

# Stakeholder Survey Results

#### 2023-24 and 2024-25 Academic Calendar Survey Results

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In November 2022, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) opened a public survey for stakeholders to provide input on issues related to the Academic Calendar for 2023-24 and 2024-25. This brief summarizes responses to the 3,983 surveys received.

# **Key Findings**

- Nearly all respondent groups rated "heat/weather" as the most important factor and "time for vacation/travel" as the second most important factor for determining both the first and last day of school.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) said they preferred to maintain the same 11 religious holidays and cultural celebrations observed in 2021-22 in future Academic Calendars.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported that it was "very important" that winter and spring recesses be at least a week long, and there were many open-ended comments emphasizing the importance of longer breaks to allow staff and students to rest and recharge.
- Respondents were divided regarding the scheduling of early dismissal days for school staff professional development and report card conferences.
- When asked to comment on the most important issues to consider when setting the
  Academic Calendar, the most frequent considerations mentioned (in order of frequency)
  were child care, challenges related to half days, the need for longer breaks/recesses,
  comments about specific religious holidays and cultural celebrations, preferences for
  starting school after Labor Day, and the decision-making process and communications
  around the Academic Calendar.

## About the Academic Calendar Survey

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) Board of Education Policy 803 authorizes the District to prepare and adopt annual Academic Calendars, and to do so with consideration to "stakeholder input and feedback." In keeping with this policy, the SDP Academic Calendar Oversight Committee (ACOC) conducted a series of stakeholder engagement activities to inform the development of the 2023-24 and 2024-25 Academic Calendars. This brief summarizes the results of one of these activities: a publicly accessible online survey geared for District parents and guardians, students, staff, and community partners.

The 2023-24 and 2024-45 Academic Calendar Survey was launched on the SDP website on November 30, 2022 and closed on December 15, 2022. The survey was available in 10 languages: English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Vietnamese, Khmer, Albanian, and French, and received 3,983 responses in total. The most common languages with responses were English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese (Table 1).

The 2023-24 and 2024-45 Academic Calendar Survey was conducted in Google Forms, a survey tool which allowed the ACOC to see a summary of responses on close-ended questions (e.g., multiple choice in real-time to inform the ongoing decision-making process. Each translated version of the survey was collected through a separate form, with a total of 3,983 responses across the ten forms (see Appendix 1).

Table 1. Number and percentage of survey responses, by form language

Form Language	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
English	3,872	97.21%
Spanish	43	1.08%
Chinese (Mandarin)	31	0.78%
Russian	13	0.33%
Portuguese	12	0.30%
Arabic	4	0.10%
French	4	0.10%
Vietnamese	2	0.05%
Albanian	1	0.03%
Khmer	1	0.03%
Total	3,983	100.00%

The results in this brief are drawn from a single dataset containing responses from all languages.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For more information, see Board Policy 804 (<a href="https://www.philasd.org/schoolboard/wp-content/uploads/sites/892/2022/07/Policy 803 School-Calendar-6.23.22.pdf">https://www.philasd.org/schoolboard/wp-content/uploads/sites/892/2022/07/Procedures 803 School-Calendar-6.23.22.pdf</a>).

#### **About the Survey Respondents**

The Academic Survey was administered anonymously through an online link, and respondents were able to provide information about themselves. We examined how well the profile of respondents represented SDP families, students, and staff. As Table 2 shows, most survey responses were from parents and guardians (50%) and school-based staff (42%). These respondents were associated with 216 different schools across the District.<sup>2</sup>

Table 2. Number and percentage of survey responses, by self-identified role

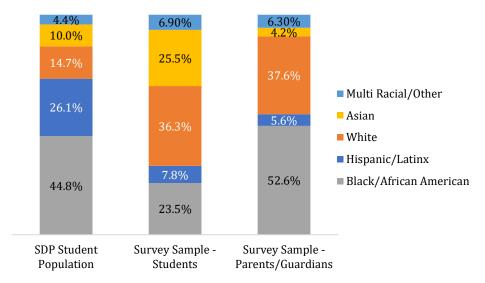
Self-identified role	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Parent/guardian of an SDP student	1,985	50%
Teacher	1,262	32%
Principal/Assistant Principal	83	2%
Other school-based staff	322	8%
Central Office Staff	130	3%
SDP Student	122	3%
Staff from a community partner organization (e.g., after school provider, health partner, academic support partner)	39	1%
Other/not specified	40	1%
Total	3,983	100%

The survey respondents were diverse with respect to race/ethnicity, though not proportional to the racial and ethnic composition of District families, staff, or students (see Figures 1 and 2). While 45% of District students in 2022-23 were Black/African American and 26% were Hispanic/Latinx,<sup>3</sup> only 24% of student survey respondents were Black/African American and only 8% were Hispanic/Latinx. This pattern was also evident in the parent/guardian survey responses.

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  About 70% of respondents indicated they were associated with a District school, while 30% did not respond to this question. The list of schools provided in the survey did not include Charter or contracted schools.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Source: QlikBAM Enrollment-Oct 1 Snapshot, 2022-23, for District and alternative District-run schools.

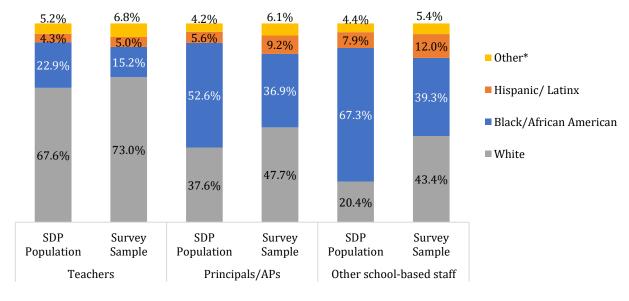
Figure 1. Student and parent/guardian survey sample by race/ethnicity, compared to the 2022-23 SDP student population



Source for SDP Student Population: QlikBAM Enrollment – Oct 1 Snapshot, 2022-23, for District and alternative District-run schools

Among employee respondents, White teachers, school leaders, and other school-based staff were over-represented in the survey compared to the population of SDP staff, whereas Black/African-American employees were under-represented (Figure 2).

