and a parent representative, met to discuss and review calendar development. Over the last couple years, we have received feedback from some families to

align calendars with our higher education partners: Whatcom Community College, Western Washington University, and Bellingham Technical College. The district facilitated meetings with representatives from our calendar committee and each of our partner institutions. Although our goal was to align our calendars, we learned from each other that differing calendar constraints and other competing factors of each organization prevented us from having mutually aligned calendars.

In August of 2020, after the decision was made to start the school year with remote learning, we adjusted the calendar for the 2020-21 school year. In order to best be prepared for students in a new remote learning environment, we moved the first day of school from Wednesday, September 2 to Tuesday, September 8. We also moved several of our staff learning days that were previously embedded throughout the school year to the days just prior to the student's first day. This allowed time for staff to engage in further professional development around our remote learning adjustments, new platforms, family engagement and curriculum.

The 2021-22 and 2022-23 calendars have been communicated to staff and families and can be viewed on our calendars webpage on our website.

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

As also reported in EL-4, the primary focus for summer and fall professional learning was preparation and ongoing support for remote learning. Work teams comprised of teacher leaders, ed tech coaches, administration, and the Department of Teaching and Learning developed districtwide, school specific, and content or grade level specific professional learning opportunities that were available online (live and asynchronous).

All certificated staff were invited to use their technology learning hours to complete five 90-minute online modules. These modules were built around the following five critical areas of focus for remote learning:

- 1) Family engagement and support
- 2) Curriculum coherence (essential standards)
- 3) Digital learning environments
- 4) Cognitive engagement
- 5) Feedback for learning

Additional choice boards were created for staff who asked for training specific to online learning tools. Choice boards were available in early August for Microsoft Teams, OneNote, Office 365, Seesaw, and iPad resources.

Here is a sample choice board for Microsoft Teams – each specific button opened to a short video tutorial and written directions:



An online learning resources notebook was created and continues to be built out to support remote and hybrid learning. Other key sections (in addition to critical areas of focus modules and choice boards) include a FAQ section, classroom examples of online and hybrid learning organized within the 5D framework, and additional technology tutorials.

When teachers returned to work in late August, live professional learning was provided by buildings and by job-alike areas. Certificated staff alternate Wednesday afternoons between building and job-alike professional development. During job-alike professional development time, content specific facilitators help guide teachers through choosing essential standards and identifying curriculum/lessons best suited for teaching online. This time has greatly supported district coherence across schools and has been beneficial for distributing the load of content creation across all district staff.

With the shift to in-person learning (hybrid) in the last few months, coaches at the secondary level have been providing professional learning and tech support for different classroom models. This ensures teachers can use available audio/video tools and meeting configurations to support different instructional purposes.

In addition to all the technology training associated with remote learning, our calendar schedule for this year has allowed professional development opportunities to occur on every Wednesday for our staff. The professional development topics included:

- **Building specific professional development**

Every other Wednesday afternoon throughout the school calendar has been dedicated to school-based professional development. Principals and their leadership teams design and facilitate school-based professional development on their school's area of focus for professional development, aligned to the key strategies and outcomes of The Bellingham Promise. For many elementary schools, this focus is on inquiry-based learning, International Baccalaureate study and development, and equitable teaching practices. At the middle and high school levels the focus has included assessment and grading practices, student engagement, and other school-based focus areas.

- **Grade level and content specific professional development**

This occurred within buildings and across grade levels throughout the entire district. On the opposite Wednesday afternoons certificated staff across the district came together for cross-district job alike professional development. These bi-weekly professional learning sessions were facilitated by teacher leaders at all levels and focus on content-based instruction and job-specific areas of development. For example, at the middle level teachers gathered in content area groups, such as language arts/social studies, math, science, performing arts, etc. Teacher leaders planned collaboratively across the content areas, then facilitated professional learning focused on priority standards, curriculum content, and aligned scope and sequence for learning. The cross-district collaboration time also included job alike sessions of professional learning by specialists; for example, Special Education teachers, speech language pathologists, literacy specialists, counselors, and other specialist groups.

- **Continued workshops and training associated with our EDI work.** Although professional development in this area is extensive, below are some of the highlights of professional development this year.

REACH Workshop: Cultural Identity & Diversity

The REACH framework assists staff members across school settings to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to value and respect each student in a culturally responsive manner.

Culturally Responsive Training

Participants build awareness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching and the Ready for Rigor framework for instructional leaders in order to facilitate building level professional learning and collaborative inquiry/coaching.

Participants will be able to describe the Ready for Rigor framework and give examples for how the components of the framework can be actualized in their specific setting.

