Arlington Public Schools

EVERY STUDENT COUNTS
EXCELLENCE FOR ALL

APS Strategic Plan
2024-30



2028-29 School Year Calendar Development – School Board Work Session

Ricardo Sorto, Special Projects Coordinator
Corey Dotson, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources

September 29, 2026

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Current Calendar Framework

School Board Policy I-4.30 and PIP I-4.30 PIP-1 establish the parameters for development of the school-year calendar.

POLICY I-4.30 | PIP I-4.30 PIP-1

180 Instructional Days
The calendar provides 180 student instructional days.

School-Year Start
The first student day is scheduled one week before Labor Day.

Winter & Spring Breaks
Breaks are scheduled with consideration for alignment with neighboring school divisions.

End of School Year
The last student day occurs before Juneteenth.

Religious & Cultural Observances
The calendar continues to recognize religious holidays APS has honored in recent years; the PIP provides guidance for cultural observance days, including Eid dates.

Calendar Development
Within the policy framework, APS must also place professional learning, grade preparation, conferences, early release days, marking periods, and pre-service days.

These parameters establish the framework within which APS must accommodate instructional days, holidays, employee workdays, breaks, and other operational requirements.

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Work Session Focus

What the Board asked staff to examine before developing the 2028–29 calendar

Community experience

What has APS heard from families, staff, students and community members over recent calendar cycles?

Calendar structure

How do current policy parameters, holidays, employee workdays and instructional requirements interact?

Regional context

How are neighboring divisions addressing five-day weeks, new adopted holiday observances, start dates and summer learning?

Instructional time

What calendar choices affect the amount and continuity of instruction before spring assessments?

2028–29 considerations

What tradeoffs should be visible as staff develops a draft calendar for Board review?

What the APS Community Has Told Us

Four consecutive survey cycles show several recurring themes

2019–20 Instructional continuity

Concerns about multiple October interruptions and the placement of non-instructional and teacher workdays.

2020–21 Start date & regional alignment

Debate over pre- and post-Labor Day starts, summer plans, earlier June end dates and alignment with neighboring divisions.

2021–22 Choppy weeks & observed holidays

Concerns about scattered days off, childcare impacts, too few five-day weeks and additional observed holidays.

2022–23 Later start & fewer interruptions

Continued preference for later starts, fewer scattered days off and more cohesive instructional weeks.

What the APS Community Has Told Us

Recurring themes across four calendar survey cycles

School-year start and end

Families frequently favored a later start—often after Labor Day—and an earlier June end. Staff feedback was more mixed, with some supporting an earlier start when it resulted in an earlier end.

Instructional continuity

Families and staff repeatedly raised concerns about three- and four-day weeks, random midweek closures, and too few uninterrupted five-day weeks.

Regional alignment & family logistics

Respondents frequently asked APS to align more closely with neighboring divisions because of childcare, camps, travel, employee residence, and cross-jurisdiction family schedules.

Holidays and breaks

Feedback was mixed: some supported additional observed holidays, while others questioned the number of division wide closures and suggested clustering non-school days to reduce disruption.

Predictability & advance planning

Families and staff asked APS to establish calendars farther in advance and clearly identify the reason for each non-school day—especially when major calendar changes were being considered.

Recurring Calendar Concerns

Recurring community concerns and calendar-development considerations

“Too few full five-day weeks”

Respondents described the school year as fragmented by three- and four-day weeks and asked APS to reduce isolated or midweek non-school days.

Start later / end earlier

Many families and students preferred a post-Labor Day start or later August start, while others valued an earlier June end.

Cluster non-school days

Feedback suggested aligning conferences, grade-preparation days, professional learning, holidays and breaks where possible to create more cohesive instructional weeks.

Align with neighboring divisions

Families and staff cited childcare, camps, travel, and employees living outside Arlington as reasons for greater regional alignment.

Balance inclusion with continuity

Community feedback reflected both support for observed holidays and questions about the number and placement of division wide closures.

Meet the 180-day instructional standard

APS calendars are developed around a 180-day instructional standard, but subsequent changes to an adopted calendar can reduce the final number of instructional days.

Overall pattern **The community did not speak with one voice, but the same tradeoffs—continuity, predictability, alignment, holidays and start/end dates—recurred across multiple calendar cycles.**

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Current APS Calendar Parameters

Policy establishes the framework; calendar design determines how the remaining days are used

180
instructional days

1 week
before Labor Day

1 week
Spring Break

Before Jun. 19
last day of school

Aligned
winter & spring breaks

Continued
observed holidays recognized in recent years

Within those parameters, the committee can adjust early release days, conferences, professional learning, marking periods and staff pre-service days.

