

Board Meeting of
October 14, 2015

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Randall Booker, Superintendent
Song Chin-Bendib, Assistant Superintendent, Business Services

SUBJECT: **REVIEW 2016-2017 / 2017-18 INSTRUCTIONAL CALENDAR
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

I. SUPPORT INFORMATION

The Instructional Calendar is a negotiated “working condition” as included in the collective bargaining process between the District and Association of Piedmont Teachers (APT). As part of the Interest Based Bargaining (IBB) process the calendar is negotiated separately from the annual openers each year. The current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) is in force through June 30, 2016, but discussion of the 2016-17 Instructional Calendar has begun.

Parent and Student Survey

Over the last five years, the District has conducted several surveys of parents and middle and high school students (in 2011, 2012, and 2015) concerning the school calendar. The survey results indicate strong support for ending the first semester before the Winter break because this is believed to be in the best interest of students. Nonetheless, there is split opinion about how to accomplish this change. The District is now exploring alternatives to its current calendar, for possible implementation starting in the 2016-17 school year, to make this change. For more information on the Instructional Calendar Development Process, please visit the [PUSD Instructional Calendar FAQ – October 2015](#).

One of the District’s goals is to support the social and emotional needs of students by reducing unnecessary student stress. One way to reduce unnecessary stress is to ensure that school vacations are in fact vacations from school.

Under the District’s current instructional calendar, middle and high school students study and complete school work over the Winter break. The students take exams after the break and then almost immediately start the second semester. If, instead, exams and projects were completed before the break, students could spend their vacation time relaxing and recharging, and start the second semester rested and refreshed.

Surveys of District students and families show strong support for ending the first semester before the Winter break. In the most recent survey, completed on October 6, 2015, 78% of middle and high school students and 63% of District parents indicated that their “strongest preference for the timing of first semester

finals” is before the break (448 students participated in this survey, along with 629 parents). Similarly, in the 2012 survey, 83% of middle and high school students and 62% of parents indicated that their “strongest preference for the timing of first semester finals” was before the break. (The calendar survey administered in 2011 did not address the timing of first semester finals.).

This approach is strongly recommended by Challenge Success, the project of the Stanford University School of Education that consults with this and other school districts on student health issues, as a means to reduce unnecessary student stress. A survey of Piedmont High School Students conducted in 2014 confirms the importance of mitigating students stress to the extent possible. This survey revealed that 78% of the 710 participants reported they were often or always stressed by schoolwork, 63% of participants reported that schoolwork often or always kept them from having time with family or friends, and 69% of participants reported that schoolwork often or always kept them from getting enough sleep.

Finally, some educators favor ending the first semester prior to the December break to address a different concern -- the “loss of learning” that sometimes occurs over the break, followed by the need to reteach certain material after the break and before final exams.

For these reasons, the District is exploring alternatives to its current instructional calendar, for possible implementation starting in the 2016-17 school year, that provide for a true school vacation during the Winter break.

Although there is strong support for ending the first semester before the break, there is split opinion about how to accomplish this shift. In the 2015 calendar survey, 50% of students and 37% of parents expressed either strong agreement or agreement with starting school one week earlier, while 55% of students and 62% of parents expressed either strong agreement or agreement with having unequal semesters. Given this split, the District is exploring a variety of approaches to make this shift.

These approaches include, but are not limited to, beginning the school year during the second week of August, eliminating the November Monday/Tuesday break prior to Thanksgiving, and/or developing flexible staff development opportunities for teachers and staff as a means to capture additional student days during the 1st semester.

Calendar Requirements

The Instructional Calendar includes setting the first and last day of school for students, non-school days for students that are either vacation or designated professional development days for staff. The setting of the semester length, report card grading periods, minimum days, conference days, and testing schedules are not subject to negotiations and are set after the Instructional Calendar is voted and approved by the APT membership and the Board of Education.

The Instructional Calendar has strict requirements from the State that must be addressed:

- 180 school attendance days – a day must be at least 325 minutes to count as a day. Funding from the State is calculated based on the attendance rate of students on the designated 180 student days in the calendar.
- Each grade level must also offer a specified total minimum number of minutes in the 180 days.
- Each grade level at each school must offer the equal amount of total minutes in the school/District (e.g., all third grades in each of the three elementary schools must offer same total minutes per year).
- Prescribed holidays included as part of the calendar with some flexibility when scheduled, except November 11, which is an “immovable holiday” and must be a non-school day if falls between Monday and Friday.
- Per local agreement, the APT base work year of 185 days that includes 180 student days, 3 professional development days and 2 work days.
- The start and end of the school year varies in districts throughout the State. Recent discussions have included the possibility of setting a calendar that allows for the semester to end prior to the traditional winter break at the end of December that goes through the beginning of the New Year.

It is important for staff, community and parents to understand the rationale that supports this calendar as a consideration. The start and end of the school year has a direct effect on the schedule of holiday/breaks through out the school year to meet State requirements and District agreements. In addition to the State and local requirements, the Instructional Calendar is designed to support students by considering the following factors that affect all:

- A schedule that supports optimal learning and long-term retention of academic material for students in grades pre-K through grade 12.
- Balance of student workload and high stakes stressors (e.g., testing and college applications).
- Balance of work/school/family time for students, parents, and staff.
- Decision timeline that allows for planning for staff and families.
- Professional development schedule that supports teaching and learning.

The timeline is for APT to vote in October and to bring it to the Board for consideration at the Board meeting on October 28, 2015.

The purpose of the discussion this evening is to provide the community with an opportunity to provide additional input for consideration.

II. **RECOMMENDATION: REVIEW**

Review 2016-17 / 2017-18 Instructional Calendar development process.