Figure 2. School-based staff survey sample by race ethnicity, compared to staff population in 2022-23



<sup>\*&</sup>quot;Other" includes Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and multi-racial staff. Source: QlikBAM Employee Information App

For more details about the racial/ethnic composition of all respondent groups, see Appendix 1.

While the survey was completed by respondents who indicated that they fell into each of the household income response options, there were more higher-income than lower-income respondents in the survey sample. Out of those who responded to the household income question, 79% of respondents said their household income was \$50,000 per year or more. As a reference point, the median household income in 2021 was \$52,649.4

Table 4. Number and percentage of survey respondent, by household income

Reported household income	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Less than \$24,999	7.7%	227
Between \$25,000 and \$49,999	13.6%	402
Between \$50,000 and \$99,999	31.7%	938
Between \$100,000 and \$149,999	21.2%	627
Over \$150,000	25.8%	764
Total	2,958	100%

# Results of Multiple-Response Questions About Future Academic Calendars

#### Factors for Determining the First and Last Days of School

The survey included questions about factors that had been surfaced in prior stakeholder discussions as important considerations for determining the first and last days of school. Nearly all respondent groups rated "heat/weather" as the most important factor and "time for vacation/travel" as the second most important factor for determining both the first and last days of school (Table 5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "QuickFacts – Philadelphia City, Pennsylvania." United States Census Bureau. <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/philadelphiacitypennsylvania/PST045222">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/philadelphiacitypennsylvania/PST045222</a>. Accessed May 16, 2023.

Table 5. Percentage of respondents indicating various factors as "very important" for determining the first and last days of school, by self-identified role

			Principal/		Central			Other/	
	Parent/		Assistant	School-	Office	SDP	Community	Not	All Stake-
	Guardian	Teacher	Principal	based Staff	Staff	Student	Partner	Specified	holders
	(n=1,953)	(n=1,250)	(n=80)	(n=318)	(n=128)	(n=118)	(n=38)	(n=36)	(n=3,906)
First day of school - Percentage who responded "ve	ery importa	nt"							
Heat/weather	33.7%	53.4%	47.5%	57.8%	54.3%	40.2%	48.6%	44.1%	43.3%
Short amount of time between summer program end dates and school start	15.3%	20.0%	30.8%	29.3%	15.9%	18.1%	33.3%	19.4%	18.6%
Access to childcare	27.2%	20.7%	25.6%	29.9%	42.7%	20.4%	40.5%	44.1%	25.9%
Time for vacation/travel	29.6%	38.9%	28.2%	44.6%	21.6%	45.8%	13.9%	28.6%	33.8%
Staff and student summer employment	14.5%	21.5%	17.9%	28.6%	18.4%	31.3%	29.7%	28.6%	18.9%
Last day of school - Percentage who responded "ve	ry importan	t"							
Heat/weather	25.8%	50.3%	53.8%	52.5%	48.4%	42.1%	47.4%	44.1%	38.0%
Short amount of time between school end and the start of summer programming	15.0%	17.7%	23.8%	26.1%	17.5%	27.4%	29.7%	14.3%	17.5%
Summer needs of graduating seniors	17.2%	17.1%	22.1%	27.2%	25.2%	37.1%	18.9%	9.1%	18.9%
Access to childcare	24.9%	16.7%	18.2%	23.7%	36.8%	28.4%	42.1%	32.4%	22.8%
Time for vacation/travel	26.9%	39.4%	27.5%	39.9%	19.7%	47.4%	19.4%	23.5%	32.3%
Staff and student summer employment	14.9%	21.9%	15.4%	28.5%	18.1%	37.1%	29.7%	20.0%	19.3%

#### Holidays, Cultural Celebrations, and Winter and Spring Recess

The survey also included questions about the different types of vacations, holidays, and other days off typically included in the Academic Calendar. The first of these questions addressed the issue of holidays and cultural celebrations, prefaced with the following note:

Past academic calendars have observed holidays beyond the required five by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. During the 2022-2023 school year the following holidays were observed (with 2022-2023 month of celebration in parentheses): Labor Day (September), Rosh Hashanah (September), Yom Kippur (October), Indigenous Peoples' Day (October), Veterans Day (November), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January), Lunar New Year (January), Presidents' Day (February), Good Friday (April), Eid al-Fitr (April), Juneteenth (June).

Respondents were then asked, "Given that observing more holidays/cultural celebrations may mean a shorter summer, winter, or spring recess, which option do you prefer for future academic calendars?" About 6 out of every 10 respondents thought the same eleven holidays/cultural celebrations currently observed should remain in future academic calendars (Table 6). An additional 11% of respondents felt the number of holidays was appropriate, but that the specific holidays/cultural celebrations chosen should be adjusted (see Tables 14 and 15 for a summary of the specific changes recommended). About 3 in 10 thought there should be fewer holiday/cultural celebrations, with a longer summer, winter, or spring recess. These patterns were consistent across different District roles (i.e. response patterns did not differ much between students, parents, and staff), and perceptions did not vary much by race/ethnicity. However, somewhat higher percentages of Asian (25%), Multi-racial (18%) and Hispanic/Latinx (14%) respondents supported a change in the specific holidays/cultural celebrations included in the calendar.

Table 6. Respondent preferences for the number of holidays/cultural celebrations in future academic calendars

"Given that observing more holidays/cultural celebrations may mean a shorter summer, winter, or spring recess, which option do you prefer for future academic calendars?"	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Future academic calendars should include fewer holiday/cultural celebrations. This would likely mean a longer summer, winter, or spring recess.	1,061	28.5%
Future academic calendars should include the same amount but different holidays/cultural celebrations. This would mean that the length of summer, winter, and spring recesses would likely stay the same.	396	10.6%
Future academic calendars should include the same eleven holiday/cultural celebrations as the 2022-2023 school year. This would mean that the length of summer, winter, and spring recesses would likely stay the same.	2,268	60.9%
Total	3,725	100%

#### Professional Development and Report Card Conference Days

The survey included the following context before the question about early dismissal days for the purpose of staff professional development:

Professional Development is time for teachers and staff to receive training and work together to plan for how to best serve students. Throughout the school year, we must set aside days in the academic calendar for staff to have professional development. We are interested in your feedback about when to schedule the half day (three hour early dismissal) staff professional development days throughout the year.

