

To: District 225 Board of Education
From: Mike Riggle
Re: School Calendar Recommendations for the 2020-2021 School Year
Date: April 29, 2019

Recommendation

It is my recommendation that detailed development and adoption of a school calendar for the 2020-2021 school year be delayed until current legislative actions and the resultant the administrative rules regarding school calendar preparation from the Illinois State Board of Education are known.

Rationale

At the present time, legislation has been introduced in both the Illinois House and Senate that could impact the current requirements for the school calendar and the conditions that define a school day for public schools in the State of Illinois. Once this legislative session has ended and revisions to current law are known it is likely to be a few months before the subsequent administrative rules from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) are released.

Constructing a School Calendar for 2020-2021

Every school calendar is unique due to the dynamic nature of national, state, and religious holidays. Developing a school calendar for the 2020-2021 school year is uniquely challenging due to the following conditions:

- Labor Day is extremely late (September 7)
- Christmas Day is on Friday
- Memorial Day is extremely late (May 31)

General Recommendations

Based on the recently revised School Calendar Preparation Guidelines as well as results from the school calendar survey administered last fall, I would like to offer the following general recommendations for the development of the 2020-2021 school calendar:

- **School year start date.** For the last 11 years, District 225 has started school either during the third or fourth full week in August. School calendar survey results indicate regardless of the school calendar option favored, an earlier start in August was the least favorable condition cited by respondents for both options. There also was strong agreement among respondents that the starting and ending dates for the high school district and the sender elementary districts should be within close proximity of each other. Therefore, **it is my recommendation that staff and students should start the 2020-2021 school year no earlier than the third full week of August.**
- **School year end date.** For a variety of reasons, it is advantageous that the school year end as early in June as possible for high school students. A later ending date in June can negatively affect educational, athletic, and academic opportunities. It can also

negatively impact summer employment and internships. **It is my recommendation that the school year end as early in June as possible.**

- **Graduation.** For many years, the Glenbrook High Schools have held graduation ceremonies on the first Sunday in June. Sunday, June 6, 2021 has been reserved for the GBS graduation in the Rosemont Theatre, which has served as the graduation venue for the school for nearly 15 years. GBN is scheduled to hold graduation ceremonies on the same day in the Sheely Center for the Performing Arts on the school campus. Area high school districts hold graduation ceremonies at various times including during the Memorial Day weekend. A change in the graduation date for the Glenbrooks would require significant planning and would probably require several scheduling changes for other important events such as the Awards Assemblies at both schools. For the 2020-2021 school calendar, **I recommend that the graduation date of Sunday, June 6, 2021 be maintained.**
- **End of semester / final exams.** Based on the recommended start date of no earlier than the third full week of August, there will likely be a significant imbalance in the number of days in each semester if the end of the first semester and final exams were to occur prior to the beginning of winter break. Although the school calendar survey results indicate a slight desire, especially among students for having finals before winter break, there is need to more fully explore the reasons behind the desired change. The survey data indicates that students, staff and parents all desire to have a winter break that is free from homework to allow students and staff an opportunity to relax and recharge prior to their return to school. **It is my recommendation that the end of the first semester, as well as final exams be scheduled after winter break for the 2020-2021 school year.** That will allow the schools to further study the impact on changes to homework policies and the structure of final exams before seeking to make a significant change to the school calendar.
- **Winter break.** Based on data received from other area high school districts as well as discussions with the sender elementary district superintendents, **it is my recommendation that the last day of school for students and staff prior to the winter break be Friday, December 18, 2020 and that students and staff should return to school on Monday, January 4, 2021.**
- **The last week prior to winter break.** The week prior to winter break is a very important time for students as teachers seek to collect projects and administer unit exams prior to the start of winter break. It is also stressful for students due to the various activities connected to the holiday season. **It is my recommendation that there be no scheduled athletic competitions, academic competitions or arts performances of any type on the Wednesday and Thursday evenings during the week prior to winter break.** Students may be engaged in practices, activities, and rehearsals as normal on those days, but they must have quality time on each of those evenings to properly prepare for their assigned academic classes.
- **Homework.** Homework has been a consistent topic of discussion for the last several years whenever the district has collected data or held focus groups to gain input on homework or the school calendar. For many reasons, both students and staff feel it is

important that vacation periods scheduled in the school calendar be free of assigned homework. There are existing policies and practices at each high school to ensure that no student is assigned homework or assessments that will impede on a student's ability to participate in religious observances. Each school is to remain responsible for communicating and ensuring that all students are able to participate in religious observances. **It is my recommendation that the district implement periods of no homework for the designated vacation periods for all students and staff in the school calendar.** These no homework periods are Thanksgiving break, winter break, and spring break. The no homework periods should be marked on the school calendar. There is no reason to wait until the 2020-2021 school year to begin this practice. **It is my further recommendation that these periods of no homework be implemented during the 2019-2020 school year.**

- **Administration of Final Exams.** For many years, the last three days of each semester have been reserved for the administration of final exams. It began when both schools followed a flexible modular schedule and continued when GBN transitioned to an alternating-day block schedule and GBS went to an eight-period day schedule. Now that both schools are on alternating-day block schedules, it is time to consider revising the schedule for the administration of final exams. **It is my recommendation that the administration continue to consider changes to the scheduling of final exam administration.** It is in the best interest of students that examinations, assessments, and project work that are a component of the final exam not be scheduled prior to the scheduled administration window for final exams to avoid conflict with the completion of unit exams prior to the days reserved for final exam administration. Once again, there is no need to wait for the 2020-2021 school year to implement a revision in the scheduling of final exam administration.