

## ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



36 Bartlet Street  
Andover, MA 01810  
(978) 247-7010  
FAX (978) 247-7090

### SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

*Susan K. McCready, Chair*  
*Shannon I. Scully, Vice Chair*  
*Joel G. Blumstein, Esq.*  
*Paul D. Murphy*  
*Ted E. Teichert*

Sheldon H. Berman, Ed. D  
Superintendent of Schools  
sheldon.berman@andoverma.us

### **Andover School Calendar Frequently Asked Questions (Updated January 21, 2018)**

1. Are there requirements for the minimum number of school days in a year?
2. Are there requirements for the length of the school day?
3. Could we add time to school days instead of making up snow/emergency closure days?
4. What does the district's contract with the Andover Educator Association (AEA) say about number of work days?
5. Are there days Andover is not allowed to hold school?
6. Are there days Andover could hold school that are currently vacation days?
7. Are there days teachers work but students do not have school?
8. When will school end for the 2017/18 school year?
9. When will school begin for the 2018/19 school year?
10. Why did the School Committee reconsider the 2018/19 calendar and provide an update in January 2018?
11. Does school start before or after Labor Day for Andover students?
12. Is the start date of Andover high school sports dependent on the start date of school?
13. When does the School Committee set the calendar for future school years?
14. Why did the School Committee not change the AEA start date provision in the latest contract negotiation?
15. Historically, how many snow/emergency closure days has Andover taken during a school year?
16. When is the last time Andover had school on a Saturday?
17. Has the School Committee considered removing or consolidating week-long vacations?
18. Has the School Committee considered removing religious holidays from the calendar?
19. To save a snow day, can Andover Schools use "blizzard bags" (alternative structured learning programs) during weather related closures?
20. Why did such little snow cause district schools to close?
21. Why is this summer so short? Why was last summer so long?

## **Andover School Calendar Frequently Asked Questions (Updated January 21, 2018)**

### **1. Are there requirements for the minimum number of school days in a year?**

Yes. In Massachusetts, a school year needs to have at least 180 days. Additionally, districts are required to have a school calendar that includes at least 185 available school days to allow for potential snow or emergency closure days. (For more detail, see Massachusetts Learning Time regulation 603 CMR 27.03, School Year Requirements.)

The Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) policy does allow for waivers of the 180 day requirement “in extraordinary circumstances,” but from a practical standpoint waivers are rarely, if ever, granted. Additionally, DESE has clarified that emergency closure days after June 1st do not need to be made up, and those after April 1st need to be made up only until the district has reached its scheduled 185th contingency day.

### **2. Are there requirements for the length of the school day?**

No, there are no requirements for learning hours in single school day, however, a school year needs to have a cumulative total of at least 990 hours of structured learning time at secondary (middle and high) schools, 900 hours at elementary schools, and 425 hours for kindergarten. (For detail, see Massachusetts Student Learning Time regulation 603 CMR 27.04, Structured Learning Time Requirements.)

### **3. Could we add time to school days instead of making up snow/emergency closure days?**

No, Massachusetts regulations require districts hold school on 180 distinct days, in addition to the requirement for an annual cumulative total of 990 structured learning time hours at secondary (middle and high) schools, 900 hours at elementary schools, and 425 hours for kindergarten.

### **4. What does the district’s contract with the Andover Educator Association (AEA) say about number of work days?**

The AEA contract stipulates that teachers will not return to work before September 1st and will not work past June 30th. Teachers are also required work four days more than the number of days when pupils are required to be in attendance by state law, for a total of 184 days. Traditionally, the days teacher work when students are not present are: two days before students arrive in the fall, one day after students leave for the summer, plus one day for parent-teacher conferences or professional development (usually scheduled on or around Election Day in November).

For calendars that have Andover teachers beginning the school year before September 1st (and so students beginning before September 3rd), the AEA has waived the start date clause in their contract.

**5. Are there days Andover is not allowed to hold school?**

State law requires public schools to be closed on statewide legal holidays. The Massachusetts Secretary of State's Office defines these days as: Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, MLK Day, President's Day, Patriot's Day, Memorial Day and July 4th.

**6. Are there days Andover could hold school that are currently vacation days?**

Andover has traditionally chosen not to hold school on: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the Day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Winter Break (dates vary), New Year's Eve, February Vacation (4 days after President's Day), Good Friday, and April Vacation (4 days after Patriot's Day).

Some of these days are off-days because they have been deemed "low attendance" days when too many staff would be unavailable for the district to operate reasonably.

**7. Are there days teachers work but students do not have school?**

Traditionally, teachers work two days before students arrive in the fall, one day after students leave for the summer, plus one day for parent/teacher conferences (elementary) or professional development (middle & high), which is usually scheduled on or around Election Day in November. This brings teachers to a total of 184 work days a year, which is a contract requirement.

