

THE FULL PICTURE OF PLANNING AN ACADEMIC CALENDAR

When planning a school year calendar, it's easy to overlook various considerations that go into it. That's why ensuring High School District 211's academic calendar meets state requirements, satisfies the wishes of teachers and parents, and meets the needs of students, isn't a simple task.

Many aren't aware of the process to create a school calendar, and for the District's 2013-2014 academic year, which was approved by the Board of Education on March 15, any slight changes happened for a reason.

"We're looking for an overall good balance," said Samantha Dolen, assistant superintendent for Student Services.

Each academic year has 185 days that need to be spread as evenly as possible between two semesters, with an additional six weeks of summer school. All of these guidelines revolve around strict requirements, such as state testing and the Illinois High School Association schedule for sports, while also considering District needs. This includes four institute days and five emergency days, such as school closures due to snow or inclement weather, that are already figured into the schedule.

Dolen said one possible change the District examined when planning the calendar was to finish first semester final exams prior to winter break, rather than after break as is customary. The District found there are more benefits to having finals culminate after break because of the amount of instructional days divided between first and second semesters.

"We looked at if it's more beneficial for students to finish before winter break and lengthen their summer, or finish exams after break and have more of a balance by having almost equal days in each semester," Dolen said.

If the District decided to have final exams completed before winter break, and perhaps emergency days were used, there is the potential to leave up to a 10-day difference between each semester. That might not seem significant, but for some students to get 10 more instructional days during a semester within a subject, especially in mathematics or sciences, seemed unbalanced. Dolen added that although the District isn't opposed to exams finishing before break, the district would have to start early in August to make sure the semesters remained balanced.

For more information on the recently approved academic calendar, please click [here](#). To view next year's academic calendar, click [here](#). A copy of the 2013-2014 calendar approved by the Board of Education is available [here](#).