Four options for the allocation of half days for the purpose of staff PD were provided, the responses to which are presented in Table 7. Two of the options were selected much more frequently than the other options: having these half days be spread out evenly over the school year (44% of respondents), or having the half days occur before other holidays (40%). Parents and guardians were more likely to prefer the half days before other holidays, while students and school staff were more likely to prefer having the PD days spread out evenly over the course of the school year.

Table 7. Respondent preferences for half days for staff professional development

I prefer that half	_			Other					
_			D 1 /		C			Oth on /	
(three hour early			Principal/		Central			Other/	
dismissal) days for	Parent/		Assistant	based	Office	SDP	Community	Not	All Stake-
staff professional	Guardian	Teacher	Principal	Staff	Staff	Student	Partner	Specified	holders
development:	(n=1,915)	(n=1,247)	(n=81)	(n=322)	(n=121)	(n=115)	(n=38)	(n=33)	(n=3,872)
Are clustered together 2-3									
times a year (for example,	7.4%	6.1%	7.4%	10.2%	17.4%	7.0%	7.9%	27.3%	7.7%
one week with all half	7.470	0.170	7.470	10.270	17.470	7.070	7.970	27.370	7.770
days twice a year).									
Are evenly spread out									
throughout the year (for	37.7%	48.4%	55.6%	50.9%	55.4%	50.4%	50.0%	36.4%	43.7%
example, one half day	37.7%	40.4%	33.0%	30.9%	33.4%	30.4%	30.0%	30.4%	43.7%
once a month).									
Occur after other holidays									
(e.g. the Tuesday after	5.8%	14.4%	6.2%	10.6%	9.1%	6.1%	5.3%	0.0%	9.1%
Memorial Day).									
Occur before other									
holidays (e.g. the	49.1%	31.0%	30.9%	28.3%	18.2%	36.5%	36.8%	36.4%	39.6%
Wednesday before	TJ.170	31.070	30.570	20.370	10.270	30.370	30.070	30.470	37.070
Thanksgiving break).									

In addition to staff PD, early dismissal days (half days) have also historically been used to allow time for report card conferences (so school staff can meet with parents/guardians). Following some feedback that the early dismissals were challenging for some parents, the ACOC decided to present stakeholders with two options moving forward: continuing with the three half days for report conferences in each marking period, or moving to one or two full days off for report card conferences. Responses split almost evenly on the issue with 52% of respondents preferring the three half days and 48% preferring the full day closure option (Figure 3). This even-split response

pattern held for nearly all respondent groups, the main exception being staff from community partner organizations, 63% of whom preferred the full day closures. However, there were some demographic differences for this question: more than 60% of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx respondents preferred staying with the half day dismissals. Lower-income respondents were also more likely to prefer half day dismissals for report card conferences: 59% of respondents with household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,000 and 69% of respondents with household incomes less than \$24,999 expressed a preference for half days.

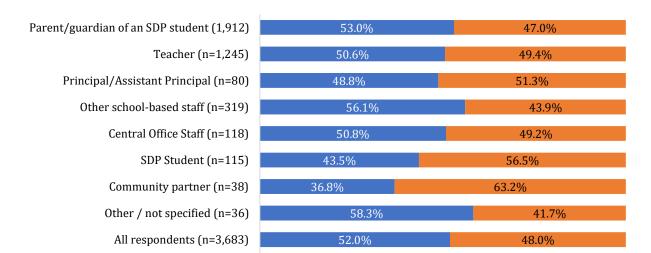


Figure 3. Respondent preferences for half days for report card conferences

- Schools close early for students three half days each marking period (no change from 2022-2023) so that staff can meet with parents/guardians
- Schools close for students 1-2 full days each marking period so that staff can meet with parents/guardians

The survey included two question items about winter and spring recess. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of two considerations for setting these breaks: first, the importance of the recess being a full week long, and second, the importance of the recess aligning with the typical winter and spring recesses for nearby school districts. Respondents of all types rated having a full week of recess as more important than alignment with other school districts. School-based staff (teachers, school leaders, and others) were most likely to rate having a full week recess as "very important."

Table 8. Percentage of respondents rating two key factors as "very important" for determining the dates for winter and spring recess, by self-identified role

How important are				Other					
the following in			Principal/	School-	Central			Other/	
determining the	Parent/		Assistant	based	Office	SDP	Community	Not	All Stake-
dates for winter	Guardian	Teacher	Principal	Staff	Staff	Student	Partner	Specified	holders
and spring recess?	(n=1,881)	(n=1,239)	(n=80)	(n=313)	(n=125)	(n=118)	(n=38)	(n=37)	(n=3,897)
The recess is a full week long.	50.6%	78.1%	77.5%	74.1%	69.6%	69.5%	60.5%	59.5%	63.2%
The recess aligns with the typical winter and spring recesses for nearby school districts.	23.3%	39.8%	37.5%	38.5%	38.2%	27.6%	29.7%	28.6%	30.8%

## Analysis of Open-Ended Feedback

A sample of 1,294 survey responses was selected for coding of open-ended responses. The subsample for qualitative coding intentionally included more of the survey responses from stakeholders underrepresented in the survey: students and respondents from the two lowest income brackets (those with annual household earnings below \$24,999 or between \$25,000 and \$49,999). Respondent groups who were small in number (school leaders, Central Office staff, respondents who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and community partners) were also over-represented in the coding sub-sample, to ensure a sufficient number of comments from these groups could be reviewed.