Regional School-Year Start Dates

2026–27 is the latest school year with an approved/published start date available across all five comparison divisions.

APS	FCPS	PWCS	ACPS	FCCPS
AUG 31	**AUG 24**	**AUG 24**	**AUG 24**	**AUG 24**
Monday	Monday	Monday	Monday	Monday
Arlington Public Schools	Fairfax County Public Schools	Prince William County Public Schools	Alexandria City Public Schools*	Falls Church City Public Schools

Regional context: APS begins one week later than the four neighboring divisions shown in the 2026–27 school year.

*ACPS traditional-calendar schools; Samuel W. Tucker Elementary follows a modified calendar.
Sources: official 2026–27 calendars/pages for APS, FCPS, PWCS, ACPS and FCCPS.

Instructional Continuity Is a Regional Design Priority

Neighboring divisions are increasingly designing calendars around instructional continuity and more complete five-day weeks.

FCPS 2028–29 Adopted Calendar

Aug. 21
First day of school

Jun. 15
Last day of school

180 instructional days

15 professional workdays

More full five-day instructional weeks

Developed following revisions to FCPS Policy 1344 prioritizing instructional continuity.

Regional Direction

FCPS 2028–29

Adopted under a revised policy emphasizing full five-day weeks, balanced quarters and instructional continuity.

ACPS

Current published calendar explicitly tracks five-day weeks and avoids isolated learning days.

PWCS & FCCPS

Current adopted calendars provide additional regional context; 2028–29 calendars are not yet available for an equivalent same-year comparison.

APS community feedback reflects the same priority: fewer fragmented weeks and more predictable stretches of instruction.

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Instructional Continuity Is a Regional Design Priority

FCPS revised Policy 1344 in June 2026 to make instructional continuity a more explicit calendar-design priority.

FCPS Policy 1344 Direction

Prioritize full five-day instructional weeks and reduce fragmented weeks within each quarter.

- Revised June 2026
- Provides a framework for developing multiple years of school calendars
- Used in developing FCPS's approved 2027–28 and 2028–29 calendars

Prioritize five-day weeks

Calendar development should minimize fragmented instructional weeks within each quarter.

Limit early-release days

No more than four division wide early-release days, plus up to four additional elementary early-release days.

Protect instructional & workdays

Approved calendars maintain 180 instructional days and 15 professional workdays.

Plan farther ahead

FCPS maintains three years of approved calendars to support advance planning and predictability.

Regional example: FCPS is using policy-level calendar parameters—not only individual date choices—to support instructional continuity.

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

How FCPS Creates More Full Five-Day Instructional Weeks

The 2028–29 calendar illustrates how placement—not only the number of non-instructional days—can reduce fragmented weeks.

Calendar-design principle

Cluster required interruptions where possible instead of creating additional isolated short weeks.

- Professional workdays are placed adjacent to existing interruptions.
- Division wide early-release days are limited and concentrated at quarter endings.
- The calendar still maintains 180 instructional days and 15 professional workdays.

SEPTEMBER 2028	**Thu., Sept. 21** Rosh Hashanah — Holiday	**Fri., Sept. 22** Professional Workday / Student Holiday	**Two adjacent non-instructional days are contained within one interrupted week.**
NOVEMBER 2028	**Fri., Nov. 3** End of Quarter — 2-hour Early Release	**Mon.–Tue., Nov. 6–7** Professional Workdays / Election Day	**Quarter-end and staff work time are grouped around the same interruption.**
APRIL 2029	**Thu., Apr. 12** End of Quarter — 2-hour Early Release	**Fri., Apr. 13** Professional Workday / Student Holiday	**Quarter closeout and staff work time occur together rather than in separate weeks.**

Key takeaway: Instructional continuity is affected by where non-instructional time is placed—not only by how many days are included.

APS consideration: Could some early-release time be reduced, consolidated, or placed adjacent to other interruptions to preserve more complete instructional weeks?

Source: Fairfax County Public Schools, approved 2028–29 Standard School Year Calendar.

Observed Holidays: Regional Approaches

2026–27 treatment of the five religious and cultural holidays identified in APS policy

Division	Rosh Hashanah	Yom Kippur	Diwali	Eid al-Fitr	Eid al-Adha
APS	W	●	W	●	●
FCPS	W	●	W	●	●
PWCS	W	●	W	●	●
ACPS	W	●	W	◐	●
FCCPS	W	○	W	○	—

● Holiday — students and staff off ◐ Students off / staff report ○ School in session / religious observance W Observance falls on weekend

— Not designated on published calendar

Similar regional treatment

APS, FCPS and PWCS have the same 2026–27 treatment: Yom Kippur, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are weekday holidays; Rosh Hashanah and Diwali fall on weekends.

