

To: District 225 Board of Education
From: Mike Riggle
Re: Update on School Calendar for 2018-2019
Date: April 6, 2017

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide the Board of Education with an update on the school calendar development process. It is the intent of the administration to present a school calendar recommendation for the 2018-2019 school year to the Board of Education for consideration during the month of May.

Background

Each year, the administration develops school calendars to be considered for adoption based on the [School Calendar Preparation Guidelines](#) posted on the District 225 website. For many years, the school calendar year has begun in late August and ended in early June of the following year. The adopted calendar for the 2017-2018 school year will begin on Wednesday, August 23 for students and will end on Wednesday, June 6 provided there are no additional emergency days due to school closings that need to be completed.

For a number of years, members of the school community have asked whether the District has considered making changes to the school calendar that would allow final exams to be administered prior to the winter break. This type of calendar would match more closely to the school calendars followed by colleges and universities in which final exams as well as the first semester are concluded prior to winter break.

Recently, a growing number of high school districts in our area have adopted a “collegiate” calendar. At the present time, the following area high school districts either have, or will be transitioning to a “collegiate” calendar:

District 125 (Stevenson)
District 128 (Libertyville / Vernon Hills)
District 207 (Maine)
District 211 (Palatine)
District 214 (Arlington Heights)
District 219 (Niles)
District 220 (Barrington)

In addition, District 113 (Highland Park / Deerfield) just announced they will transition to final exams administered before the winter break, but will end the first semester after the winter break. Recently, due to construction, District 203 (New Trier) followed a modified “collegiate” school calendar and conducted final exams prior to winter break last year with positive reviews from their school community.

District 225 Administrator Discussions

For the last four years, administrators within the district have discussed the possibility of transitioning from a “traditional” school calendar to a “collegiate” school calendar. Until last year, there was only mixed support for the proposed change. Last year, the feedback seemed to be much more positive, but not quite a majority. This year, after reviewing the drafts for “traditional” and “collegiate” calendars, a significant majority of administrators at both schools recommended transitioning to a “collegiate” school calendar for the 2018-2019 school year.

As part of the feedback collected, the following items were submitted by the school administrators:

- The deadline for submission of semester grades by teachers is an important issue that will need to be resolved.
- The timeline for course registration, the building of the master schedule, and articulation meetings for IEPs will have to be adjusted.
- The “collegiate” calendar will be in sync with that of many of the surrounding high school districts.
- The “collegiate” calendar will allow students and teachers to experience a true break before the holidays without projects and finals looming for after the winter break.
- Additional breaks in instruction will be eliminated and the need for unit closure across all disciplines prior to winter break will no longer be needed.
- Transitioning to a “collegiate” calendar will require a cultural shift and rescheduling of pre-holiday traditions and celebrations.
- The stress of final exams will be shifted to pre-holiday weeks.
- It will be necessary that the calendar matches as closely as possible with our feeder school districts.
- Instructional supervisor contracts will have to be reviewed. More flexibility will be needed.
- Large school functions such as Awards Assemblies, Prom and Graduation will have to be scheduled appropriately and work with AP Exams.
- The shift to a “collegiate” calendar may be a positive for overall student wellness
- The “collegiate” calendar may allow better alignment for all students within a family.
- The “collegiate” calendar may not align as well for the traditions of the communities and families with summer plans.
- Remaining with the “traditional” calendar will continue the current condition of discussing the possibility of ending finals before winter break.

Impact on Athletics

The IHSA athletic calendar is established in conjunction with the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA). The calendar is determined by counting weeks beginning with the first full week in July. The primary concern at the present time is the starting dates for Boy’s Football and the remaining fall sports that students would be involved in. Boy’s Football may begin on the Monday of Week 6 and all other fall sports may begin on Wednesday of Week 6. Here are the associated dates:

Boy’s Football: (2016 - August 8); (2017 - August 7); (2018 - August 6)

All other fall sports: (2016 - August 10); (2017 - August 9); (2018 - August 8)

According to the data shared with the Board of Education in May 2016 for the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 1441 students out of a population of 5059, or 28.5% of the school population participated in a fall sport and would be home for the start of school on a “collegiate” calendar. The only negative cited would be a loss of practice time (two a days) prior to the start of school by the fall athletic teams. This would be the same condition for all area teams starting on a “collegiate” calendar.

It is important to note that scheduling has become a concern recently for winter sports as many area high schools have changed to a “collegiate” calendar. Schools on a “collegiate” calendar are not available prior to winter break due to final exams and schools following a “traditional” calendar are not available to compete for one week after winter break due to final exams. This results in one less week being available for scheduling athletic events.