Of the 1,294 surveys selected for the coding sub-sample, 725 provided comments in response to the main open-ended question ("When thinking about the decisions we need to make about the academic calendar and how that affects you, what are the most important things that we should consider?"), and 423 responded to the open-ended question about holidays ("Please use this space to provide additional recommendations/feedback regarding Holidays/Cultural Celebrations"). These responses were coded into themes and sub-themes, which are summarized in this brief, approximately in order of frequency.

#### Key Considerations for Setting the Academic Calendar

Participants were given the opportunity to share the factors or considerations they felt should be taken into account in decision-making related to the Academic Calendar through the following openended question: "When thinking about the decisions we need to make about the academic calendar and how that affects you, what are the most important things that we should consider?"

The most common theme among responses to this question (131 comments among the coded sample) was child care challenges for working parents (see Table 9 for sub-themes and examples). Unsurprisingly, this theme was most common among respondents who identified primarily as SDP parents or guardians, but was also very common among teachers and other school-based staff as well. Child care issues were raised across income level and race.

Table 9. Sample comments related to child care challenges

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Child care challenges related to half days	Half Days for any purpose are both disruptive to the learning process and challenging for families, especially those requiring childcare. [parent/guardian]  Half days and days off are necessary, but they are so frequent and often a week before or after a holiday (not adjacent) and it is nearly impossible to find child care for a half day. Anything the district can do to minimize or eliminate half days would be extremely helpful. Grouping full days off together is easier for so many reasons. There are day camps for full days off at local biz, but no half day camps. Many parents can generally take a full day off work using personal time, than take off for 3 half days in a row. A grandparent can agree to watch a child for the day, but 3 half days in a row is much harder to coordinate. The kids get screen time while parents struggle to work from home. It's frustrating. [parent/guardian]  No consecutive half days!!!! This is so annoying and hard to find childcare, transportation, adjust work schedules, etc for 3 half days in a row. It would be sooooo much better to make it a day and a half off instead of three half days. I cannot stress enough how annoying half days are and how much I hate them. [parent/guardian]  Report card half days are extremely disruptive and difficult to manage as working parents. Students barely have 2 complete 5 day weeks by the end of October. Half days aren't clustered with other closures to add convenience to families who may be able to cluster childcare needs with family help. [parent/guardian]  The sessions I participated in last year, all participants spoke to how challenging half days are for families and this year even more half days were added to our schedule because the middle school decided they would do conferences at interim reports time instead of report card times (so instead of juggling 9 half days for conferences - we are juggling 18]! That is in addition to the monthly half and/or full days off, gone are the days of a single income adequately supporting a family. We really

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Child care challenges related to half	Full day PDs are better than half-day PDs. Academically, a half-day is basically useless and many students skip anyway. It slightly alleviates parent child-care needs to schedule one full day off rather than two half-days away from school. [teacher]
days (cont.)	No more half days! Half days are extremely difficult to find childcare able to pick up my kids from school and care for them for the 3 hours until I get home, on such a sporadic schedule (random days once a month but sometimes 3 days in a row for conferences, etc). I end up using my sick and personal days. This defeats the point of the half days - I do not get professional development and must do zoom report card conferences from home. [teacher]
	1/2 days that connect to a Friday are best. Mid week are harder to find child care. [school leader]
	Half days are brutal on attendance and daily classroom instructional routines at the elementary level, and difficult for families to coordinate childcare. Families can't coordinate midday pickups, so our attendance suffers, which we are penalized for. Full days for PD are preferable. [other school staff]
Aligning with	Aligning with typical work holidays of working ppl. [parent/guardian]
calendars of neighboring	How typical office holiday schedules align. [parent/guardian]
districts or workplaces to make child	When families have multiple children in different schools zone and districts having different days off. It is hard for us as parents sometimes to accommodate it along side our jobs. [parent/guardian]
care easier	Half days should be the same as those for the Head Start program. Many parents have kids in both and it can be difficult for them to take off 6 half days. [parent/guardian]
	Aligning breaks with all surrounding districts. We all have children and scramble to find child care since we always have spring break the week before Easter. [teacher]
	Align to neighboring districts, as many staff members are parents to school aged children and it is extremely difficult to find child care on the days that do not align. [teacher]
	I believe the alignment with neighboring districts s important as staff members have children in the other districts which creates a conflict for their attendance [school leader]
	Beginning school and ending school closer to other districts and the archdioses. Many staff have to find childcare, as the SDP starts school 2-3 weeks before many other districts, Charter schools and religious schools. [other school staff]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
SDP should	After school care for half days (which we've had and I appreciate) [parent/guardian]
offer or support child	After school programs for middle school [parent/guardian]
care options for half days	Childcare can be difficult when days off do not align with those of nearby school districts. For example, some places off day-off camps but not on all the days that SDP schools are closed or have half days. [parent/guardian]
	Communicate with parents about other childcare/enrichment opportunities on half days [parent/guardian] local school based after care expansion - its harder to take the time away to address half days with this ongoing corporate rule and gig work. Bring in volunteers that can teach a skill
	or do a work shop on half days via sign up. [parent/guardian]
	The biggest problem for me as a single parent is child care. Thankfully, my kids are in the free after care program at the school which will take them for the rest of the day on half days. [parent/guardian]
Report card conferences	It's also frustrating that the district wants parent-teacher conferences to be child-free, and obviously the kids can't be in class, but doesn't offer a place for those kids to hang out during conferences. More than one Guardian may want or need to attend a conference. This year, on top of 3 half days leading to a holiday, we had to hire a sitter for an hour to go to 2 children's conferences (and, we are lucky they are in the same school currently). It just does not make sense for working parents. [parent/guardian]
	In my experience as a K-8 parent, teachers do all report card conferences in the first two days and the third afternoon is early dismissal for no reason. It may be different for larger schools. Think of taking 3 half days vs. 2 full days from work for parents. [Central Office]
	When I was an SDP single parent (all my children have graduated), report card conferences were difficult because they conflicted with my assigned conferences. More flexibility (some online?) would help. [Central Office]
	I think PD time and conferences should be adjusted to include more virtual options for teachers/staff (whose students may be home from school and need childcare). I think conferences should better align with family schedules. I think conferences the week of Thanksgiving is an awful idea! This year's extra long first quarter did not work. [teacher]
Staff PD timing creates child	A full week of PD before the start of school year is not necessary2-3 days is sufficient, childcare is difficult to find during that time as people are still on vacations. [teacher]
care challenges	Staff also have families they need to be there for - do not hold meetings/PD beyond 4:00PM [school leader]
	School start dates - better when they start PD at the end of August- not too early- it is hard to get child care in the middle of August when camps are done and children did not start school yet. Would be better if there were some options to do PD for beginning of year by Zoom or asynchronous & be able to opt out of PD on site as much as possible. [school leader]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Early information so parents can plan for child care	I think a lot about child care arrangements that parents need to make, but having the schedule completed in advance of the school year allows parents/families to plan accordingly up front. But also sharing/providing resources for the periodic half days for families that may not typically need them I understand the value of doing PD when teachers are already at work, it's also important to think about what that means for families and advance notice doesn't necessarily mitigate the challenges of families that may not have options at the ready [parent/guardian]
	The calendar gives ample time to plan ahead for childcare coverage, which I appreciate. [parent/guardian]
Other child care concerns	One of the biggest considerations is parents work schedules. Schedule changes create havoc and sometimes lost wages which of impact a student's quality of life. [parent/guardian]
	Working parents with no PTO [unknown]
	What's best for FAMILIES. Not just staff families but student families as well. [teacher]
	Staff childcare issues [unknown]
	Spring recess should NOT be a full week. Taking a full week off work is a hardship for working parents and it is very difficult to find affordable childcare during that week. [parent/guardian]
	The lengthy winter and spring breaks are extremely difficult for families that do not have childcare options. It would be prudent to minimize the time off here, so that the school year can start and finish at better times to avoid the heat. It's often easier to find summer childcare for many weeks than a random week here and there. [parent/guardian]

