

## **Calendar Creation and Parent Conferences – Q/A**

### **1. How is the annual district calendar created in the Moorestown Township Public Schools?**

The district calendar, which includes determining the basics of the start to the school year, the end of the school year, common holidays and abbreviated day, snow and professional development days, is developed by the Superintendent using feedback from an advisory committee comprised of representatives from the Board of Education, Home and School Association, Moorestown Education Association, Moorestown Administration Association and Central Administration.

### **2. Is the calendar approved by the Board of Education?**

Yes, the district level calendar, developed and recommended by the Superintendent, is approved by the Board and then posted on our district webpage. This calendar is typically presented to the Board in the new year (Jan./Feb.). It does not include individual school events such as parent/teacher conferences but rather focuses on common calendar days for all schools.

### **3. Are there other calendars besides the district level calendar?**

Yes, the district develops several additional calendars to support athletics and building based programming. In the spring (March/April), central administration builds the internal calendar which includes other key elements including parent/teacher conferences, prom, testing dates, marking periods, mid-terms/finals, etc... These building specific dates can be found on the calendar maintained at each building and posted on the school websites as they are often unique to the building or grade level.

### **4. The Home and School Association has a calendar. What role does the Home and School have in the development of district or school calendars?**

The Home and School Association has representatives that sit on the district calendar advisory committee and gives feedback as parents in our community. The calendar that Home and School puts out each year is an effort to compile key dates and events across the district to a single document to support and help parents stay informed. They do not create the content rather they collect it so it is in one place to make it easier for our school community and their members.

### **5. What factors are looked at when developing calendars?**

We look at the following:

State and Federal holidays – in our calendar we address Labor Day, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Dr. Martin Luther King Day, President's Day and Memorial Day.

State specific dates and requirements – New Jersey requires school to be closed for the NJEA Convention held in November and also mandates the minimum number of school days for students.

Contractual Obligations – The district has contracts with the Moorestown Education Association, the Moorestown Administrators’ Association, non-affiliated staff and confidential staff. These obligations also include number of work days per year, the length of the work day, and specific holidays.

**6. Why are conferences set up the way we currently do them?**

Moorestown prides itself on having high quality conferences with parents and to that end has elected to do 20 minute conferences versus a shortened and less comprehensive conference.

Given class size, the number of support staff that also provide feedback in conferences where students are receiving supplemental services, duplicated conferences for divorced or separated families, and the fact that conferences routinely extend beyond the scheduled 20 minutes, the math requires a minimum of 5 days utilizing an abbreviated day schedule.

For example, the contractual conference time per day under an abbreviated day schedule is 2 hours. Assuming no breaks and perfect implementation of the time that would allow for 6 conferences per day. A class with 24 students would need four 2 hour periods to address the minimum time required. However, addressing the issues outlined in the previous paragraph we regularly need the additional time.

To address that need for more time and to help working parents, our Moorestown Education Association volunteers to move one of the conference blocks that would be in the afternoon to an evening conference time. In turn, to meet the contract for work day, the teachers get that time back through an abbreviated day at the end of the conference week.

**7. What changed in this current school calendar?**

After last year’s calendar committee process, the Superintendent listened to the various stakeholders and took the following action to attempt to improve the calendar.

Decrease in abbreviated days. Recognizing that abbreviated days are disruptive to our staff, parents and the students, the 2017-18 calendar has two fewer abbreviated days – the first day of school and the day before the winter break due to where the holiday falls in the weekend.

Conference dates. Understanding that one of the concerns was the number of days in November with the NJEA Convention and Thanksgiving, the 2017-18 calendar moved conferences later in the month. This was an effort to balance out the trimesters, give a full week of instruction in-between the required November dates, as well as to wrap the conferences into an already disrupted Thanksgiving Week for those that may use the time for travel.

Late Arrival and Child Care. Hearing that some parents working shiftwork could not attend the afternoon conferences without having to take off of work, it was suggested that we try a late

arrival day to give parents an alternative. Childcare services were also expanded in an effort to provide additional and more cost effective options for parents.

**8. Has the district looked at how other districts provide conferences and why can't we do it like some of those districts?**

Yes, last year and in previous years as well, the committee collected information on other approaches utilized in other districts to address the "No School November" discussion. While not a phrase coined or unique to Moorestown, districts have taken various approaches to attempt resolution. Each district has its own culture, history and contractual agreements that make up their calendar. Many factors were weighed into the conversation and the feedback collected at this committee meeting and other meetings the superintendent attended around the district supported maintaining our current structure for the following reasons:

**Conferences in October or December.** Some schools moved their parent conferences to dates in October and some to early December but in our discussions parents and teachers felt that October was too soon to gauge academic progress based on when school starts. They also felt that December was too late in the year and already a busy month with Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas and our winter break.

**Full Day Conferences.** Some school districts do full day parent conferences, but in our discussions this did not resolve the "no school November" problem and in fact, added days on to our calendar in June and for some parents made childcare more costly and more challenging to cover. Some parents articulated that it was easier to get coverage with a neighbor or friend for a portion of the day and even get out of work early or go in late rather than taking a full day off for childcare. The district added drop-in care this year as one option to assist parents in finding affordable child care.

**Adding hours or shortening the length of the conference.** Some school districts had fewer abbreviated days but we also found that they only did a 10 minute conference and parents did not feel they would get the quality or volume of content we currently provide during conferences. Related to adding hours this would have to be negotiated in our collective bargaining agreements.

The district is continuing to explore options and will not bring a district calendar forward to the Board of Education for approval until January or February. If you have additional questions or constructive thoughts on how to improve our process for calendar development please email [calendar@mtps.com](mailto:calendar@mtps.com). Thank you.