



Calendar Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 5, 2023; 4:00 p.m.
Professional Learning Lab

Members present: Superintendent Dr. Marcus Lewton, Assistant Superintendent Keith Harris, Mrs. Diana Stroud (Roughrider Virtual Academies), Mrs. Jodi Martin (Berg Elementary), Mrs. Tammy Meschke (Roosevelt Elementary), Dickinson Education Association President Shawna Knipp, Dickinson High School Principal Jeffrey Brandt, Jefferson Elementary Principal Sara Streeter, Mr. Jeffrey Whitehead (Southwest Community High School), Mrs. Jessica Sherman (District-Wide PAC), Mrs. Lori Strom (Lincoln Elementary), Mrs. Crystal Hoerner (Jefferson Elementary), Mrs. Nicole Tooz (Dickinson High School), CTE Director Aaron Anderson, and Mrs. Ashley O'Brien (Dickinson Middle School).

The meeting was called to order by Superintendent Dr. Lewton at 4:00 p.m. He explained the purpose of the meeting was to draft a calendar for the 2024-2025 school year. The draft calendar would be presented to the school board for consideration and final approval.

Committee members introduced themselves and the building or group they represented.

The 2022-2023 and the 2023-2024 school calendars were distributed to the committee. They were used for comparison purposes. A draft 2024-2025 school calendar was also distributed. The 2024-2025 draft calendar was information rolled over from the 2023-2024 calendar. Exceptions to the rollover were changing the spring parent/teacher compensation day from the last week in April to Easter Monday. There was also one more instructional day added in December on December 20. With the added instructional day, there was still one more day of Christmas/New Year's holiday break compared to December 2023.

Dr. Lewton noted there were eight (8) early release days (and four professional development days) in the 2022-2023 school calendar. There are five early release days (and five professional development days) in the current 2023-2024 calendar. He apologized for the clarification which should have been provided in the 2023-2024 calendar regarding the teacher half-day workday.

Traditionally, Dickinson Public would not have an instructional day during the Friday of the Western Dakota Association (WDA) basketball tournament. This changed in the 2023-2024 school calendar when the Calendar Committee voted to have instruction on that Friday and select a different day for non-instruction. The non-instruction day was moved to the last Monday in April to build in a break for students and staff. Mrs. O'Brien additionally noted there were 175 student contact days in the 2022-2023 calendar and there are 174 student contact days in the 2023-2024 calendar.

Superintendent Lewton met with the administrators on Monday and they reviewed the draft 2024-2025 school calendar. Some of the input received from the administrators was the following.

- There is a need for more professional development time.
- The Friday early releases are hard for families.
- Friday early releases are difficult when teachers and staff are coaching and are unable to attend the professional development.

Dr. Lewton explained the elementary buildings will have substantial curriculum changes in English Language Arts next school year. The professional development will need to support the elementary instructors. At Monday's Cabinet meeting, the administrators suggested front-loading professional development for the elementary.

Assistant Superintendent Harris inquired if the October 25 early release day could be moved to September to accommodate the suggestion of front loading for the elementary teachers. A date was suggested in September. Mrs. O'Brien asked if some of the early release dates could be consolidated and converted into a full day of professional development. Superintendent Lewton asked for a show of hands for those interested in consolidating the early releases. A majority were in favor. Mrs. Martin inquired if three early releases could be converted. After checking the number of hours from the early releases, Dr. Lewton responded some of the early release days might be able to be converted to a full professional development day.

Mrs. Martin suggested removing the early release dates on October 25, December 13, and maybe April 25. Dr. Lewton said some instructors may like the half-day of professional development as it is just the right amount of time. He had received positive feedback from the most recent early release day. DHS Principal Brandt concurred. Mrs. Martin said during the early release days, there is a loss of instructional time, the students do not receive the specials, the student's schedule is disrupted, some students have shorter lunches, and there is a change to the schedule for the entire day. She has heard from the Berg Elementary staff they feel it is more beneficial to have a full day of professional development. Mrs. Sherman explained as a parent, there are disadvantages to the full day of professional development, such as RASP not being open.

Mrs. O'Brien inquired if there could be a trade-off by having the students come to school later, such as the high school's late-start Wednesdays. Would it be better for families to drop their children off at school later in the morning instead of picking them up early on the early release days? Mrs. Sherman was concerned with the parent's work schedules not being able to accommodate a late start. CTE Director Anderson said at the CTE Center, they are trying to accommodate the schedules of multiple school districts. Having professional development for a full day would be easier to incorporate. Principal Brandt added he has observed the instructional rigor is not as intense on the early release days. There was input from committee members regarding having enough professional development time to do everything needed to be completed. With the new elementary curriculum, what would be the most effective? Would a full day or more early releases be most beneficial? There needs to be enough time to support the initiatives.

Dr. Lewton summarized some of the reasons noted for having fewer early release days. These reasons included the early releases disrupt the students' routines, the students do not receive their specials, and parents' schedules are disrupted. One of the positives for the early release days is that they stagger the time a bit. Mrs. Sherman suggested if there was a full day of professional development, to schedule it around a holiday.

Dr. Lewton addressed Mrs. Martin and asked which three early release days she would suggest removing. Mrs. Martin responded by suggesting changing the February 18 or January 20 full professional development day into an early release day. She also suggested having full days of professional development in August, September, January, and February. She recommended making the full-day professional development day in January into an early release. Dr. Lewton asked for a show of hands of those in favor of the suggestions. Based on the response, Superintendent Lewton summarized the committee would consider consolidating two or three early release days and making those into full professional development days.