Different approaches

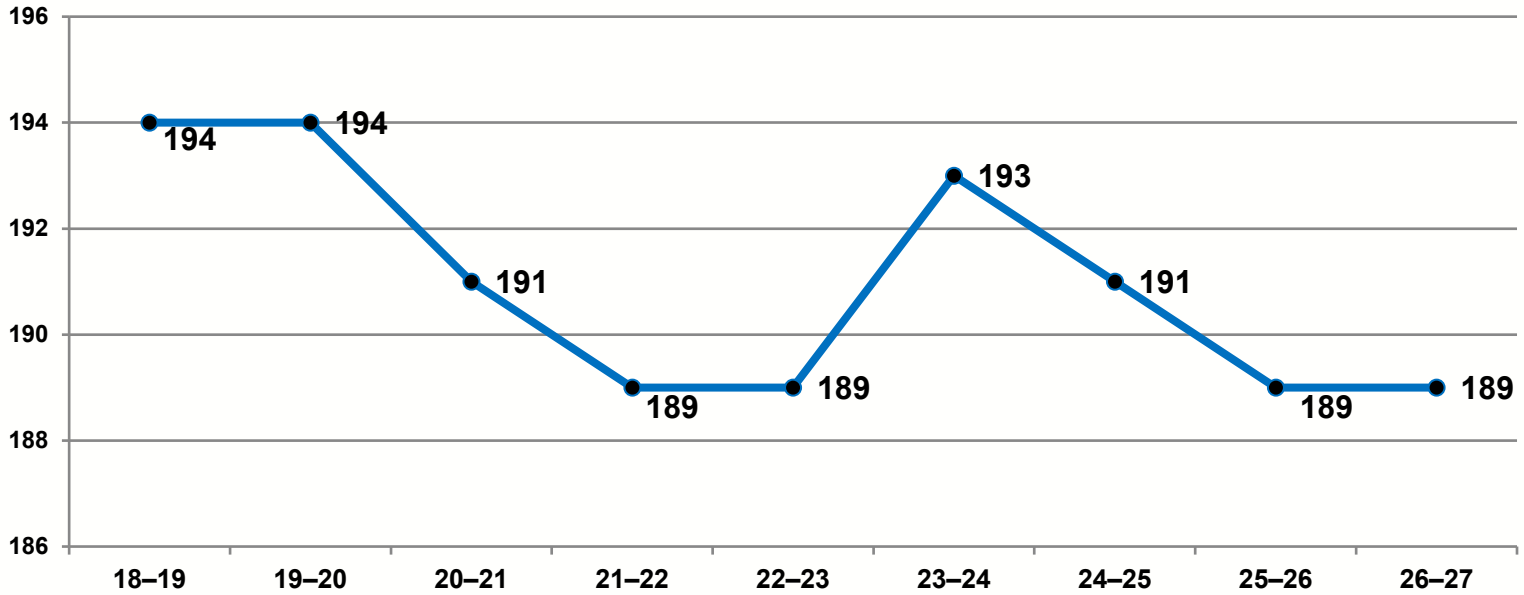
ACPS uses Eid al-Fitr as a student non-school day with staff professional learning. FCCPS keeps school in session for Yom Kippur and Eid al-Fitr and identifies them as religious observances.

Regional practice varies in whether a recognized observance results in a division wide closure, a student-only non-school day, or school remaining in session.

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Teacher Workdays Remain Below the Historical 194-Day Level

APS has preserved recent 180-day student calendars while operating with fewer teacher reporting days



7 consecutive calendars below 194 days

189 teacher workdays in 2025–26 & 2026–27

195 teacher days in 2026–27
FCPS • PWCS • ACPS

Historical comparison

2019–20: 194 teacher days / 181 student days = 13 non-student teacher days

2026–27: 189 teacher days / 180 student days = 9 non-student teacher days

As APS accommodates 180 instructional days, holidays, breaks and other non-school days within the August–June calendar, fewer weekdays remain available for teacher workdays and other calendar priorities.

Calendar Capacity Affects More Than Student Attendance Days

The same fixed August–June window must accommodate 180 instructional days, employee work requirements, holidays, breaks and other calendar priorities.

