

# Personnel Policy Review

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Fort Smith Public Schools | Board of Education Presentation

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# Purpose of the Presentation

Tonight's discussion focuses on reviewing one component of the district's leave structure: **The partially paid Extended Catastrophic Leave provision.**

- 🛡️ This review is **NOT a proposal to eliminate** catastrophic leave protections.
- 🔍 The recommendation is to **remove the additional extended partially paid layer** that exists beyond the district's current leave protections.



# Policy Review Background

This topic was previously presented to the **Personnel Policy Committees in August** for discussion. During that meeting:



Committee members requested **additional time** to review the policy details thoroughly.



Members wanted the opportunity to consider **possible revisions or feedback** before moving forward.



In response, the item was **removed from the agenda** to allow for this further review period.



# Timing of the Recommendation



## Current Context



Issuance of employee contracts



Approval of salary schedules



Personnel policy updates for the 2026–2027 school year



## Why Now?



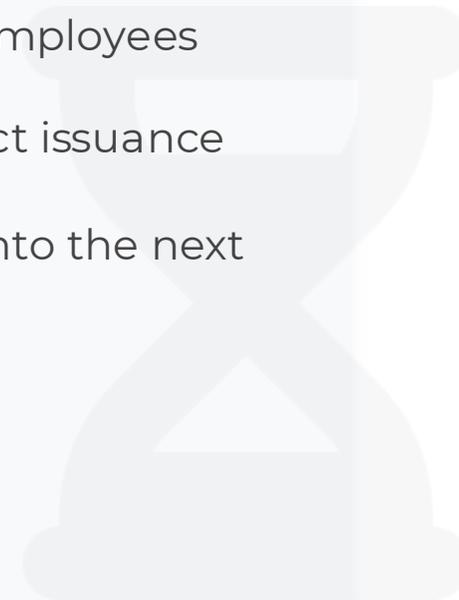
Clear expectations for employees



Alignment with contract issuance



Transparency moving into the next school year





# Our District Provides Multiple Leave Protections

Fort Smith Public Schools provides **several layers of leave protections** for employees.



These benefits provide support during **illness, family events, and medical situations.**



Extended catastrophic leave exists **AFTER** several other leave options have already been exhausted.



# Layer 1: Regular Sick Leave

1

2

3



**1 Day**

Earned Per Month



**Unlimited**

Accumulation Allowed

This allows employees to build significant leave balances over time to address personal or family medical needs.



# Layer 2: Extended Sick Leave

1



2



3



**Up To 115  
Days**

Additional Lifetime Days



**Sub Cost**

Employee Only Pays Substitute

This allows certified employees to continue receiving most of their salary during extended illness after regular sick leave is exhausted.



# Layer 3: Catastrophic / Dread Disease Leave

1

2

3



**Up to 30 Days**

Fully Paid Leave



**Serious Medical**

For Critical Conditions

This provides additional financial protection when significant medical events occur.



# Family Leave Benefits

Fort Smith Public Schools also provides **paid family leave**:



## **Birth Leave: Policy 3.56.1**

Paid leave following the birth of a child



## **Sick Leave: Policy 3.8**

Additional paid leave following the birth of a child



## **Adoption/Foster Placement Leave: Policy 3.56.2**

Paid leave when a child is placed through adoption or foster care



# Additional Employee Protections

Employees also have access to **additional protections** including:



## Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

Up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave



## Workers' Compensation

Protection for work-related injuries



## Assault Injury Leave

Up to one year of full pay if injured in the course of employment



# Additional Leave Options

## Employees may also access:

-  Medical leaves of absence
-  Leave protections for qualifying medical situations
-  Optional short-term disability insurance
-  Optional long-term disability insurance