Introduction to Cultural Identity & Diversity

This course focuses on equity and diversity, with a focus on how to recognize biases and address them productively. Participants learn what it means to be culturally responsive in classrooms, the school, and the community.

- **Social emotional learning (SEL)**

August and September professional development included a strong focus on social and emotional learning. All middle school and high school certificated teachers took part in at least one-half day training with the professional leaders at Character Strong. The focus of these sessions, which were then supported with the opportunity for additional professional learning opportunities throughout the year, was on building student connection and resilience during online remote learning. Teachers learned about the importance of social emotional learning and how to build relationships and connection in their remote learning setting with students. The Character Strong curriculum was then implemented in all advisory classes across our middle and high schools for the first several months of school and continued to be implemented into the weekly morning advisories at a minimum of once per week at all schools throughout the remainder of the school year. Elementary staff continued with professional learning and application of SEL in building classrooms focused on belonging and ownership through the support and use of Caring Schools Community curriculum alignment and professional learning on how to conduct morning meetings through remote settings effectively to increase student connection.

- **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 of absences related to professional development. Based on the final data for 2018-19 and the data prior to school closure in March of 2020, it shows an overall decrease of 43 to 49 percent. As you can see in the chart below,

absences for professional development purposes have continued to reduce each year. This data does not take into account that the number of certificated staff has continued to increase significantly over the same time period. Based on our current schedules, remote learning and other factors, we were not able to further compute data that is consistent with previous years.

Certificated Staff Absences by Year for Professional Development							
	2013-14 Baseline Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 Prior to School Closure
Total No. of Certificated Absences	4,958	4,495	3,799	3,287	3060	2818	1650
Percent of Decrease from Baseline Year		9.3%	23.4%	34%	38%	43%	49%

▪ **Develop intentional time for student and family engagement in conferencing**

In past reports, we have focused on both middle school and elementary conferencing, and on our staff's effort to create partnerships, communications and supports with our kindergarten and non-English speaking families. Work on these efforts continued this year, despite dealing with the closure and reopening of schools due to the COVID virus. With that backdrop, and given the strange year with COVID, our report this year focuses specifically on strategies put in place to keep the lines of communication and engagement with families open during the pandemic. We focus our reporting in two ways in the paragraphs that follow. First, we report on the big picture of engagement and provide evidence of our overall efforts to keep families and students close during the pandemic and provide for their ongoing needs. Second, we focus specifically on outreach and engagement efforts with families whose children are served in our Special Education programs, including some novel ways that technology has enabled engagement.

▪ **Engagement during the pandemic**

It has been a very unusual year to say the least. Last March, on the governor's order, we closed the Bellingham Public Schools. But the needs of our families did not go away, nor did we cease to engage and provide for our families as the pandemic hit. As we worked to move into online/remote delivery of instruction, our emphasis on family and student engagement became an even more important focus for the work of staff in the district.

Part of our response to the situation created by the pandemic included continuing to provide food, school supplies, and overall support for remote and (eventually) hybrid learning to our

families. Our food service staff mobilized to provide weekly meal boxes available for pickup across the school district, and school staff engaged in delivering meals to those families who could not pick up food on site. Schools mobilized to put together supply packets that included instructional materials, art supplies, musical instruments, and basic school supplies that students needed to engage in remote learning. Our technology team, with the partnership of community providers, worked to ensure that every family in the community who needed WI-FI access in the home was able to get it. Educational technology leaders quickly ramped up to ensure that all our youngest learners had access to their own computing device, essentially moving the provision of devices to primary age students up a full year ahead of planned implementation.

It is powerful to listen to the voices of our teachers and other staff about the ways that new efforts to engage with students and families has mattered over the past year. The comments gathered from our teachers, classified staff and administrators below provide first-hand accounts of some of the ways that our staff engaged with some of the kids and families who needed our help the most during this time, and what they learned in the process. Many of the accounts from staff who engaged in home visits highlighted the gratitude families expressed. By way of example in one school, some comments below were gathered from Squalicum High School staff who engaged in supportive home visits:

“Seeing faces is so powerful!”

“Students and families were always thankful and appreciative of the support for their devices.”

“I delivered food and loved seeing the sincere gratitude and hope that it gave our students and families to make it through this difficult time!”

“Parents are grateful (to) see teachers delivering care packages and school supplies.”

“It was great to see the smiles of gratitude. When you pull up in your personal car and bring a student something they need, they know you care. That connection is worth the time it takes to make the drive.”

“These visits have been the best part of my day! I hope that we can continue them as we get back into in-person instruction. They are valuable in many ways: instructional, educational, social/emotional along with developing stronger community bonds.”