**8. When will school end for the 2017/18 school year?**

Wednesday, January 15th was Andover's 6th snow day of the 2017/18 school year, which puts the last day of school at Thursday, June 28th. The School Committee has set these additional days as make up days, if necessary:

- A 7th emergency closure day would be made up on Friday, March 30th (Good Friday). It will be an early release day for students and a professional day in the afternoon for faculty. Additionally, if there is a 7th closure day, then Friday, May 4th becomes a full day of classes and is no longer an early release day as previously scheduled.
- An 8th day would be made up on Friday, June 29th. It will be an early release day for students and a full day for faculty.
- A 9th day would be made up on Saturday, April 28th.
- A 10th day would be made up on Saturday, May 12th.

**9. When will school begin for the 2018/19 school year?**

On January 18th, the School Committee revised the 2018/19 school calendar to set the first day of school as Monday, August 27th for teachers and Wednesday, August 29th for students. There will be no school on Friday, August 31st.

This was a revision from the calendar communicated to parents in late December, which had students and teachers returning to school after Labor Day. New calendar options were made available to the School Committee on January 18th, after the AEA voted to waive the September 1st start date clause in their contract.

#### **10. Why did the School Committee reconsider the 2018/19 calendar and provide an update in January 2018?**

Development of the 2018/19 school calendar began in September 2017. The School Committee set a target date of December 14, 2017 to finalize the calendar, and at that time the School Committee voted for the only available calendar option, which had teachers returning to work after the contracted start date of September 1st. However, based on feedback from the Andover school community, the AEA decided to reverse an earlier decision and hold a vote of their membership on whether or not to waive the start date. On January 18th, the waiver passed by a margin of 384-159 (70.7%), providing additional calendar options.

Prior to voting on a calendar change, the School Committee solicited feedback from the Andover community via a district-wide Connect5 email message. The Committee received more than 100 emails with a wide variety of thoughtful feedback. Though reasoning varied, a minority of emails (11.9%) did not want the calendar to be adjusted and majority (63.6%) expressed support for a calendar that had students returning before Labor Day.

At their January 18th meeting, the School Committee had a lengthy discussion before voting 3-2 to change the 2018/19 school start date. The first day of school will be Monday, August 27th for teachers and Wednesday, August 29th for students. No school will be held on Friday, August 31st.

The updated 2018/19 calendar was communicated to families on Friday, January 19th. The email included guidance that families who made irrevocable plans for August 29th through September 5th based on the calendar distributed in December should contact their building principal(s) immediately to discuss.

#### **11. Does school start before or after Labor Day for Andover students?**

Start date can vary relative to Labor Day. Per the AEA contract, teachers will not begin school before September 1st. Traditionally, teachers work two days before students start, so school begins for students prior to September 3rd only when the AEA waives the start date clause in their contract.

For school years beginning September 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, the AEA voted to waive the start date clause in their contract, and school to started for teachers the Monday before Labor Day and for students the Wednesday before Labor Day. (There was no school the Friday before Labor Day in 2013 or 2014 but there was school the Friday before Labor Day in 2015 and 2016.)

For the 2017/18 calendar, the AEA voted in January 2017 not to waive the September 1st start date clause in their contract and school began for teachers and students after Labor Day.

For the 2018/19 calendar, the AEA reversed an earlier decision and on January 18th voted 384 to 159 (70.7%) to waive the start date clause. That same night, by a 3 to 2 vote, the School Committee moved start for teachers to the Monday before Labor Day (August 27th) and for students the Wednesday before Labor Day (August 29th). There will be no school the Friday before Labor Day (August 31st).

**12. Is the start date of Andover high school sports dependent on the start date of school?**

No, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) sets formal start dates for sports seasons. The start is independent of any district's school calendar.

Fall season sports are able to start tryouts or practice on the 2nd Thursday before Labor Day, with football also being allowed "limited contact sessions" beginning the 3rd Friday before Labor Day. For the 2018/19 school year, MIAA has set the earliest football start date for Friday, August 17th and all other Fall sports for Thursday, August 23rd.

Additionally, MIAA regulations also say the Winter season must not begin before the first Monday after Thanksgiving, and the Spring season must not begin before the third Monday in March.

**13. When does the School Committee set the calendar for future school years?**

The School Committee has received feedback that families want a school calendar set far in advance of the next school year, and over the past several years there has been an attempt by the committee to set the calendar in a timely fashion.

The 2015/16 school calendar was set in January 2015.

The 2016/17 school calendar was set in December 2015.

The 2017/18 calendar was set in January 2017.

The 2018/19 calendar was initially set in December 2017 and revised in January 2018.