**These protections remain available even if catastrophic leave were revised.**



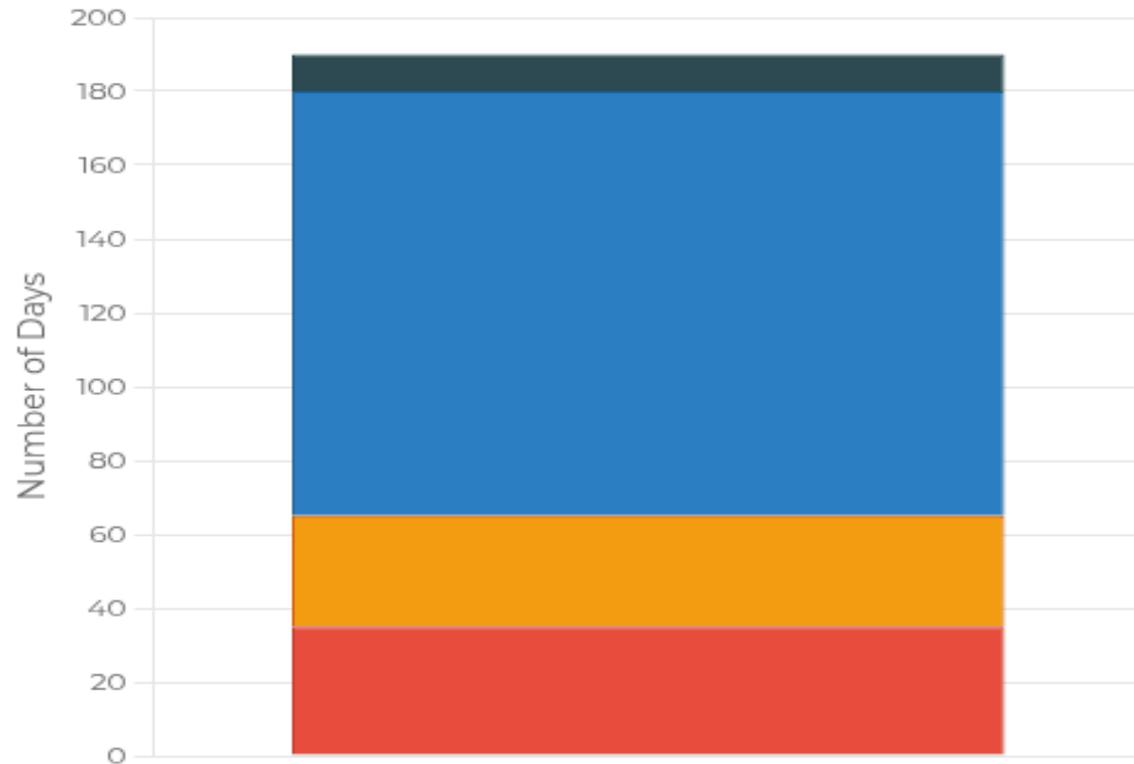
# Where Extended Catastrophic Leave Fits

Extended catastrophic leave occurs **after ALL other leave layers are exhausted.**

When combined with other leave options, employees may receive up to **180 days** of paid leave.

 **180 Days Total**

*\*Equivalent to an entire school year*





# Why Review This Provision?

While the district remains committed to supporting employees, **extended absences can create operational challenges** that impact the learning environment.

*These include:*



Maintaining classrooms with fully licensed teachers



Ensuring qualified staff for students



Managing substitute staffing for extended periods



# Student Continuity



## Students benefit from:

- ✓ Consistent instruction
- 👤 Stable classroom leadership
- 🎓 Strong teacher-student relationships

VS



## Extended absences can result in:

- ✂ Multiple substitute placements
- 📖 Instructional disruption
- 🚫 Reduced continuity for students



# Impact on Staff and Operations

Extended absences can also impact the wider school community beyond the classroom:



## Colleagues



Increased workload



Additional responsibilities



## Campus Operations



Substitute shortages



Difficulty maintaining program continuity



# Key Clarification

This discussion is **NOT** about valuing employees only when they are healthy.

**Even without the extended catastrophic provision, most employees would still have access to:**

- ✓ Regular sick leave
- ✓ Catastrophic leave
- ✓ FMLA protections
- ✓ Assault injury leave
- ✓ Optional disability insurance
- ✓ Extended sick leave (up to 115 days)
- ✓ Paid parental leave
- ✓ Workers' compensation
- ✓ Medical leaves of absence



# A Strong Leave Structure Remains

When viewed together, our district would still maintain one of the **most comprehensive leave structures available.**



Extended catastrophic leave is currently an **additional layer** beyond multiple existing protections.

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*It is often described as: "The safety net of the safety net of the safety net."*



# Recommendation

The recommendation is to **remove the partially paid Extended Catastrophic Leave provision** while maintaining the other leave protections currently available to employees.

**This approach seeks to balance:**

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**Support for  
Employees**



**Staffing  
Stability**



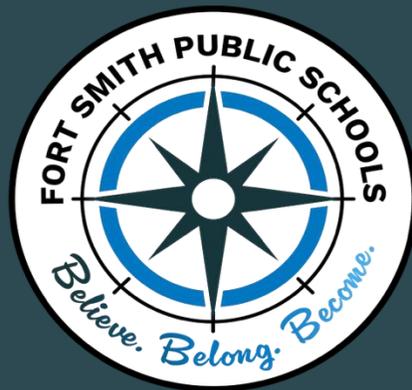
**Student  
Continuity**



# Moving Forward

Reviewing this provision during contract and salary schedule approval allows the district to address critical priorities simultaneously.

-  **Maintain transparency** throughout the policy review process.
-  Provide **clear expectations for employees** regarding leave benefits.
-  Ensure policies **support both staff and students** effectively.



## Fort Smith Public Schools remains committed to:



Supporting the health and well-being of employees



Ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction for students

*Believe Belong Become*