

Date: February 18, 2010

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X

FROM: Cathy David, Deputy Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction

THRU: Morton Sherman, Ed.D.

TO: The Honorable Yvonne Folkerts, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Restoring lost instructional time due to snow emergencies

STRATEGIC PLAN CORRELATION: The information in this document directly aligns with Goals 1 and 2 of the ACPS Strategic Plan.

Related ACPS Policy: Policy IC/ID, School Year/School Day

Related Virginia Code: VA 22.1-98, 8 VAC 20-131-150, 8 VAC 20-131-90

ISSUE: Inclement weather has caused the ACPS to cancel ten full days of classes (12/21, 12/22, 2/3, 2/5, 2/8, 2/9, 2/10, 2/11, 2/12, 2/16) and delay school openings by two hours on two additional dates (1/8 and 2/17). As a result, ACPS elementary students have missed 61.5 hours of instruction and ACPS secondary students have missed 65.66 hours of instruction. Losing this amount of instructional time greatly impedes the division's efforts to teach all children to high levels of achievement.

BACKGROUND:

State mandates:

Title 22.1 of Virginia Code requires all school divisions to provide 180 days OR 990 hours of instruction to students in grades 1-12, and 540 hours of instruction to kindergarten students. (Note: Time in the school day allocated to lunch and/or recess cannot be counted as instructional hours.) Additionally, Virginia Code requires school divisions to make every effort to make up instructional time missed due to severe weather emergencies in order to meet the state standard of 180 days or 990 instructional hours.

Title 8 of the Virginia Administrative Code requires school divisions to provide 140 clock hours of instruction for a high school credit course and 140 clock hours of instruction for middle school courses in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

To meet the state minimum requirement of 180 days, ACPS would need to schedule 4 makeup days in addition to the 3 makeup days identified on the 2009-2010 Academic Calendar.

OR

To meet the state minimum requirement of 990 instructional hours, ACPS would need to add 15.25 instructional hours across the remainder of the school year.

Current ACPS Calendar:

The ACPS traditional and modified academic calendars exceed the state minimum requirements by scheduling 183 school days that include a total of 1,036.25 instructional hours for elementary students and 1,112.50 instructional hours for secondary students. The current elementary instructional day is 5 hours and 45 minutes long. The current secondary instructional day is 6 hours and 10 minutes long.

To meet the ACPS standard of 183 school days, ACPS would need to schedule 7 makeup days in addition to the 3 makeup days identified on the 2009-2010 Academic Calendar.

OR

To meet the ACPS standard of 1,036.25 elementary instructional hours and 1,112.50 secondary instructional hours, ACPS would need to add 61.5 elementary and 65.66 secondary instructional hours across the remainder of the school year.

Options:

The following alternatives were considered as possibilities for restoring lost instructional time:

- #1 Restore only the amount of time needed to meet state requirements.
- #2 Use a combination of spring break days and days at the end of the year to make up missed days.
- #3 Restore instructional time by adding minutes to the remaining instructional days.

Each alternative was assessed to determine:

- The degree to which the alternative would result in meaningful instructional time.
- The degree to which the alternative would support student learning.
- The degree to which the alternative would result in high rates of student and teacher attendance.

Based on the criteria noted above, option 3 was selected as the best means for restoring the instructional time that was lost for snow cancellations.

Discussion:

Faculties and administrators recognize the critical need for time to be both plentiful and effectively utilized if our students are to achieve the ambitious goals of the ACPS

Strategic Plan and the targets of the ACPS Education Plan. As Malcolm Gladwell points to the rule of 10,000 hours of practice that create masters in any field of academia, sports, or visual/performing arts, ACPS must make the most of every available hour to ensure that our students master the content of their coursework.

Teachers and school-based administrators met on February 16 to discuss alternatives for making up lost time and to identify high impact strategies for using restored instructional time. The overwhelming response from school staff members endorsed adding minutes to the school day in lieu of using spring break days or adding days to the end of the school year.

Many creative ideas for using the restored instructional time have been generated by staff members. A small sampling of ideas is listed below:

- Creating cross-grade level groups for targeted interventions and enrichment activities
- Extending time in mathematics for algebra readiness activities
- Extending time in science for hands-on, experiential learning activities
- Engaging students in grades K, 1, and 2 in developmental play activities
- Adding a 30 minute “flex” period at grade 9 through which students rotate to receive additional instruction in each class
- Extending one period each day by 30 minutes at the middle school level, using a nine day rotation cycle.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the School Board approves the following adjustments to the 2009-2010 Academic Calendar:

1. Follow the School Board approved 2009-2010 Academic Calendar to make up the first three days missed for snow cancellations. Specifically:

12/21/09 is made up on 4/16/10

12/22/09 is made up on 5/28/10

2/3/10 is made up on 6/23/10

(Note: in using 6/23/10 as a snow makeup day, staff recommends that 6/17/10 becomes a full day for students, and that 6/18, 6/21, 6/22, and 6/23 are half days for students. Teachers will work a half day on 6/24.

2. Beginning on March 1, 2010 and continuing through May 28, 2010, add 30 minutes to the K-12 instructional day.

These actions will result in a 176 day school year, with 1,026 elementary instructional hours and 1,099.33 secondary instructional hours.

IMPACT: Implementation of these recommendations will support our students and teachers in meeting the division goal of preparing every student for success in college, work, and life.

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