The School Committee has already begun developing options for the 2019/20 school year calendar.

**14. Why did the School Committee not change the AEA start date provision in the latest contract negotiation?**

The teacher contract defines the work year as September 1 to June 30, and that predates all of the current School Committee members. The Committee cannot provide specifics about other topics discussed during recent contract negotiations, but it is fair to conclude that - like with every negotiation - neither side got everything they wanted. The Committee did, however, achieve a number of important goals in the latest contract including employee health care premium contribution changes in efforts to manage the town's insurance costs and extending the student instructional day beginning in 2019/20.

**15. Historically, how many snow/emergency closure days has Andover taken during a school year?**

Andover has used an average of 5 emergency closure days per year over the past 5 years, however some individual years have exceeded the standard 5 days proactively reserved in the calendar.

2010/11 school year: 3 days  
2011/12 school year: 2 days  
2012/13 school year: 6 days district wide plus 1 more day at AHS  
2013/14 school year: 4 days  
2014/15 school year: 7 days  
2015/16 school year: 3 days  
2016/17 school year: 4 days  
2017/18 school year: 6 days as of January 17th

**16. When is the last time Andover had school on a Saturday?**

Andover last held school on a Saturday in April 2013. This was also the most recent school year (prior to 2017/18) that Andover students returned to school after Labor Day.

**17. Has the School Committee considered removing or consolidating week-long vacations?**

Yes. During the 2013/14 school year, a sub-committee of the School Committee undertook an extended evaluation of the school calendar. There was significant community and staff input on several issues, including handling of February and April vacations, but no clear consensus on the benefit of a change. You can find survey results, including over 200 comments on vacation schedules on the APS website here: <http://www.aps1.net/1382/Presentations-Data>

Ultimately, Andover did not change week-long vacation schedules, determining this would not be easy for any single district to do alone. In 2016, the Andover School Committee formally asked the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to study the issue of week-long vacations and develop state-wide recommendations.

**18. Has the School Committee considered removing religious holidays from the calendar?**

Andover traditionally does not hold school on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Christmas Eve or Good Friday because these are considered “low attendance days” when not enough staff would be available for schools to operate effectively.

However, during the 2013/14 school year, a sub-committee of the School Committee undertook an extended evaluation of the school calendar. There was significant community and staff input on several issues, including handling of religious holidays. You can find survey results, including over 230 comments on religious holidays on the APS website here: <http://www.aps1.net/1382/Presentations-Data>

Andover has district policy (JH, Student Attendance, Absences and Tardiness) allowing students and staff to observe holidays of religious significance as an excused absence. The policy references Massachusetts General Laws 76:1; 76:16; 76:20.

**19. To save a snow day, can Andover Schools use “blizzard bags” (alternative structured learning programs) during weather related closures?**

Students working from home during bad weather days has gained traction in New Hampshire, but has not evolved beyond pilot programs in Massachusetts, where state requirements are different.

The Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) recently issued updated guidance on “alternative structured learning programs” including requirements that assignments are “substantial” and include “teacher involvement rather than resembling traditional homework assignments.” Programs also need to “account for the widely varying circumstances in students' homes and guarantee that the alternative structured learning day program is accessible to all students.” You can find the full DESE memo here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/asld-memo.html>

The logistics of delivering meaningful and accessible learning with teacher involvement during no school days (including potentially days with no electricity) are challenging. However, Andover is in the process of seeking information from any Massachusetts districts who have successfully piloted such programs.

**20. Why did such little snow cause district schools to close?**

School Committee policy EBCD calls for the Superintendent to consider many factors related to the safety and health of the children including: weather conditions (both existing and predicted); driving, traffic, and parking conditions affecting public and private transportation facilities; actual occurrence or imminent possibility of any emergency condition that would make the operation of schools difficult or dangerous; inability of teaching personnel to report for duty; and safety of students walking to school and to bus stops.

While calling off school is ultimately the Superintendent's decision, he gets guidance from Andover public works, Andover public safety, weather forecasters and the bus companies in advance of making a decision, often with late night and early morning conference calls. School cancelation decisions are typically more difficult to make during marginal storms than large ones.

**21. Why is this summer so short? Why was last summer so long?**

Lack of consistency in school start dates and the number of weather/emergency closures during the year will impact the distribution of 180 school days within any year, and thus the number of days available to summer vacation.

For example, the 2017/18 school year was the first that began after Labor Day since 2012/13, making Summer 2017 about a week longer than summer vacations the previous years. Moving back to a pre-Labor Day start for the 2018/19 school year will make summer 2018 shorter than typical.

Many parents provided feedback that consistency of start day schedule (always return pre- or post-Labor Day) is important, and this would help the district maintain the length of summer break, assuming weather conditions are also held similar from year to year.