

DATE: March 13, 2012

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: High School Modified Calendar Analysis (Trustee Request #150)

ORIGINATOR: David Fraser, Executive Director Corporate Services
Tanni Parker, Assistant Superintendent Student Learning Services
Brian Smith, Director Infrastructure and Finance

RESOURCE STAFF: Bruce Cline, Sandy Forster, Chris Wright, Larry Schwenneker, Cheryl Hagen

REFERENCE: December 13, 2011 Board Meeting (Trustee Shipka)

ISSUE

The following information was requested: Provide an analysis if all high schools were to adopt a modified calendar with a November break for the 2012-2014 school year. The analysis should include benefits, risks, financial implications and other operational considerations associated with implementing a modified calendar in all high schools including schools with Grade 7 to 12 programming. Also provide information on any high schools that requested a modified calendar for 2011-2012, their rationale, and surveys they provided and the Administration's rationale for either accepting or declining the request.

BACKGROUND

N/A

CURRENT SITUATION

Implications Related to Staffing and Collective Agreements

In terms of potential risks and implications related to staffing and collective agreements, there may be potential impacts under the Support Staff Collective Agreement.

Adding a fall break will impact 10-month support staff in terms of being able to accrue enough vacation entitlement to cover both the November and Christmas recesses.

Also, clause 4.d(ii) of the Support Staff Collective Agreement states that "unless otherwise notified, 10-month employees assigned to senior high schools are required to report for duty two (2) weeks prior to the commencement of the school year." This would mean that administrative staff (e.g., administrative assistants, secretaries, clerks) would be required to start earlier in August each year which may impact attraction and retention to these positions.

In terms of teaching staff, clause 1.(d) of the Teachers' Collective Agreement states: "Natural Break means Christmas Break, Spring Break, Summer Break, other breaks of four or more week days, semester changes at high schools, and any other time approved by the Board." Due to the nature of definition, there are no implications if the Board implemented a modified calendar which added a fall break

Financial Implications

Finance does not anticipate any financial implications associated with implementing a modified calendar in high schools.

Operational Considerations

Facilities Services - A November break would allow Facilities staff time to work on smaller projects in schools, but it would come at the expense of taking time off from the summer months when staff are able to do major work that requires as much time as possible, i.e. installing new boiler systems or roofing work.

Student Transportation - The most significant challenge related to a district-wide modified calendar would be related to Edmonton Transit Services (ETS) costs. Given that the District purchases ETS passes for each complete month, the cost of an August pass would be absorbed by Student Transportation. An estimated additional cost of \$250,000 would be included in the annual Student Transportation budget, with no additional funding to offset.

ETS has indicated that, given sufficient notice, driver availability could be arranged in order to ensure basic service commitments are accommodated. It should be noted, however, that some additional service components generally available during the academic year, such as school specials, may not always be available prior to September 1.

Yellow bus service would see increased costs as well. Since the majority of yellow bus service available to high schools involves student ridership from other grade levels, costs accrued through August service additions would not be recovered during a fall break. Buses would still run during a fall break in order to serve junior high riders, meaning buses could not be parked and no cost savings could be realized.

High Schools that Requested a Modified Calendar for 2011-2012

Harry Ainlay

Rationale:

- Staff and students felt a wellness break would be very positive. It was hoped to show a decline in staff/student illness thus resulting in less student/staff absences.
- A November break could open the possibility of student exchanges and travel trips to sister schools throughout the world, limiting students away from scheduled classes.

Questions and Concerns:

- Contracts for custodial as well as support staff needed to be looked at.
- School athletics may be negatively affected as this would disrupt the volleyball league.

Survey Results:

- Staff were 100 per cent in favour of this proposal.
- Parent Council was 100 per cent in favour and wanted to have the catchment area schools get on board with this as well.

- A sampling of students were surveyed and 80 to 90 per cent were in favour. Some students did not like the disruption in learning, however the majority felt the break would be beneficial.

The request was denied given the following considerations:

- Research evidence does not support claims of educational or academic gains resulting from a modified calendar.
- Claims of a School Council in one school indicating that a calendar change would be appreciated by surrounding schools is speculative and unsupported.
- The programming at the school was not of such a unique nature to warrant approval as is the case with current modified calendar approvals (i.e. religious holidays, specific programming such as Sports Alternative Program, extended year schooling for pregnant or parenting teens, High School Flexibility Pilot, etc.).
- At the time of the request, the Board was engaged in discussions regarding modified school calendars and it was best to consider Board direction prior to approval of one case.