The second most common Academic Calendar consideration raised by respondents (107 of the coded sample) was the challenging nature of half days (see Table 10 for sub-themes and examples). This theme overlapped substantially with the child care theme, and was raised most frequently by parents and guardians, although school-based staff, Central Office staff, students, and staff from partner organizations also commented about half days. The respondents who commented about half days were distributed across income levels, with the highest frequency of half day comments among the top two income brackets (those with annual household incomes above \$100,000).

It is important to note that most of these open-ended comments are in contrast to the responses to the multiple-choice question about report card conferences, where a slight majority of respondents preferred the existing approach of three half days rather than one or two full days (see Figure 3).

Table 10. Sample comments related to half days

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Child care challenges related to half days	See Table 9
General	Full days off instead of half days. [parent/guardian]
comments about half day challenges or preference for	Half days require someone to be home halfway through the day for pick up. Instead of 3 half days, one full day or two full days so children can be sent to family if needed. To disrupt parents with jobs as little as possible. [parent/guardian]
full days off	half days bad full days good
	I would prefer less half day professional development and more full days. [school leader]
	Half days are very difficult and chaotic for everyone. [unknown]
	Please consider the half day teacher conferences, it would be better if the schools were closed for 2 days every marking period, rather than running half days. Parents would understand the 2 days closures rather than having to take 3 days off to meet with teachers. [unknown]
	Less half days. Students are missing instruction. Report cards - 3x a year. Conferences 1 full day of no school so everyone gets them done in one day. [teacher]
	Regarding report card conferences, this past marking period, [school name] had 3 half days for conferences allegedly, but only actually held conferences on two of those days. I would prefer for my child to be in school a full day if there are no conferences or professional development. [parent/guardian]
Disruption to student learning	My kids travel 45 minutes each way to school, so having half days is frustrating when they spend 1/3 of the time commuting and then the teachers don't get any work done because classes are only 20 minutes long. [parent/guardian]
	No more 1/2 days for teacher training. Consolidate these into full day of training, so parents and kids do not have to hassle to get to school for a few hours of less effective learning, and a 10am lunch! [parent/guardian]
	What is best for the kids, based on evidence rather than opinion— the half days are the worst because they count as a full day but students receive less academic instruction. [parent/guardian]
	Half days are very difficult for instruction. I'd rather have whole days of instruction and whole days of PD. [teacher]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Half days present challenges for non-academic, Out-of-School Time (OST) programming	So many half days making providing monthly related services really really hard! [other school staff]
	Frequency of breaks can be a problem for my program. We go into classrooms all over the district to teach hands-on nutrition based lessons and when there are half-days and full days, we can't teach. These frequent interruptions in the schedule make it more likely that we won't be able to teach all planned lessons in all of the school classrooms, an issue that the guardrails are trying to prevent. [Partner or community member]
and other service provision	Half days (difficult to staff for OST providers) and summer camp dates. [Partner or community member]
	Half days impact the ability to offer after-school enrichments. Less half days or a consistent schedule of half days (like the last Friday of every month) allow for predictability in after-school planning. [Partner or community member]
	Planning around 1/2 days to engage partners/OST/library/rec to provide child care [Partner or community member]
Transportation	Difficulties in providing transportation on half days. [parent/guardian]
challenges	I'd rather have full days off than half days, it makes pick up and drop off much easier! [parent/guardian] students not having a ride on half-days leading to some students not coming to school [teacher]
	The way it affects the school with the calendar, I would say, that mainly on half days parents don't send the students to school due to transportation. [unknown]
Safety risks of half days	Less half days (dangerous for kids in middle/high schools, whole day off for parent teacher conference & professional development days instead [parent/guardian]
	The concept of a 1/2 day counting as a full school day is ridiculous. My son shuttles through all his classes with a few moments of instruction time. Either have full days or days off, don't put more kids on Septa buses and the subway shuttling back and forth which is a risk in itself just so the district can check the box on the number of days they've opened. Either open to provide real instruction or close. [parent/guardian]
Avoid	Less consecutive half days- those are not useful academic days for children [parent/guardian]
consecutive half days	Three half days in a row right before a major holiday makes it really difficult for families to prepare and travel for holidays.
	Half days are a waste of time especially if they are for multiple days in a row. We are not teaching lessons when over half the class is missing. It's usually a day of prep paybacks anyway. We need a better system. [teacher]
Absenteeism	please consider limiting 1/2 days. many parents think those are unimportant school days and often take vacation days instead of sending their children to school. [other school staff]
	Consistent access to students who traditionally do not attend on half days [unknown]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
PD days should be full days	1/2 day Professional Development days are ineffective. [Central Office]  PD days don't have to be half days. There is virtually no learning that happens and I question how effective five a half a day of OD is. The district should study that. Would rather the district set aside full days for it. By state law, you have 28 hours of PD to cover, use full school days to cover for it instead of these awful half days [parent/guardian]  Half days are brutal on attendance and daily classroom instructional routines at the elementary level, and difficult for families to coordinate childcare. Families can't coordinate midday pickups, so our attendance suffers, which we are penalized for. Full days for PD are preferable. [Central Office]  Please consider making PD days full days and thus full days off of school as opposed to half days. Very little to no teaching or learning is accomplished on half days. [parent/guardian]  Half days are very difficult for instruction. I'd rather have whole days of instruction and whole days of PD. [teacher]  Please consider the half day teacher conferences, it would be better if the schools were closed for 2 days every marking period, rather than running half days. Parents would understand the 2 days closures rather than having to take 3 days off to meet with teachers. [Partner or community member]