Student Calendar

180

instructional days

within a calendar that also includes:
holidays • breaks • conferences • early release

Remaining Calendar Capacity Supports

- Pre-service and planning
- Professional learning
- Grade preparation / records
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Other required teacher work responsibilities

Within a fixed August–June window, every calendar decision affects the number and placement of days available for instruction, teacher work requirements, holidays, breaks and other priorities.

Instructional Time & Summer Learning

Two additional considerations raised for the 2028–29 calendar discussion

Instruction Before Spring Assessments

An earlier start may provide additional instructional time before spring assessments when assessment and end-of-year windows remain unchanged.

Elementary

Spring SOL testing begins earlier in May. Because testing dates vary by grade and subject, the amount of additional instruction before testing would also vary.

Grades 7-12

Virginia law generally requires SOL/end-of-course assessments to be administered no earlier than two weeks before the end of the applicable course, grade level, quarter, or semester, with specified exceptions.

An earlier school-year start does not automatically provide the same amount of additional pre-assessment instruction across all grades and courses.

Regional Summer Learning — Most Recently Available Programs

Division	Approx. Length
APS	4 weeks
ACPS	4 weeks / 16 days
FCPS	~3–5 weeks depending on the program
PWCS	~ 3 weeks K-8 / ~ 4 weeks HS

*Length varies by program and grade level; comparison reflects the most recently available summer schedules.

APS's four-week summer program is generally consistent with neighboring divisions.

Calendar consideration APS's four-week summer program falls within the range of comparable programs offered by neighboring divisions; program length varies by grade level and program type.

2028–29: What We Know Before Drafting the Calendar

Known dates, current policy parameters and regional context establish the starting point for calendar development.

Known 2028–29 Dates

Labor Day	Rosh Hashanah	Yom Kippur	Diwali	Memorial Day	Juneteenth
Sept. 4, 2028	Sept. 21	Sept. 30 • Saturday	Oct. 17	May 28, 2029	June 19

Eid observance dates remain tentative and are finalized through the current PIP process, including consultation with Muslim community leaders.

APS Current Policy

Aug. 28, 2028 start

One week before Labor Day

Virginia Law

Earlier start is legally permissible

First instructional day may be no earlier than 14 days before Sept. 1

FCPS 2028–29

Aug. 21 start • June 15 end

Adopted calendar for the same school year

Calendar elements still to be placed Winter Break • Spring Break • Teacher Workdays • Conferences • Professional Learning • Early Release

These known dates and policy parameters — together with the Board's discussion — will inform development of the 2028–29 APS draft calendar.

2028–29 School Year Calendar Development

Board Discussion

Questions to guide development of the 2028–29 draft calendar

1	**Instructional continuity**	How should APS prioritize full five-day instructional weeks when calendar constraints conflict?
2	**Observed holidays**	What objective criteria should guide divisionwide closure versus recognition/accommodation while school remains open?
3	**Teacher workdays**	How should APS balance teacher workday needs with instructional days and other calendar priorities?
4	**Regional alignment**	Which forms of alignment matter most — start/end dates, breaks, holidays, or overall instructional rhythm?
5	**Instructional time**	How should assessment timing and summer programming factor into decisions about the school-year start and end dates?
6	**School-year start**	Should APS consider a start earlier than the current policy of one week before Labor Day for 2028–29?

Arlington Public Schools

EVERY STUDENT COUNTS
EXCELLENCE FOR ALL

APS Strategic Plan
2024-30



QUESTIONS

Appendix: APS Calendar Survey Record

Supporting detail for the four survey cycles summarized in the main presentation

Survey Cycle	Participation / Evidence	Key Supporting Detail
2019–20	Multiple stakeholder groups	Survey results and qualitative feedback focused on instructional continuity, especially the number and placement of non-instructional and teacher workdays.
2020–21	Parents • Staff • Students • Community	Start date was the dominant issue. Feedback contrasted pre- and post-Labor Day starts and also raised summer plans, June end dates, conferences/PD days and regional alignment.
2021–22	4,600+ responses 2,770 parents • 1,827 staff • 330 community • 85 students	Major themes included the early start/length of the year, fragmented weeks, childcare, additional observed holidays and suggestions to combine workdays/closures where possible.
2022–23	3,958 responses 2,793 parents • 1,224 staff*	Option 1 was endorsed without modification by 38.7% versus 27.1% for Option 2. Comments again emphasized later starts, fewer scattered days off, regional alignment, observed holidays and more cohesive placement of closures.

Important distinction: Survey questions and response structures varied by year; results should not be treated as a single longitudinal poll.

Should APS consider a start earlier than the current policy of one week before Labor Day for 2028–29?

Sources: APS calendar survey materials for 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22 and 2022–23. *Respondents could identify with multiple roles.