Assistant Superintendent Harris noted the student contact days would reduce from 174 days to 173 student contact days. Superintendent Lewton said the District would need to make sure this was providing enough instructional minutes to satisfy the state's requirements. Mr. Harris explained individuals in the community are familiar with instructional days versus instructional hours and minutes. He added when the number of instructional days are reduced, there could be a negative perception. In the past, the District has used a waiver to have the early release days.

The proposal was to take the five early release days and reduce them to two early release days. Superintendent Lewton requested a show of hands from those in favor of reducing the five early release days to two early release days and increasing the number of full-day professional development days from five days to six days. A majority of the committee members were in favor of the proposal.

Dr. Lewton referenced Mrs. Martin's conversation earlier and inquired what days would best support the teachers. Jefferson Elementary Principal Streeter proposed a full day of professional development in October, keeping the December 13 early release day, and keeping the May 22 early release day. In essence, her proposal was removing the early release days on October 25, 2024; March 21, 2025; and April 25, 2025, and adding a full day of professional development in October 2024. Mrs. Sherman said there were already a couple of days with no school built into the calendar in October. Principal Streeter responded as the District rolls out the new ELA curriculum, there could be four hours of training in August, some time set aside in September, time in October, and then a readjust in December if necessary. Principal Streeter suggested Monday, October 28 as a potential day for the full-day professional development in October. Mrs. Martin inquired if the full day could be on October 31 or November 1. A date should be established to receive the greatest attendance. Dr. Lewton said that when staff are gone on the professional development days, they are letting their team down. Those days need to be protected.

Dr. Lewton summarized the proposal. It was to eliminate the early release days on October 25, March 21, and April 25, and to add a full day of professional development on Friday, November 1, 2024. He asked for a show of hands. The committee was unanimously in favor of this proposal.

There was a discussion regarding the potential benefits of moving the full-day professional development to September or early October. Mrs. Meschke explained there was a good amount of testing during the first three weeks of school. The professional development would be most beneficial after the testing is completed and the classroom settles into a normal routine.

Mrs. Tooz inquired as a non-elementary teacher, if there would be other options for the delivery of the professional development to support the needs at the middle school and high school. The new curriculum will affect them eventually. Dr. Lewton said the Administrative Cabinet did have that conversation. As a District, Dickinson Public has fewer professional development days than most Districts. Additionally, the school day is shorter or is average in comparison to other school districts.

Principal Streeter explained at the elementary level, it was hard to have one grade level get together. There could be 12 individuals in a grade level. That requires 12 substitute teachers. Dr. Lewton added at the middle school and high school, it was easier to have common preps.

Dr. Lewton asked for further discussion on next year's calendar. Mrs. Stroud noted there were no breaks between February 19 to April 16 in the 2024-2025 calendar. It appears there are approximately seven weeks of instructional days with no breaks. Parents will take their children for a vacation or long weekend in February and April. What will happen in March when there are no breaks?

Dr. Lewton referenced the minutes from the drafting of the 2023-2024 school calendar when this committee chose not to have the parent/teacher conference compensation day on the Friday of the WDA basketball tournaments and chose to move that compensation day to the last Monday in April. Mrs. O'Brien recalled having Easter Monday off and it is now proposed as the parent/teacher conference compensation day. One committee member said that Easter Monday used to be a snow makeup day. Dr. Lewton said families want to have off Maundy Thursday through Easter Monday. They also want to have off the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. With these days off from school, there is little room for additional days off. Dr. Lewton proposed moving the February 18 professional development day to a date in March. Mrs. Strom proposed moving the August 19 professional development day to a day in March. Mrs. Knipp responded the professional development days in August are already set. There was a discussion about moving the February 18 professional development day to several different days in March. One date was the Friday of WDA basketball. Another date was Monday, March 10, 2025. There were pros and cons of the two dates. If the professional development was on Friday, March 7, 2025, some of the staff would be gone. If the professional development was on Monday, March 10, most of the staff should be there. Dr. Lewton asked for a show of hands for each date: Monday, March 3, 2025; Friday, March 7, 2025; and Monday, March 10, 2025. The majority selected Monday, March 10, 2025, as the professional development day.

Mrs. Sherman inquired if the Friday, December 13, 2024, early release could be moved to the day before Christmas break. After discussion, it was decided Friday, December 13 would be the best date to have teachers engaged in professional development.

Dr. Lewton inquired if the committee wished to make any alterations to the early release on the last day of school. There were pros and cons shared with the ending decision of having the last day of school as an early release.

Superintendent Lewton inquired if the teachers would like to build in any snow days or continue with utilizing virtual learning on snow days. Principal Streeter said it was nice knowing there were no snow makeup days on the calendar. Then families can plan for vacation when no school is scheduled. Last year, the District utilized five virtual learning days early in the school year. Superintendent Lewton noted that at about the third virtual day in a row, the virtual option would need to be reconsidered. Superintendent Lewton requested input if the committee was satisfied with implementing virtual learning days on snow days. The committee was in favor of this option.

Dr. Lewton asked for input on any other items regarding the proposed 2024-2025 school calendar. There were no other topics brought forward. He said he would have Twila make the changes to the draft calendar and email it out to the committee members. Committee members were asked to review the calendar and let Dr. Lewton or Twila know within 24 hours if there were any errors or adjustments that should be made. After 24 hours, another draft calendar would be emailed to the committee members for them to share with other employees in their building and survey the results of the input. If there were any major concerns that needed to be addressed, it was possible another meeting would need to be scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.