Many respondents shared their thoughts about scheduling annual breaks such as winter and spring recess, summer holiday, and Thanksgiving. These comments generally advocated for longer and/or more frequent breaks to reduce staff and student burnout and enable family vacations (Table 11).

Table 11. Sample comments related to breaks (winter, spring, summer, Thanksgiving)

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Longer winter break/the day off before Christmas eve	I would prefer longer mid-year vacations for school, and shorter summer. [parent/guardian]  I think the Winter recess is too short. [parent/guardian]  Would like December 23rd off to prepare for winter holiday. [teacher]  Changing winter/Christmas break to 2 weeks instead of 1 week or at least have 3 days off before Christmas instead of having Christmas Eve off. [parent/guardian]  please give back long winter breaks. We shouldn't be going to school the day before Christmas eve.

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Longer winter break/the day off before Christmas	When a break is only a week it doesn't leave much room for people to travel to see family while also enjoying the break so it just causes us to come back even more tired than before the break because there was no time to relax.
eve (cont.)	The days prior to major holidays like Thanksgiving and especially Christmas, we should at least get half-day the last day before Christmas break [Central Office]
	Add one extra week of winter break. To make this possible, reduce the number of holidays or start the school year earlier [unknown, translated from Portuguese]
Longer winter break because of teacher and student burnout	It would be interesting to consider lengthening the winter recess and shortening the summer recess to prevent summer learning loss and give school-based staff a chance to avoid mid-year burnout. This would be similar to the practice in other states. [Central Office]
	This year (2022) working a full day December 23rd is a huge gripe among the staff. Especially when we have a half day the Friday before. Why wouldn't the half day at least been the 23rd? Three full weeks of working before Christmas break is a strain on the teachers and other school staff. Stressed teachers create stressed students. [Central Office]
	I get that child care is an issue for many parents, but I believe students would benefit from at least a week fall holiday, 2 weeks over winter, and a week for spring, if not more. The summer break is too long, and students are worn out during the year. [parent/guardian]
Longer summer break	Kids should have a full summer vacation begin Memorial Day school should end and start after labor day [parent/guardian]
	Longer summer holiday [other school staff]
	Should consider a little longer summer [unknown]
	I think that summer jobs end later and start earlier so I think some of the days off and half during the year need to be taken away so that we can have a longer summer break (more at the end is more important)
Longer spring break	People with family in other states/countries need a full week at Spring Recess to travel to see them. I am unable to travel the eight hours to see my family if we only have 2-3 school days off for Spring Recess. We all need a full week off in the spring so we can see family and truly have a break/time off to recharge between January 2nd and the end of the school year. During past years when we didn't have a full week, mental health of staff and students suffered greatly in late April through June, and there were many absences. [teacher]
	Start the school after Labor Day, at least one week of Spring break, and at least of 9 days of Winter break. [teacher]
	winter and spring recesses are way too short to provide an actual break. non-religious holidays like veterans day arent that important to keep [student]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Longer spring break (cont.)	Spring Break should be longer period of time [student]
Longer Thanksgiving break/Wednesday off before Thanksgiving	Having the Wednesday before Thanksgiving off would be nice, as people tend to have travel plans or have shopping to do. In addition, that day tends to be an academic "waste" so to speak there are class parties, movies, crafts, etc. I think most people would be willing to extend the school year by just one more day in order to accommodate having that Wednesday off. [Central Office]
	WEDNESDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING OFF. FOR THE LOVE OF EVERYTHING. It is incredibly difficult to have Thanksgiving or travel when you have to work the day before the holiday. [teacher]
	Full week off for Thanksgiving, two weeks off for winter holiday, full week off for spring break [teacher]
	Teachers and students should have half days the day BEFORE Thanksgiving and the day BEFORE Winter Break! [teacher]
	Traveling during before holidays to see family. Half day or no school before the day of the holiday (ex. Thanksgiving, winter break) [teacher]
	I think that the Wednesday before Thanksgiving break should be a half day for students and staff to allow for travel and holiday preparation. [teacher]
More breaks	Length of time universities give, working parents, staff burnout, etc. [Central Office]
generally to prevent burnout	days where kids can chill and work on there mental health [student]
	Staff mental health. We need breaks throughout the year. The week long Spring Break and Winter Break are CRUCIAL. [teacher]
	You need to stop making kids go back in August, let them have full breaks and holidays off. Kids need time to have their brains relax. It's too much pressure on kids. They need time off. [parent/guardian]
	consider the student's mental health; Some students may need the break from the amount for work they get from classes [student]
	mental health awareness for students (SEL Days) [student]
	employee's needing time to rewind and not burn out [Central Office]
	mental wellness breaks/opportunities for faculty/staff [Central Office]
	Frequent breaks for teacher recharge and mental health [Central Office]

One of the most common sentiments shared was the importance of starting the school year after Labor Day and/or in September rather than in August (Table 12).

