

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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

SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Susan K. McCready, Chair
Shannon 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 (January 2018)

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Andover School Calendar Frequently Asked Questions (January 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.

2. What does the district's contract with the Andover Educator Association (AEA) say about work days?

The contract stipulates that teachers will not return to work before September 1st and will not work past June 30th. Teachers are also required work 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 a total of 184 days a year.

3. 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.

4. 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 vacation days because they have been deemed "low attendance" days when too many staff would be unavailable for the district to operate reasonably.

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

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.

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

Friday, January 5th was Andover's 5th snow day of the 2017/18 school year, which puts the last day of school at Wednesday, June 27th. If we have a 6th snow day, Andover will have school Thursday, June 28th. If we have a 7th snow day, we will have school on Good Friday, March 30th. If we have an 8th snow day, we will have school on Friday, June 29th or a Saturday likely in March or early April. (As of January 5th, the School Committee has not discussed contingencies for a 9th or 10th snow day.)

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

On December 14th, the School Committee approved a calendar that set the start date of school for students on Thursday, September 6th. The first day for teachers is Tuesday, September 4th. Because of the AEA contract clause that teachers will not work before September 1st and that they work two days prior to students returning, the School Committee had no option other than to begin school after Labor Day.

8. Andover was able to begin school before Labor Day in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. Why is that not an option in 2017 or 2018?

Per the AEA contract, teachers will not begin school before September 1st and they work two days before students arrive for the school year. The teacher work year is only able to begin before September 1st when the AEA waives the start date clause in their contract, which gives the School Committee discretion to start school earlier.

For school years beginning 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, the AEA voted to waive the start date clause in their contract, which allowed school to start 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 Executive Board voted not to bring the start date clause to a vote of their membership prior to the School Committee's setting the calendar on December 14th.

The AEA Executive Board initially approved a vote of the AEA membership for March 2018, but at the November 9th School Committee meeting, AEA leadership was asked to hold a vote in time to set the calendar in December 2017. The Chair of the Andover School Committee attended the AEA's Executive Council meeting on December 7th to represent the Committee and thus the interests of its constituents to the union, requesting a timely vote to waive the provision. At this meeting, it was reiterated that the Friday before Labor Day would be a NO SCHOOL day as a good faith measure by the Committee (as voted by the School Committee on October 12th) in hopes of collaborating with the union to have a pre-Labor Day start. On December 7th, the AEA Executive Board voted 14 to 11 not to hold a vote of their entire membership.

This left the School Committee no option but to begin school after Labor Day 2018, which was the least-favored option (“option D”) initially developed by the School Committee. (Each of the other options - A, B, and C - required the union waiver, and the School Committee removed option A from consideration in October upon suggestion that a waiver would be more likely if the calendar did not include school on the Friday before Labor Day.)

9. 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.)

Development of the 2018/19 school calendar began in September 2017, and has been on agendas at School Committee meetings and topics of discussion during administration meetings with the AEA throughout the fall and early winter. The School Committee set, communicated, and held to a target date of December 14th, which was the last Committee meeting of 2017, to finalize the 2018/19 calendar.

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

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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 effectively operate.

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.

13. Can the School Committee reconsider the 2018/19 calendar?

In light of the two snow days on January 4th and January 5th, the Committee will be discussing additional contingencies for the 2017/18 year and the 2018/19 calendar at its meeting on January 11th. The Committee is unable to set a start date before September 6, 2018 for the 2018/19 school year because the AEA has not voted to waive their contracted start date provision. Any other considerations would need to be done in short order as the calendar has been published and the district and district families have begun planning accordingly.