Impact on Feeder Elementary Districts

The school calendar adopted by District 225 has served as the base for the feeder elementary school calendars for many years. Each of the feeder districts has its own nuances, including the number of days that students are in attendance. In general, although each district may start and end on different calendar days, the feeder elementary districts try to set a school calendar that is close to that of the high school district to keep families together as much as possible.

For the last few years, I have been discussing the possible transition to a “collegiate” calendar by the high school district with the elementary feeder district superintendents. Their position has become more amenable over the last few years. The primary concern expressed on behalf of their school communities is that an earlier start in August will negatively impact vacation plans for families and may result in reduced attendance levels at the start of the school year.

Impact on the Communities

There are a significant number of entities that will be affected by a change to an earlier start date in August. Primarily, these are entities that provide services to elementary and high school students during the summer months which include the park districts, libraries, and a variety of area camps. If a decision is made to transition to a “collegiate” calendar, it is important that the change be advertised as early as possible.

Teacher Input

The mechanism for gathering teacher input on school calendar in the past has been through the GEA. The administration developed draft calendars in the traditional manner each year and presented the best calendar scenario to the GEA leadership for input and worked actively to eliminate any concerns prior to presenting the recommended calendar to the Board of Education for consideration and approval.

The formal consideration of transitioning to a “collegiate” calendar is a fundamental shift from previous calendars and requires greater input from the staff. During the month of April, drafts of both the “traditional” and “collegiate” calendars will be presented to the staff to consider and discuss prior to gathering their input through the use of a survey. We anticipate that there will be a variety of concerns associated with the proposed change, which we anticipate will be similar to the concerns submitted by the administrators.

Discussions with the Unions

Although example “traditional” and “collegiate” calendars have been shared with the GEA leadership, no formal discussions have been held regarding a possible transition to a “collegiate” calendar. There also has been no data collected regarding the opinions of teachers. A change in the school calendar is generally considered to be a change in working conditions, which should be formally discussed with the union leadership. Collective bargaining with the GEA is scheduled for the 2017-2018 school year and should the Board and administration wish to pursue a “collegiate” calendar for the 2018-2019 school year, the impact of a “collegiate” calendar can be formally discussed and issues resolved during that process. In a similar manner, any issues raised by GESSA and GESPA can be addressed during the 2017-2018 school year in a similar manner.

Student and Parental Input

No formal data has been collected from students or parents. On surveys administered to students and parents in the fall of 2015 on student wellness and curriculum, ending the first semester prior to winter break did not emerge as a primary concern. Follow-up focus groups also did not indicate that changing the school calendar was a high priority. However, for a number of years, the administration has received inquiries from students and parents as to whether we have considered changing to a calendar that would allow for final exams to be completed prior to winter break. It has also been a topic covered a number of times by the student newspaper at each high school. Following a survey of the teachers, we intend to provide information to parents and students and collect their input through a similar survey.

Calendar Drafts

1. Traditional Calendar

Based on the current School Calendar Preparation Guidelines, the traditional calendar draft for the 2018-2019 school year contains the following elements:

- Start of school for teachers - Monday, August 20
- Start of school for students - Wednesday, August 22
- End of first quarter - Friday, October 26
- Thanksgiving break - Wednesday, November 21 thru Friday, November 23
- Last day before winter break - Friday, December 21
- Return from winter break - Monday, January 7
- End of first semester for students - Thursday, January 17

- Institute Day (Grading Day) for teachers - Friday, January 18
- Start of second semester - Tuesday, January 22
- End of 3rd quarter - Friday, March 22
- Spring break - Monday, March 25 thru Friday, March 29
- Graduation Day - Sunday, June 2
- Last day of school for students - Wednesday, June 5
- Last day of school for teachers - Thursday, June 6

2. Collegiate Calendar

The draft of a collegiate calendar for the 2018-2019 school year currently contains the following:

- Start of school for teachers - Thursday, August 9
- Start of school for students - Monday, August 13
- End of first quarter - Friday, October 12
- Thanksgiving break - Wednesday, November 21 thru Friday, November 23
- Last day before winter break for students - Thursday, December 20
- Proposed Institute Day (Grading Day) for teachers - Friday, December 21
- Return from winter break / start of second semester - Monday, January 7
- End of 3rd quarter - Friday, March 8
- Spring break - Monday, March 25 thru Friday, March 29 or TBD
- Graduation Day - Sunday, May 19
- Last day of school for students - Thursday, May 23
- Last day of school for teachers - Friday, May 24