

# SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

350 Mountain Road, Suffield, Connecticut 06078  
860-668-3800

**Karen M. Berasi**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Brian Hendrickson**  
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

**Natalie Donais**  
Director of Special Services



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Dear Families:

The questions and answers below are in response to the major feedback themes that emerged from the Early Release Day webinar that was held on November 29th. We will be sending out additional communications after our parent focus groups, which will include next steps and additional opportunities for community feedback after winter break.

## **Q - What evidence do we have to justify the early release day?**

A - In previous years, Suffield's PD schedule has ranged from two full day PD days to two full days and three half day early release days. This PD time has been provided to discuss, revise, and implement a variety of curriculum based initiatives across all content areas. Additionally, last year we provided some teachers with PD throughout the year by providing substitute teachers. While teachers were able to receive training, the use of substitutes proved to disrupt consistency of instruction and classroom management and at the same time was costly in terms of substitute costs. Our current calendar which provides two PD days (one before students started and the other on November 8), coupled with student performance on assessments and feedback from teachers regarding the need for more collaborative time, has lead us to explore the early release day option. Student performance data from the 2015-2016 administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment, which includes comparisons to other similarly situated towns and the State average is posted below under *Additional Resources* - this information can also be found in Suffield's Annual Town Report.

## **Q - What options will be available to parents who cannot be home one hour early?**

A - We are exploring options with town organizations/departments, the Farmington Valley YMCA, and our existing aftercare program (which is run out of Spaulding School). We have also invited Suffield Parks and Recreation to participate in this endeavor. Additionally, we are exploring the utilization of support staff during the early release day to minimize and/or eliminate costs to families.

## **Q - How will you ensure that the services in the Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) of special education students are being met?**

A - An early release day will not impact service hours in IEPs. The IEP is a legal document that mandates services regardless of schedule, PD days, or snow days. This year, the 2016-2017 school year, Suffield has two teacher PD days before the start of the school year and one PD day during the school year resulting in more instructional hours for all students than are required by the CSDE. The early release time of one hour will not impact the required instructional hours for any student.

**Q - What other options are there to increase teacher collaboration time besides an early release day?**

A - The most common options used by school districts are:

- 1) Half day and full day PD days when school is not in session, and;
- 2) Substitute teacher coverage during the school day for teacher teams to work with curriculum leaders and coaches.

Based on research and experience, we believe that two hours a week of collaboration time provided through an early release time of one hour in combination with the contractual hour once a week will result in teacher growth that will benefit students.

**Q - What – specifically - will be done during the early release day?**

**How will the work be monitored?**

A - The early release day will allow teachers to do the following:

- 1) Structured work with teachers in different grade levels and schools by content area, and;
- 2) Allow teachers to analyze student work and assessment data to make changes to unit/lesson plans with the support and guidance of curriculum leaders,
- 3) Receive coaching from curriculum leaders and instructional coaches on how to individualize and differentiate their classroom instruction in order to increase student engagement.

*Meeting minutes will be kept for all teams and will be closely monitored by administration.*

**Q - Why are we having an early release day when teachers already have collaboration and prep time?**

A - Teachers have approximately 3.5 hours a week for preparation time and one hour a week for collaboration time. The one hour of collaboration time is used for the following:

- 1) Collaboration with Special Education case managers, curriculum leaders, coaches;
- 2) Meetings and communications with families regarding student concerns, and;
- 3) Evaluation meetings with administration. Given the expectations and demands on the time of teachers, there is a clear need to increase the amount of collaboration time each week.

Additionally, to maximize our use of time, we are exploring the early release day backing up to the contractually based weekly one hour of after school collaboration time that is used for faculty, department, and grade level meetings.

**Q - What are the benefits of reducing instructional time?**

A - Districts that use early release days often do so as a way to shift release time from full and half days to more frequent release each week. For example, if a district has 3 full day release days and three half day release days, the total release time when school is not in session totals approximately 30 hours. By shifting to a weekly one hour early release day (oftentimes backed up to pre-existing one hour after school meetings), a district uses the same amount of time on a more frequent basis. Further, teacher feedback throughout all of last year was that teachers need more collaboration time to better meet the needs of students. Teachers and administrators value and believe that increased collaboration time, on a more frequent and scheduled basis, will lead to increased student outcomes and engagement for all students. Because of the clear feedback from teachers and administrators, increasing teacher lead learning and collaboration time were included in the District Improvement Plan that was presented to the Board of Education in September.

Specifically, the following short term strategies (found on page 7 of the District Improvement Plan) were the top priorities of teachers:

- “Increase collaboration time for all teacher groups and teacher lead learning”
- “Provide resources and time to improve and write curriculum in all areas of study”
- “Develop a comprehensive social emotional learning plan that creates conditions and systems to analyze, interpret, and leverage academic & social emotional student data effectively”
- “Provide teachers with opportunities for professional development in student centered learning, PLC, K-12 core text, differentiated and specialized instruction”

**Full Link to District Improvement Plan**

[http://www.suffield.org/uploaded/BOE/2016 2017 Agendas/20161107/06 -  
\\_District Improvement Plan 10-5-2016.pdf](http://www.suffield.org/uploaded/BOE/2016%202017%20Agendas/20161107/06_-_District%20Improvement%20Plan%2010-5-2016.pdf)

**Additional Resources & Research on the Value of Teacher Collaboration:**

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2014/07/18/power-of-teacher-collaboration-nea/>

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb15/vol72/num05/How-We-Know-Collaboration-Works.aspx>

<b>Performance Results from the 2015-2016 Administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment</b>		
<b>District</b>	<b>Meets or Exceeds the Achievement Level in English Language Arts</b>	<b>Meets or Exceeds the Achievement Level in Math</b>
Simsbury	81%	68%
Farmington	79%	73%
Granby	78%	64%
Canton	74%	67%
Bolton	78%	66%
Ellington	74%	65%
Tolland	71%	67%
<b>Suffield</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Somers	68%	53%
Hebron	64%	59%
<b>State AVG</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>