From staff serving the students in the GRADS program at Options, comments were similar. One staff member noted, for example:

“For the Options GRADS program I pick up weekly school meal boxes and deliver to students as per requested for the week. Some students rely on these food boxes. In addition, I drop off diapers, formula, wipes and any other basic necessities. In the beginning of the school year, I dropped off student computers and chargers to student homes. Some students live as far as Blaine and many hours of dropping off and driving!”

Another Options staff member highlighted the importance of community connections in keeping students and families engaged:

In our GRADS class, we have had the opportunity to work with BTC Parenting Program. Each Tuesday, Ann Marie, licensed pediatrician nurse and parenting advocate, ZOOMs with our class and teaches topics such as sleep, stress, transition, feeding babies, etc. We bring in other community resources such as Early Headstart and guest speakers to provide additional information and programs to our teen parents.

The person-to-person connections from our staff paid off in many ways. Seeing staff boosted engagement and feelings of inclusion. And, for some kids connecting in the home helped generate referrals for other needs. An art teacher noted,

“Class supply deliveries to homes usually boosted student engagement in class immediately...since students felt more capable having the supplies needed to do art class and perhaps they felt more included as a result of the personal gesture, is my guess.”

Another teacher wrote:

“Not so much a highlight as a testament to the importance of in person contact. (I) visited one ninth grade student who appeared very sick. Reporting to counselors got referrals and other adults in his corner.

While the work of engagement has a huge upside in helping to keep students and families connected to school during the pandemic, it has also revealed the significant challenges faced by so many of our students and their families. One teacher put it this way, for example:

“It has been a humbling reality check to visit students in their home environments and acknowledge the protective factors and the barriers that they and their families are facing. Seeing some students light up when we deliver snacks and post cards has made me feel like I'm doing something good/worthwhile/effective. On the other hand, seeing closed doors and a lack of response/connection has made me feel stuck, frustrated, and defeated. What else can we do to get these students and families re-engaged?!”

Another staff member noted how it takes a village to support some families in need:

Currently, we have two students living at the Agape house. We have worked with our homeless liaison and have been able to secure spots at the Agape house to provide safe housing for both mom and baby. Each student was living in toxic environments, unable to attend school consistently, and dealing with their mental health. Currently, one student is attending our Internet Café daily, child is enrolled in childcare and is passing all of her classes. The other student will begin attending Internet Café, child in childcare and attend her classes this week. Transportation is also provided to ensure the students are able to get to and from school. Providing services and resources to each of these teen parents has been crucial and vital to being a healthy parent to their child. It has been a team effort; GRADS teacher, school counselor, transportation, homeless liaison.

At the elementary level, teachers made family engagement a weekly routine, using time set aside on Wednesdays for family conferencing and engagement with individual students. Teachers report that this process of regular connections provided a transparent window into the lives of students and made it possible to address learning and other needs.

▪ **Engagement with families and students receiving Special Education services**

A survey of Special Education teachers in spring 2020 captured the most identified silver lining of the school shut-down experience. Through distance learning and development of remote Special Education instruction, from preschool through Community Transitions, teachers developed stronger connections with connections with families.

In the spring, with guidance from Special Education leadership, all special educators contacted families to collaboratively determine the most meaningful and sustainable strategies to continue students' progress toward their IEP goals. In the fall, with further guidance from OSPI, special educators stepped up expectations for fully implementing IEPs. This involved continued collaboration with families to provide instructional resources, connect via Zoom and Seesaw, share video-based lessons, and facilitate two-way communication so that teachers could monitor

student progress, even while learning remotely. Here are a few examples of what teachers had to say:

“I am developing richer relationships with parents as I conference with them about remote learning plans.”

“The increase in family involvement impacts teaching and learning.”

“I have a closer bond and connection with the families as they sit in on and sometimes participate in Zoom lessons.”

“I’m strengthening connections not just with my students, but with their entire family.”

“Video modeling helps the family understand the skills their child is developing, and how to help them.”

Family outreach and collaboration, combined with assistive technology devices and training, is improving the ability of our students who are nonverbal and their families to communicate across home and school. With Linda Schlee’s retirement, the district hired Amy Fleischer to continue our efforts to improve assistive technology support for students. From Analisa Ficklin, one of our Assistant Directors for Special Education, here is a description of one student’s experience supported by assistive technology:

A student with complex communication needs is beginning to use assistive technology to access her environment and communicate at school and home. One piece of AT that she’s using is called a Step-by-Step, an adaptive switch (or button) with multiple recorded messages that play one by one, with each activation. Therefore, it can be used to hold a conversation.

