

HCS D School Board Agenda Item:

# **Structure of the annual school calendar**

## **Executive Summary**

Annual school calendars are typically structured to respond to diverse demands, including alignment with important cultural events, coordination with other parts of the education system, and convenience of the parents and community. While all these needs must be balanced, it seems feasible that HCS D might want to take a fresh look at the annual structure of our school calendar, with an eye towards considering some minor changes that may benefit student learning.

It is proposed that the School Board create a Calendar Committee, charged with:

1. Surveying the calendar structures of nearby K-8 districts, as well as the most common public and private high school districts that Hillsborough students typically attend.
2. Identifying the research that predicts the effect of different calendar choices on student outcomes.
3. Surveying the parent community, teachers, and staff, about what they find valuable about the current calendar structure, as well as which aspects of the calendar present challenges.
4. Gathering, compiling, and analyzing relevant data from the HCS D (e.g., any correlation between average student attendance vs. any mismatch with the high school calendars).
5. Reporting back to the Board about lessons learned, as well as recommendations for next steps (if any).

It is important to note that the scope for investigation is only rearranging the current instructional and vacation days. There are two closely related topics, which will not be considered here: the structure of the individual school day (start times, end times, recess and bell schedules, etc.) and the total number of instructional days during the school year.

## **Current HCS D Calendar**

There are a number of legal requirements on any HCS D calendar, as well as common cultural expectations.

Ed Code (37220-37223: see ATTACHMENT B) requires twelve specific school holidays: Jan 1, MLK (~Jan 19), President's Day (~Feb 13/16), Memorial Day (~May 25), July 4, Labor Day (~Sept 1), Veteran's Day (Nov 11), Thanksgiving (~Nov 27/28), Christmas (Dec 24/25).

Contract negotiations with the Hillsborough Teacher's Association (HTA) include clauses that specify: (1) the start date of the school year; (2) the end date of the school year; (3) 186 total contract days; (4) 181 total instructional days. (Thus five non-instructional teacher days each year are designated for professional development, planning, or preparation.) *Note: The school calendar concepts discussed here would include negotiated items, and thus would need to be developed in collaboration with HTA.*

In general, a 1- or 2-day school week is found to have very low attendance, so successful calendars generally have at most two vacation days during any week that includes a student instructional day. Also, the winter and spring breaks are designed to overlap (plus or minus a day) with the San Mateo Union High School District's winter and spring recesses. Note, however, that the start and end dates to the school year do not overlap with SMUHSD; the high school teachers started on Aug 11 and the students on Aug 12; high school students will finish on Thurs May 28, 2015, teachers on Fri May 29, 2015. (See ATTACHMENT X1)

For our current 2014-15 school year (see ATTACHMENT C):

1. The previous school year ended on Friday June 13
2. Teachers returned to work on Wed Aug 20
3. The first instructional day for students was Mon Aug 25
4. Summer vacation lasted 10 weeks
5. Thanksgiving has a 5-day break (Thurs-Mon)
6. Winter break is 2 weeks (+ 1 day)
7. Spring break is 1 week (+ 1 day)
8. School will end on Friday June 12, 2015.

## **HCS D Calendar History**

HCS D had a number of significant calendar reform efforts in the 1990's. A brief summary is given below:

### *1991-1992*

1. Community had a strong preference for starting after Labor Day
2. Added full "ski week" (or intersession) at President's Day weekend
3. Stabilized the timing of Spring Break (rather than always matching Easter)

The intersession program turned out not to be as popular as hoped, with parents and students.

### *1995-1997*

1. Continued preference for school starting after Labor Day (and ending mid-June)
2. Importance of matching high school breaks

With the fixed start and end dates, little significant change was possible.

### *Late 1990s / early 2000s*

Around this time, the San Mateo Unified High School District changed to a calendar with a school year that began somewhat prior to Labor Day. (The motivation was to allow for semester final exams to occur before winter break, instead of in January, thus allow for a true “break”.) In matching the high schools, many K-8 districts (including Hillsborough) also adopted calendars with a school year start prior to Labor Day.

(For those interested in further details, additional historical information on the 1991 effort can be found in ATTACHMENT D. For more information about the 1995 effort, see ATTACHMENT E.)

## **History of School Calendars**

In the 1800’s, school was generally not compulsory, and typically was structured to meet the needs of the local community. Rural students generally experienced much less school than urban students. A typical calendar might have at most six months of school -- half (3mo) in the winter and half (3mo) in the summer -- with children home from school in the spring for planting, and in the fall for harvest. In contrast, some urban schools were open up to 49 weeks out of the year, with 11- or 12-month schedules.

After the Civil War, the traditional calendar was established with the confluence of urban and rural interests, and a growing need to standardize the time children spent in school. When the 9-month calendar emerged, 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture, and climate control was limited. (Having the long break in the summer was required in hot Southern states with school buildings that lacked air conditioners.) This is sometimes described as the calendar “having its roots in our past agrarian society.” Most US schools today follow this calendar, in which school meets roughly from September through June, with a long summer vacation between school years.

## **Research**

Two examples of academic studies of the impact of school calendars on student learning:

Selected quotes from a meta-analysis on Summer Learning Loss:

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Summer\\_Learning\\_Loss/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Summer_Learning_Loss/)

summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade level equivalents on standardized test scores--on average, children's tests scores were at least one month lower when they returned to school in fall than scores were when students left in spring.

