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# Northampton teachers OK two-day furlough

## City schools will start a week early

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Tuesday, July 14, 2009

**NORTHAMPTON** - City teachers have agreed to give up two paid days in a union give-back that will save \$133,000 and preserve 3.4 jobs, but which means school will start a week early, on Sept. 2 rather than Sept. 8.

The School Committee Thursday ratified the two-day furlough, which the negotiating team and Northampton Association of School Employees finally settled on as a cost-savings measure that would preserve teaching positions.

The agreement is for one year, and is separate from the teachers' three-year contract, which is up for renegotiation after this school year.

The two furlough days are the opening convocation - a day in which the school district staff and teachers gather as a whole - and a professional development day traditionally held before school commences in September.

The School Committee also determined that school would start a week earlier, on Sept. 2, and end June 16, barring snow days. The district is allowed up to five emergency make-up days after June 16.

Superintendent Isabelina Rodriguez recommended the school calendar change in light of the two-day furloughs preceding the school year. The original plan was to start school Sept. 8, allowing the year to end as late as June 28 with snow days.

"We can now start the school year that much earlier," said Stephanie Pick, of the School Committee. "It puts us more in line with the communities near us and allows us to get out of school that much earlier."

She noted a lot of families don't know about the calendar change yet, and the committee recognizes some people won't be happy about it.

"There are people who get the school calendar as soon as it happens so they can make their vacations," Pick said.

Rodriguez said the furlough days net about \$133,000 in savings, and when she added in approximately \$40,000 in pothole funds that come back to the city from the state and unanticipated money generated by the school choice program, the department brings in more than \$170,000.

Rodriguez said the additional revenues will enable a high school teacher and two elementary teachers to get their jobs back and a middle school physical education teacher to increase work hours back to full-time. Pick noted physical education hours affect class sizes throughout the school.

"It's not just about having more P.E. - it will help alleviate class-size problems in general," Pick said.

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The negotiating team and teachers union met seven times this spring to brainstorm ways to reduce the budget gap. The 3.5 teaching positions were "not what we had hoped to identify, but we also understand the economic situations and the unions' position, so this is what we were able to agree to," said Lisa Minnick, Ward 6 School Committee and negotiating team member.

Additional teaching jobs were also preserved last month when Northampton voters approved a Proposition 2½ override that gave an additional \$1 million to city schools. The override meant the \$27.3 million schools budget saved 5.8 elementary teachers, four middle school and 3.6 high school teachers from the 27 positions slated for elimination in March.

#### Convocation change

Rodriguez's alternate convocation plan is to hold staff meetings at the individual schools during other days. There is no alternate plan to make up the professional development day, which allows teachers to work with their colleagues, plan lessons and have "a little more say as to what they can do" before the school year.

Giving up "professional development is a sacrifice," said Rodriguez. "It is unfortunate."

Meanwhile, she said there is an upside to the change in the school start date as well. The change "will positively affect the students in the long run because it will mean we'll have a little more breathing room during the school year should we need it because of snow days," Rodriguez said. "The commissioner's pretty firm about not waiving those (snow) days."

She noted families will receive phone calls this week and a letter informing them of the change. One concern Rodriguez noted is the calendar change's potential effect on vacation plans for Labor Day, Sept. 7.

"Some families will feel relief because now they don't have to find child care for another week; Other families might have to change plans and we regret that they're having to make alterations in their schedule," said Minnick. "But this seemed like the right way to go."

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## Comments

Tue, 07/14/2009 - 11:49 — [aobrien](#)

New

### [Vacations are planned it's July 14th](#)

This can't happen so quickly!!! Arrangements have been made by many families. I called the Super Office last years--at least 3 times asking the first day of school!! Thanks once again for messing up everyone lives. School of choice looks better and better every year!

▪ [reply](#)

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Tue, 07/14/2009 - 09:28 — [chezdan9](#)

New

### [Date Change](#)

Would you knee-jerk reactionaries look at a calendar? The change is only 3 extra school days. You're all so wound up, you NEED a vacation. So your kid misses 3 days in the beginning of the year because of a previously-scheduled vacation. What's the big deal? Relax and take a pill. Sheesh.

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Mon, 07/13/2009 - 21:33 — [mollyshannon](#)

New

### [No consideration for families.](#)

I also do not understand how this change can happen so suddenly. I'm sure I'm not the only family with vacation plans

for that week-work time taken off, deposits paid for the vacation, pet care reserved, etc. Now what happens-the kids start school a week late or we go without a long-planned vacation? I agree with the previous poster-this superintendent and the school committee, which approved the plan- doesn't really seem to care about or consider family schedules.

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Tue, 07/14/2009 - 08:08 — [margaret](#)

New

### [Start date change](#)

I couldn't disagree more. The extra week, which no other area district has in Sept. was causing many working families great angst as there are no camps available during that first week of Sept. Finding child care and paying for it is a huge burden for working parents. I am thrilled with the change.

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Mon, 07/13/2009 - 22:08 — [HampTaxPayer](#)

New

### [Write letters](#)

This issue needs to be brought to the attention of Isabella Rodriguez, just as the transportation issue was brought up to her through a meeting with parents and principals. It was changed when she realized what a headache it would be for parents. If we don't speak up, we will never be heard. Make some phone calls, and write some letters!

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Mon, 07/13/2009 - 20:56 — [HampTaxPayer](#)

New

### [How are they allowed to do that?](#)

I just do not understand how the superintendent can legally change dates like that so drastically? It would be one thing if it were a couple of days but this is an entire weeks difference. I understand the reason- but it still seems so very wrong. It seems to be that this woman has no conscience when it comes to inconveniencing the parents of Northampton students.

I am also very concerned that our kids' teachers won't be meeting up to discuss their plans as usual. So much for the override passing so that our lives wouldn't be interrupted.

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