Table 12. Sample comments related to starting the school year after Labor Day

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
General request	Please start school after Labor Day, not before. [parent/guardian]
	I would love for school to start after Labor Day. [parent/guardian]
	Opening after labor day. Not in August [parent/guardian]
	Students starting school after Labor Day. [school leader]
	Please please go back to the first day of school being after Labor Day. [parent/guardian]
	Returning back to school for all staff/students after labor day! [other school staff]
Too hot in August	Beginning school before Labor Day has been a failed policy due to the heat/infrastructure issues in the SDP. [parent/guardian]
	Starting school in August when it is very hot (and will get hotter due to global warming) is unhealthy for students and disruptive to parents when school closes due to heat warnings [parent/guardian]
	School should start after Labor Day due to the excessive heat in August. [teacher] Please go back to having school start after Labor Day. It was extremely hot in my classroom when we started in August. It was hard for my class and even myself to concentrate. I think starting after Labor Day will help to promote a positive start without as many distractions. [teacher]
	HEAT. We always start before Labor Day (which I dislike) and then close early or don't open because of extreme heat. Until all Philadelphia schools have air conditioning, we should not be opening in August. And to open and then close due to heat and then close for the break? It just doesn't make any sense to me. [parent/guardian]
Better to have half days due to heat at the end of the school year (instead of the beginning of the school year)	The heat in August. Schools should go back to September start dates. Yes, it gets hot in June which the school year extends to when there is a later start date, but it disrupts the flow of the start of the school year to have early dismissals in the beginning of the year as opposed to the end. [teacher]
	Students should return from summer break after Labor Day. These building heat up all summer long and August is brutal. End later in June, yes its hot but buildings have not been sitting all summer cooking. [other school staff]
	The most important thing to consider is that August starts before Labor Day for students are problematic due to high temperatures in old buildings that have held the heat of all the heatwaves all summer long. While there can be extreme heat in June, it is not as frequent of an issue and also doesn't have the same impact, as the buildings do not immediately become unbearable the first day or two of a heat wave. It is also rare for

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Better to have half days due to heat at the end of the school year (instead of the beginning of the school year) (cont.)	extended heat waves to occur in June, unlike August where they are more common. Having worked in an old building with no air conditioning for 12 years in the SDP, often the days and even weeks after a heatwave technically broken in August still had 85 + degree classrooms. This has NOT typically been the case in June. Additionally, the result of sudden heat-related closures in August is also more impactful to student learning loss. It involves the loss of continuity of routines and procedures and new instruction after summer that have just begun to take hold in classrooms. A closure in June is less impactful to student learning at the end of an academic year where everything is in place - students can easily be assigned work for home and teachers, schools, and parents have established lines of communication for these kinds of closures. [teacher]
Better for vacations	Not to start school until after Labor Day it makes it difficult for families and vacations and it's just to hot [other school staff]  Returning to school in August shortens my much needed vacation. In addition, when students return we get them accustomed to procedures and accountability and they go out for Labor Day it causes confusion because they forget lessons learned during the short time of being at home for labor day [teacher]

In addition to comments about specific preferences for the Academic Calendar, many respondents commented on the District's decision-making process and communications related to the calendar (Table 13). Stakeholders highlighted the importance of predictability, early planning, and communication of the calendar to allow time for schools, families, and partners to plan their own calendars, and continued inclusion of respondents in the decision-making process.

Table 13. Sample comments related to the Academic Calendar decision-making process and communications

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
A predictable calendar is helpful	Consistency of schedule [parent/guardian]  Weather, consistency, why do we go through this every year? Make a decision and stick w it. [parent/guardian]  For us at the libraries, the most important thing is just being able to consistently predict when the half-days and days off will be and knowing in advance, so that we can plan to have programming to accommodate the kids coming over. Sometimes there's last minute changes after the initial calendar is sent out and we don't have a great way of keeping up with those. [partner or community member]  Consistency, predictability, and breaks of meaningful length at winter. [teacher]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
A predictable calendar is helpful (cont.)	Parents who got ****ed during the pandemic were still struggling without NO help then nor now therefore changing stuff to make it harder for us who had to continue to work throughout is a slap in the face. No need for unnecessary changes. Leave it be. [parent/guardian]
	Going forward, it would be fantastic to know further in advanced if central office is closed for winter recess. It is a great benefit, but finding out about it late (in November) impacts newer staff and staff at lower pay scales who are not able to make travel plans, etc., that they may have chosen to make had they known that we would have an additional week off. [Central Office]
	Predictability is important to allow to plan ahead. Having the calendar be similar from year to year allows all communities the ability to plan ahead. [Central Office]
	Holidays generally don't change so planning for them is not as difficult, but the PD calendar seems to change every year and aligning it to the various bell schedules has presented a number of challenges not only for the parents of our students but also for our staff who also have students in the district and need to fulfill professional obligations as well as make childcare arrangements. [Central Office]
Early planning and communication	Clear communication in advance. Planning with climate change in mind. Not changing from school to school, or age group to age group. [parent/guardian]
	I think a lot about child care arrangements that parents need to make, but having the schedule completed in advance of the school year allows parents/families to plan accordingly up front. But also sharing/providing resources for the periodic half days for families that may not typically need them I understand the value of doing PD when teachers are already at work, it's also important to think about what that means for families and advance notice doesn't necessarily mitigate the challenges of families that may not have options at the ready [parent/guardian]
	Setting calendar with as much notice ahead of time as possible [parent/guardian]
	Whatever is decided regarding days off and 3hour early dismal just make it well known in advance to parents. Last minute notice is not enough time to arrange childcare or to schedule/reschedule outside appts [parent/guardian]
	Set the calendar early so families can plan - then don't change it! [partner or community member]
	Putting the calendar out in advance in order to plan around my work schedule. [teacher]

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Including stakeholders in decisions	When making a decision, you need to put yourself in the place of the person to whom these questions relate (children / parents / teachers). [parent/guardian, translated from Russian]
	Please make sure to take into account the opinions of the student body and the teaching staff [student]
	to keep opening feedback. [student]
	School staff's ideas also important, should ask their opinions [unknown, translated from Chinese]

#### Key Considerations for Religious Holidays and Cultural Celebrations

Following the multiple-choice question about the number of holidays and cultural celebrations in the Academic Calendar, there was an open-ended comment field inviting respondents to provide more details about their preferences. Most respondents said they were happy with the holidays/cultural celebrations in the 2022-23 Academic Calendar, but a few made comments about wanting fewer holidays, additional holidays, or ensuring the selection of holidays is fair and inclusive. For ease of interpretation, comments about holidays and cultural celebrations made in the general open-ended question<sup>5</sup> are also included in this section (Table 14).