Summer loss was more pronounced for math overall than for reading overall.

all students, regardless of the resources in their home, lost roughly equal amounts of math skills over summer.

the quality of evidence available on modified school calendars made it difficult to draw any reliable conclusions. ... Modified school calendars may have a small positive impact on student achievement ... but the existing research contains design flaws that render conclusions tentative at best.

Analysis of the effect of switching from a traditional calendar to year-round schooling:  
<http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/business/economics/faculty/rouse/2011-02-14%20The%20Impact%20of%20year%20round%20schooling.pdf>

year-round schooling has essentially no impact on academic achievement of the average student.

### Case Study: San Mateo - Foster City (TK-8) School District

2014-15 District Overview (number of schools, type of calendar):

	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Year-Round</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>K-5</b>	9 1/2	6	15 1/2
<b>Middle</b>	2 1/2	2	4 1/2
<b>Total</b>	12	8	20

(The 1/2 in the table above indicates North Shoreview Montessori, which is a K-8 school.)

The SM-FC district was interested in moving to a single, unified calendar for all 20 schools, beginning next school year (2015-16). Their primary design criteria, besides merging the traditional and year-round calendars, was to align Winter and Spring breaks with the San Mateo Union High School district calendar.

In March 2014, numerous parent and staff forums were held, and data was collected from a calendar survey. On May 1 2014, the results were presented to the SM-FC school board.

A sampling of results from their parent survey:

	<b>Year-Round</b>	<b>Traditional</b>
<b>Likes</b>	73% Fall intersession 71% Shorter summer vacation 50% Winter intersession 50% Spring intersession 18% School starts end of July	64% Winter break 52% 9-10 week summer vacation 48% Late August start

<b>Dislikes</b>	42% Lack of camps during intersessions 34% Shorter summer vacation 31% Childcare challenges 27% Different from HS calendar	51% Summer is too long 41% Different from HS calendar 29% Childcare challenges
-----------------	---	--

When the survey asked for preferences on a new, blended, unified calendar, the results were:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Vs.</b>
Length of summer	6 weeks	36% parents 51% staff	4 or 8 weeks
Length of breaks	2 weeks	30% for Fall 54% for Winter 36% for Spring	1 or 3 weeks
Start of school year	Middle of August	26% parents 35% staff	beginning of Aug, end of Aug, or after Labor Day
End of school year	Middle of June	38% parents 40% staff	end of June or end of May

Full details are available here:

[http://www.smfc.k12.ca.us/groups/news\\_item?d=x&id=1399702407947&group\\_id=1227680228618&return\\_url=1401761281428](http://www.smfc.k12.ca.us/groups/news_item?d=x&id=1399702407947&group_id=1227680228618&return_url=1401761281428)

The SM-FC Board then approved the general design direction, and turned it over to the teacher's union to create a specific proposal. At the end of September the teachers voted to approve a specific unified calendar, and on Oct 2, 2014 the SM-FC School Board approved the new unified calendar for all 20 schools, starting 2015-16.

(See ATTACHMENT F)

## **Possible calendar directions**

(See ATTACHMENT X2)

It is premature to propose any specific future HCS D calendar, without first engaging in collaboration and input from the parent community and the staff. Still, it may be useful to consider the kinds of modifications that may be feasible.

Consider the length of the summer break (currently about 10 weeks), and whether a small portion of that vacation time might be more productively redistributed as additional breaks throughout the school year. (If the summer were to be shortened, that could be accomplished by starting earlier in August, or ending later in June, or some combination of the two.) Some possibilities include (some subset of):

1. a week (or two) intersession in October
2. extending the Thanksgiving holiday to a full week
3. a “ski week” in February
4. extending spring break from one week to two weeks

#### Sample Benefits:

1. A shorter summer, mitigating some of the academic “summer slide”
2. Additional “recharging” breaks throughout the school year, to help with burnout and stress
3. Most communities with traditional calendars are unfamiliar with the benefits of a significant October break. However, communities with year-round schools typically do have such a break, and both parents and teachers often describe it (see SM-FC data above) as their favorite part of the academic calendar (e.g. because of off-peak travel, etc.).

#### Neutral:

1. Continued alignment with the SM High School calendar for Winter and Spring breaks
2. No change in the number of annual instructional days

#### Sample Costs:

1. Any transition is difficult. Parents and staff (and the outside culture) have already arranged their lives for the current calendar, and any change would require solving some new problems.  
(*Possible mitigation:* there is no need for hurry with a calendar change, so it could be announced well in advance of implementation, allowing sufficient time to arrange new solutions.)
2. Childcare: it may be easier to arrange childcare for one continuous long summer block, than to fill non-traditional week-long holes at other times during the year.  
(*Possible mitigation:* Hillsborough Recreation, with sufficient warning, might be able to institute new programs to fill the new gaps. Also, if our breaks overlap with SM-FC, we may be able to take advantage of any solutions third parties create to solve the same problem for those students.)
3. Summer enrichment: although the bulk of the summer vacation would remain, and surely most enriching activities would still be available, nonetheless it is likely that there are some activities that would have been feasible with a traditional calendar, which would no longer be possible.  
(*Possible mitigation:* with the 12,000 students in 20 schools in San Mateo and Foster

City taking the lead on a similar calendar, perhaps the local culture will begin to adapt to serve the new needs.)

## **Resource**

Don Geddis

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Board direct the Superintendent to form a Calendar Committee in order to explore the feasibility of rearranging instructional days on the HCSD annual calendar for the purpose of improving student outcomes.