The other day, in a Zoom session with the SLP and OT, the student’s mother expressed gratitude for the improved home-to-school connection resulting from remote services (delivered in the home environment), combined with face-to-face instruction (at school) – and using the Step-by-Step to bridge between the two environments. By providing the AT and the support to use it in such meaningful ways, this team was using technology to promote continuity and student growth.

In many of our schools it is common practice for students to participate in their IEP meetings, bringing students, family, and school staff together in collaborative development of IEPs. In some schools, students *lead* the meetings. After preparing with their Special Education teacher, the student leads their family and school team through a discussion of their own strengths, needs, goals, and services. They use graphic organizers and prompts, including questions to elicit the participation of their family members and service providers in a collaborative process to develop

the new IEP. Student-led IEP meetings are common practice for students served in Life Skills at Squalicum High School; students served in Resource at Kulshan Middle School, Fairhaven Middle School, and Options High School; as well as students served in Community Transitions. We continue to work towards growing this practice across the system through PD and the support of our Special Education TOSAs.

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

Since our school year calendar was significantly impacted by the pandemic, we worked diligently to share updates as quickly as possible with the board, staff, students and other stakeholders.

On Friday, March 13, 2020, we told our community that per a directive from the governor, [all schools would be closed for six weeks](#), effective Monday, March 16. Our district sent emails, text messages and phone calls to staff and families to share this update and translated messaging into multiple languages. It was also posted to our website and social media. Our principals and staff also helped share this news with staff and families during March 13 dismissal and in their school-based communications, such as e-newsletters and Seesaw. The governor closed all schools across the state, and there was extensive media coverage about the virus and its impact on our community and beyond.

The [closure impacted spring break](#) in that remote learning continued April 6-10 to make up for the transition time from the beginning of the closure as our staff and families shifted into new remote learning. We worked with labor groups on this decision, and we were in agreement that a benefit to continuing remote learning during the formerly-scheduled spring break meant the school year would not need to be extended. The calendar change was addressed in district and school messaging, as well as classroom-based communication and social media. Governor Inslee subsequently extended the statewide school closure, and we shared an [update](#) with staff and families via general notification channels. After receiving guidance from OSPI on calculating 180 days of instruction, given the complexities of [snow days in January](#), the pandemic and remote learning, OSPI granted many districts emergency waivers and [we then shared our new last day of school](#).

As we planned the 2020-21 school year over the summer and [announced we would be beginning in a fully-remote model](#), we decided we needed more time with staff to prepare and train them for remote teaching and learning and [delayed the first day of school](#). Again, we sent messaging to staff and families in a variety of ways in multiple languages, working closely with our principals, leaders and family engagement team to ensure no staff, student or family missed this important announcement. Throughout the 2020-21 school year, there were many calendar updates shared to announce dates and plans to bring grades back for in-person instruction ([first one in October](#) and the [most recent one was in Feb 2021](#)). We followed our model of

communicating in a variety of ways to reach our community, including teachers and staff who engage regularly with students and families.

After we worked with our labor leaders, we shared [the key dates for 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years](#).

▪ **Inclement weather impact on calendar**

A silver lining of the pandemic is that we have developed a new remote learning option in case our school campuses need to close for in-person instruction due to the weather. (We should point out that calling this a “silver lining” is subjective; there are those who are disappointed by the prospect of not having snow days.) But for the 2020-21 school year, we did not need to deploy this option, nor did we have any “traditional” snow days. We sent out our weather protocols and [reminders to staff and families](#) in January when the forecast called for snow; because many of our staff and students were already in remote learning at that time, the impact would have been limited.

The weather and road conditions varied throughout the district this winter, so we only modified some of our bus routes to “snow routes” a few days due to snow and ice to safely bring kids to and from school in February 2021. Notifications were limited to students who were receiving in-person instruction, which at the time included students in preschool to grade 2, those served in our BRIDGES and Life Skills programs, and our internet café.

The transportation director, director of school safety and emergency management, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning, assistant superintendent of human resources, executive director of operations, the superintendent, and executive director of communications and community relations work closely to ensure staff, students, families and community members are notified of any changes to bus routes or the school closure in a timely manner in a variety of ways. Families and staff may opt to receive early morning text and email messages regarding emergency information. This information is shared via our district message line in English and four other languages through the multi-language message line, broadcasted by local media, posted on our website and posted on social media.

As reported in the previous section, we had multiple snow days in the 2019-20 school year in addition to the COVID-19-related closure.

Statement of compliance:

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