



*Education Services Center. 5776 S. Crocker Street. Littleton, Colorado 80120. 303.347.3300.*

## **Questions and Answers Related to the 2016-2017 & 2017-2018 Instructional Calendars**

### **What are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)?**

PLCs provide time for teachers to meet together in teams to analyze data, solve student learning challenges, and improve instruction. During these meetings, teachers discuss:

1. What is essential for students to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?
4. How will we respond when a student already knows it?

### **Why does the District have PLCs?**

Professional Learning Communities are proven to increase student achievement and are commonly in place in school districts locally and across the nation. When PLCs were first implemented districtwide in Littleton Public Schools during the 2007-2008 school year, time was built into the calendar so that no instructional time would be lost. Non-student time was restructured, and seven minutes were added to every school day. This makes the two-hour late start on the 10 PLC days possible.

### **Are PLCs making a difference?**

**Yes!!! LPS students maintain high achievement over time because PLCs provide teachers the opportunity to collaborate, share best practices, and make data-driven decisions that help address the learning needs of individual students.**

- LPS students continue to significantly outscore the state average on state assessment tests.
- LPS is the only Denver metro area school district to be Accredited with Distinction – the highest academic accreditation rating given by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) – five years running!
- LPS high schools have one of the highest graduation rates and lowest dropout rates of any high schools in the Denver metro area.
- Principals report that classroom instruction continuously improves because teachers use PLCs to share best practices with one another, which strengthens everyone's efforts.

### **Why do students have to be out of school during this time?**

Because all instructional staff members participate in PLCs, student supervision is an issue. Elementary parents may choose to enroll their children in the tuition-based School Age Child Care program at their elementary school on late start mornings. District transportation is also provided on PLC days; buses run two hours later.

### **How does the LPS calendar compare with other school districts in the area?**

Most metro area school districts start school within a few days of one another; however, some districts start school as early as the first week of August. LPS is usually “in the middle of the pack.” Holiday breaks are similar, as well.

### **Why does school start in August?**

The Board of Education places a high value on ending the first semester prior to winter break. This is the determining factor for the first day of school.

High school students (and their parents), as well as many middle school students (and their parents), have a high priority for finishing semester finals prior to winter break so families can enjoy time together without academic demands.

High school teachers have a high priority for this also because at least a full week of instruction in the second semester was lost reviewing for finals during the time when LPS did not end the semester prior to winter break.

The Board of Education places a high value on keeping the number of days in each semester as equal as possible for equity in semester-long courses.

### **Why is the first day of school on Thursday?**

For 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, the first day of school will be on a Thursday. In the past 10 years, the first day of school has been on various days of the week. This allows the district to meet state requirements for instructional time and to continue to have a full week off at Thanksgiving, which has become an expectation in the community. Starting on Thursday allows winter break to begin on Friday.

### **Important to know...**

Hot weather is not a factor because all LPS schools are air conditioned. Thank you, LPS community, for the improvements to our heating and air conditioning systems through the 2013 bond!

Studies show that there is not a significant savings in utilities in starting a couple of weeks later.

Because finals are over, many LPS seniors use their time over winter break to complete college applications. More than 90 percent of LPS graduates report they plan to go to college.

The earlier start time for the school year allows for more preparation time for Advanced Placement (AP), ACT, PSAT and SAT exams. The later the start date in August, the more preparation time lost for students who take Advanced Placement courses. AP exams are given on national test dates, over which LPS has no control. More than 1,000 LPS high school students take at least one Advanced Placement exam each year. The same is true for the PSATs, and these scores determine which seniors nationwide are selected for prestigious scholarships such as National Merit, Presidential, Boettcher, etc. Adequate preparation time is critical. The Class of 2015 was offered approximately \$40 million in college scholarships.

Many high school students are already “back in the swing of things” at the beginning of August due to activity and athletic practice schedules, which are driven by the Colorado High School Activities

Association (CHSAA). A later start date would not affect when practices begin or when games and contests are scheduled.

Many of these reasons center on high school students and may not be priorities for elementary families at this time. But, high school is the destination for all LPS students after years of preparation in elementary and middle school. We want all LPS high school students to have every advantage when it comes to postsecondary readiness. In addition, we value one calendar format to support families. As a result, the start and end dates of school are consistent K-12.

### **Why does school end in May?**

The date of the first day of school drives when the last day of school will be. An earlier start in the fall means an earlier release in the spring. The placement of state assessment windows, recognized holidays, and non-student days also affects the last day of school.

### **How are start and end dates for winter break chosen?**

There is a value for having a two-week winter break. The nationally recognized holidays of December 25 and January 1 are always included in this time period.

### **Why is the Monday after winter break a non-student day?**

Non-student days are built into the teacher contract as part of the negotiated agreement with the Littleton Education Association (LEA). An overwhelming majority of teachers value having a non-student day prior to the start of the spring semester, which allows teachers a day to prepare. For many schools, this is the only opportunity for staff development in the second semester of the school year.

### **Why are there four, half-day planning days for teachers at the elementary level?**

Planning time is critical for effective teaching, and all LPS students deserve to benefit from the most effective teaching we can provide. There is variance between the school-day schedules of elementary teachers compared to the school-day schedules of secondary teachers, which results in elementary teachers having less daily planning time. As part of the negotiated agreement with the Littleton Education Association (LEA), the four, half-day planning days for elementary teachers are an attempt to provide adequate blocks of planning time for elementary teachers.

### **Will students be out of school the week of Thanksgiving again?**

Yes. This practice began in the 2010-2011 school year when furlough days were implemented as part of a budget-reduction strategy for the district. Since then, LPS was able to restore the two instructional days previously furloughed, and the days were added elsewhere in order to preserve the week-long Thanksgiving break. The response from teachers and parents has been overwhelmingly positive; some see it as a fall break, which is common in other school districts.