Table 14. Sample comments related to religious holidays and cultural celebrations

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Fairness and inclusivity	Please keep giving off for Eid, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Good Friday and Lunar New Year. May also want to consider giving off for Diwali. Are there other important religious holidays that should be considered? Please consult with communities. [parent/guardian]
	I like how the holidays calendar is multicultural and respects important dates for different religions. I would keep it as is. [parent/guardian]
	Be fair with each ethnic group's traditional holidays [parent/guardian, translated from Chinese]
	The calendar should be more inclusive and include additional holidays, such as Three Kings Day and the Lunar New Year if they fall on a weekday.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The general open-ended feedback question text was, "When thinking about the decisions we need to make about the academic calendar and how that affects you, what are the most important things that we should consider?"

Sub-theme (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Minimize additional holidays	Please minimize holidays/cultural celebrations other than those which are widely and universally celebrated by employers. I would love if we could stick to federal holidays only. [parent/guardian]
	Fewer holidays during the school year would prevent the educational and familial disruptions they currently present. [parent/guardian]
	Just have only the 5 required days. Full week of Thanksgiving off. Longer Memorial Day weekend. [other school staff]

Although the majority of respondents (58%) said that future Academic Calendars should include the same eleven holidays and celebrations as the 2022-23 calendar, there were a number of open-ended comments requesting additional holidays (Table 15).

Table 15. Sample comments related to perceived need for additional religious holidays and cultural celebrations

Holidays respondents requested off (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments
Two days for Rosh Hashanah	I think that religious holidays should be days off since they require specific observances that wouldn't work if the student were required to be in school. I went to school in NYC and we always had two days for Rosh Hashana as both of those days require religious observance. Additionally, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are the most important holidays in Judaism. [parent/guardian]  Jews celebrating for two days of Rosh Hashannah needing to get a note from rabbi is the epitome of disrespect - This is unprofessional and the FURTHEST thing from being inclusive [teacher]
Good Friday and/or Easter Monday	Would like Easter Monday as a holiday for religious reasons [teacher]  I honestly feel the day after Easter is very hard for staff and students to return. It is difficult to spend open time with your family without worrying about having to get up early in the morning on Easter Monday. I would rather work the week before Easter and have the following week off. Or work The Monday before Easter and have Easter Monday off. Either way, to some, Easter is just as important as Christmas or other holidays. [teacher]

Holidays respondents requested off (in order of frequency)	Sample Comments				
Three Kings Day	Consider the Hispanic population that celebrates the winter recess (Christmas) until January 6th. [unknown, translated from Spanish]				
	Three Kings is a holiday celebrated in the Hispanic/Latino Community. This day is January 6th. I feel like this community represents a large number of students and staff within the school community, yet we do not have a holiday that represents us. [other school staff]				
	Due to the high number of Latino students, Three Kings Day should be observed. [teacher]				
Eid	Eid should have 2 days off instead of one [parent/guardian]				
	Include the celebration of Eid for Muslim students that celebrate it [teacher]				
Lunar New Year	Asian students are increasing. Hope we will have a holiday for Chinese New Year. [parent/guardian, translated from Chinese]				

# Use of Survey Results in Decision-Making

This survey allowed a broad range of stakeholders to provide input on the 2023-24 and 2024-25 Academic Calendar. The results of this survey were used to inform decisions about the 2023-24 and 2024-25 Academic Calendars, and the rationales for key decisions were made available on the District website. In particular, the Academic Calendar Oversight Committee decided to keep holidays and cultural celebrations largely consistent with those observed in 2021-22, to start school after Labor Day in 2023-24 (this was not possible in 2024-25 due to the number of religious holidays falling on school days), and to reduce the number of half days while ensuring adequate time for professional development for school staff and for families to meet with teachers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See here: https://www.philasd.org/calendar/#1677103226740-b94e55a5-1991

# Appendix 1. Percentage of survey responses by race/ethnicity and self-identified role

	Self-Identified Role										
Self-			Principal/	Other	Central			Other/			
Identified	Parent/		Assistant	School-	Office	SDP	Community	Not	All Stake-		
Race/	Guardian	Teacher	Principal	based Staff	Staff	Student	Partner	Specified	holders		
Ethnicity	(n=1,730)	(n=886)	(n=65)	(n=242)	(n=96)	(n=102)	(n=32)	(n=32)	(n=3,185)		
Asian	7.9%	3.4%	4.6%	3.7%	3.1%	25.5%	3.1%	9.4%	6.6%		
Black/African	24.1%	15.2%	36.9%	39.3%	32.3%	23.5%	25.0%	31.3%	23.4%		
American											
Hispanic/	8.7%	5.0%	9.2%	12.0%	7.3%	7.8%	15.6%	18.8%	8.0%		
Latinx		0.7 70	3.0 /0	7.2 70	12.070	7.570	7.070	13.070	10.070	0.070	
Multi-racial	6.0%	3.4%	1.5%	1.7%	4.2%	6.9%	-	3.1%	4.7%		
White	53.0%	73.0%	47.7%	43.4%	53.1%	36.3%	53.1%	31.3%	57.0%		
Other*	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	3.1%	6.3%	0.3%		

<sup>\*</sup>Includes American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander