Calendar Frequently Asked Questions

Billings Public Schools Calendar

Which Factors Affect Our School Calendar Most?

- ➔ State Law:
  - MCA (Montana Code Annotated) 20-1-301 requires a minimum of 1080 *aggregate hours* for students in grades 4-12, 720 hours for K-3 students, and 1,050 aggregate hours for graduating seniors. *Aggregate hours* generally equate to instructional time.
  - MCA 20-1-304 requires a minimum of 3 PIR days for instructional and professional development meetings (maximum of 7.) Two of these mandated PIR days are held in accordance with the state teachers' conference (typically in October.) Billings Public Schools schedules 7 PIR days during the school year.
- ➔ Billings Public Schools Employee Contracts:
  - BPS has collective bargaining agreements with three different employee unions (MFPE, BCEA, BEA) -- each with its own stipulations that affect the calendar.
    - Certain days throughout the year are specified as vacation days for support employees. Because these are contracted vacation days for our paraprofessionals, facilities employees and secretarial staff, we realistically can't conduct school on these days.
    - The BEA collective bargaining agreement stipulates that our aggregate hours and PIR time is dispersed over 182 total days, thus setting the actual number of days allocated throughout the school calendar.
- ➔ Graduation:
  - We currently hold graduation at Metra Park Arena on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. *(See FAQ: **Why do we use the Metra for graduation?** for details.)*
- ➔ Balancing Semesters:
  - When building the calendar, it is important that we provide an equal (or close to equal) amount of instructional time each semester. Many courses at the middle and high school level are designed to be taught in one semester. The amount of time provided to cover the curriculum should be as equal as possible across each semester.

What Affects Our School Year Start and End Dates?

- ➔ Graduation:
  - We currently hold graduation at Metra Park Arena on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. *(See FAQ: **Why do we use the Metra for graduation?** for details.)*
  - Seniors may graduate with 30 fewer aggregate hours as per MCA 20-1-301.
- ➔ State Law, PIR, Snow Day, BPS Union Contracts
  - Once the final day of school is set, we work backwards to build our calendar. In doing so we have to account for the following:
    - 1080 Instructional hours for grades 4 - 12, 1050 hours for seniors, and 720 hours for grades K - 3 (to meet the aggregate hours required by MCA 20-1-301 and in accordance with BEA collective bargaining agreement.)
    - 1 Snow day (which becomes vacation if it is not needed.)
    - 7 PIR (two of which must coincide with the MFPE Educator Conference in October.)
    - Holidays stipulated by and specific to the various collective bargaining agreements.

- 2 Non Pupil Related (NPR) Days for training and classroom preparation

Why Do We Use Metra Park Arena for Graduation and Why Is It Memorial Day Weekend?

- ➔ Metra Park Arena offers a conducive venue for graduation for the following reasons:
  - ◆ Ample parking.
  - ◆ Ample seating, such that graduates are not limited in the number of attendees they wish to invite.
  - ◆ The indoor venue ensures that our graduation events are not impacted by weather.
- ➔ Metra Park Arena is not available for our use during the first weekend in June.
  - ◆ Therefore, Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend is the date currently selected for graduation.
- ➔ Other options have been considered and the following limitations have factored into the decision-making process:
  - ◆ Attendance would be limited at all other local venues including high school gymnasiums, college campuses, Lincoln Center, Alberta Bair Theater and the Shrine.
  - ◆ Parking would be a challenge at each location.
  - ◆ Daylis Stadium has been considered as an outdoor venue with ample seating. Unpredictable weather and lack of parking are limitations.

What are PIR Days and Why Do We Have Them?

- ➔ PIR days are state-mandated professional development days for educators (MCA 20-1-304).
- ➔ BPS teachers are required to complete 7 days of PIR professional development.
- ➔ MCA 20-1-304 stipulates that we provide a minimum of 3 such days during the school year (and a maximum of 7) -- two of which coincide with the MFPE Educator Conference held annually in October.
- ➔ PIR days do not count as instructional days.

What are NPR Days and Why Do We Have Them?

- ➔ NPR (Non Pupil Related) Days are additional days added for classroom preparation and staff training
- ➔ The two NPR days are not required by statute; however, they are a new feature of the 173 day calendar

Why Do We Have a Snow Day On Our Calendar and How Does It Work?

- ➔ Our snow day is a regularly scheduled instructional day that becomes a vacation day for students and staff in the event that it is not needed. This is why we try to place it as late into the spring semester as possible.
- ➔ State Law allows the board of trustees to close school for 1 school day each school year due to an unforeseen emergency. Schools may not be required to reschedule the pupil-instruction time lost because of the unforeseen emergency (MCA 20-9-806.)
- ➔ State law also mandates a certain amount of instructional time (MCA 20-1-30.) If school closures jeopardize meeting the required aggregate hours, then schools must make-up the lost hours.
- ➔ Our snow day helps prevent the addition of days to the end of our school year due to weather-related school closures.
- ➔ If we close school due to weather one day or less, then the snow day becomes a vacation day. If we close school for more than one day, then we attend school as regularly scheduled on the snow day.

Why Do Students Always Have Two Days Off In October?

- ➔ State Law & Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) Educator Conference
  - MCA 20-1-304 requires a minimum of 3 PIR days for instructional and professional development meetings (maximum of 7.) Two of these mandated PIR days are held in accordance with the MFPE educator conference (typically in October) to provide BPS educators opportunities to attend (and share presentations) at this conference.

Why Do We Have a PIR Day In January So Close To Winter Break?

- ➔ Balancing the semesters (so each semester has the same amount of instructional time) is a priority for our calendar committee.
  - Because of constraints such as graduation, state law, and BPS employee contracts (**see FAQ: *What Affects Our School Year Start And End Dates?* for details)**, we are not able to end the first semester prior to Winter Break.
  - First semester typically ends on a Friday within the first two weeks of January. The BEA collective bargaining agreement stipulates the following Monday as one of our scheduled PIR days to be used as follows: *½ day of training and ½ day of recordkeeping to get grades and comments in order*.
  - This also ensures that our technology department has the time necessary to complete first semester records and open second semester schedules, gradebooks, etc.
- ➔ When possible, we align this day with the federally recognized Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.

Why Don't We Get Two Full Weeks of Vacation During the Winter Break?

- ➔ Because of constraints such as graduation, state law, and BPS employee contracts (**see FAQ: *What Affects Our School Year Start And End Dates?* for details)** we have to fit 187 instructional/PIR days into the school year without extending beyond the Friday following Memorial Day.
  - This means we have very limited "wiggle room" for vacation days.
  - A community-wide survey conducted in 2019 overwhelmingly showed that our parents, staff, students and community members preferred to spread out these limited days to include a week-long spring break rather than extending winter break.
  - Winter break is typically about 10 days long (including weekends).

Why Can't We Move the Spring PIR or May Vacation Day to Extend Other Breaks?

- ➔ Billings Public Schools currently hosts the annual District and State Music Festivals in the spring.
  - The date for the State Music Festival is set by the Montana High School Association (MHSA).
  - The date for the District Music Festival is set in conjunction with the MHSA and participating schools.
  - These events are large enough that they require the use of entire high school buildings, thus making a regular instructional day unrealistic.

Are Any Holidays Mandated by State Law?

- ➔ For Students, MCA 20-1-305 states that pupil instruction and pupil-instruction related days shall not be conducted on the following holidays:
  - New Year's Day
  - Memorial Day
  - Independence Day

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day
- When these holidays fall on Saturday or Sunday, the preceding Friday or succeeding Monday shall be a school holiday.

Which Holidays are Negotiated by Current Collective Bargaining Agreements?

➔ BCEA Article 8, Section 1, stipulates that permanent employees normally working 35 hours per week in one job classification, or in any combination of job classifications, will be eligible for the following paid holidays:

- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Day before Thanksgiving
- Thanksgiving Day
- Day after Thanksgiving
- Day before Christmas
- Christmas Day
- Day after Christmas
- New Year's Day
- Spring Break Day
- Good Friday
- Spring Day - Section 4,The holiday for Spring Day shall be determined by the Superintendent.
- Memorial Day

➔ MFPE Local 7770 Article 7 Section 1 stipulates that permanent employees working at least 35 hours per week will be eligible for the following paid holidays:

- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Day before Thanksgiving
- Thanksgiving Day
- Day after Thanksgiving
- Day before Christmas
- Christmas Day
- Day after Christmas
- New Year's Day
- Spring Break Day
- Good Friday
- Spring Day - Section 4, The holiday for Spring Day shall be determined by the Superintendent.
- Memorial Day