Queen Elizabeth

Rationale:

- students can catch up on work
- reduce teacher absenteeism
- many increase student achievement
- shorter summer favours continuity of study

Survey Results:

Family		Staff	
Families at the school	810	Total staff	109
Response to survey	411		
Support	373	Support	105
Non support	68	Non support	4

The request was denied given the following considerations:

- Research evidence does not support claims of educational or academic gains resulting from a modified calendar.
- The programming at the school was not of such a unique nature to warrant approval as is the case with current modified calendar approvals (i.e. religious holidays, specific programming such as Sports Alternative Program, extended year schooling for pregnant or parenting teens, High School Flexibility Pilot, etc.).
- The indicated rationale that students can catch up on work during a fall break is an unsupported aspiration.
- At the time of the request, the Board was engaged in discussions regarding modified school calendars and it was best to consider Board direction prior to approval of one case.

KEY POINTS

- There may be potential impacts under the Support Staff Collective Agreement.
- An initial disadvantage would be child care arrangements for the fall break.
- Transportation is also an issue as many students in travel not only by yellow bus but also by ETS. By starting in August, an added month of busing and bus pass subsidy is incurred by schools and the District. An estimated additional cost of \$250,000 would be included in the annual Student Transportation budget, with no additional funding to offset.
- For the 2011-2012 school year M.E. LaZerte was selected by Alberta Education to participate in the High School Flexibility Pilot Project. Through collaboration with members of the school community, organization and programming models were discussed, resulting in various initiatives including a modified school calendar.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Related Facts

TP:ja

Related Facts

Much research has been completed on the positive and negative effects of shortening the summer break and inserting other breaks in the school year for schools. The research is quite divided though as to a clear benefit being shown. The majority of the research focuses on year round schooling not the simple addition of a few days or a week into August and the addition of a single fall break. In addition, the research for the most part is based on American schools whose traditional summer break is three months not two.

Four main areas of impact of any change to school calendars are parents, students (achievement and attendance), school staff, and school operation.

In first attending to parents, an obvious initial disadvantage would be child care arrangements for the fall break. For high school aged students having a fall break is not as large a concern as it would be with younger students. What could be impacted would be summer work undertaken by these older students possibly having to be ended earlier with an earlier start-up as well as child care of younger siblings. A second potential negative would be some parents needing to make concessions in holiday planning to be home for school startup prior to the traditional September start date. It could be argued that this would diminish after the initial year of implementation and parents and students would adjust as needed. This was noted in anecdotal comments from residents of Elk Island School District who adopted an early start and fall break week calendar district-wide in the 2008 school year and re-confirmed as their calendar by the board of trustees in October of 2011. Prior to that, they had two years of partial fall break that included November 11 and an equivalent number of days before September to balance the days off in November.

- During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, a number of Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) stakeholders were consulted related to the transformation of outdated board regulation HCA.BR –School Year Calendar into board policy HCA.BP – Approval of the School Year Calendar and an administrative regulation HCA.AR – School Year Calendar. Parents at the Key Communicators meeting in March of 2006 insisted that students should not start school until September. Indeed most wanted to start after Labour Day, but this would be impossible in years when Labour Day falls on the 5, 6 or 7 of September with current collective agreements that make it difficult to increase the length of the school day to compensate for fewer instructional days. (e.g. current Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA] collective agreement sets a maximum of 1,430 minutes of instructional duties per week.).
- Similar sentiment was shown in the EPS fall 2011 survey of parents regarding a district-wide modified calendar.

A stated advantage by parents in Elk Island, as well as others who support current modified calendars, is the ability for parents to have a fall vacation with their children at a time when it is not a peak period for tourism.

It is in the area of student achievement and attendance that, as mentioned in the research, seems divided as to benefit. Again, this is related to what is considered year round schooling and the longer summer break in American schools. Cooper (1996), in his major review of research on summer vacation and achievement found limited if any benefit on student achievement from a

shortened summer vacation. This of course would be a major addition of weeks of school in summer not the addition of a few days or a week.

Attendance at M.E. LaZerte High School comparing years prior to their present modified calendar shows no significant difference in attendance during start-up days whether they be in August or September.

Stated advantages to the shortened summer and fall break are a shorter time away from studies and the opportunity for students to have a break from the rigour of fall start-up of the school year. Again, in anecdotal comments from Elk Island, as well as a survey of achievement results on the posted Annual Education Results Review (AERR) data for Elk Island shows no significant changes in achievement. How the modified calendar at M.E. LaZerte will impact student achievement has yet to be determined.

The advantages and disadvantages for school staff and school operations begin with the fall break. Teachers in Elk Island in anecdotal conversations have provided strong positive response to the break. EPS teachers who were involved in year round schooling and now a modified calendar have reported similar positive response to the fall break. However, it should be noted Elk Island found that after the institution of a fall break there was no significant difference in staff attendance or absenteeism.

School operations as a whole would not be affected by the fall break however there are staff contractual obligations that would have to be worked through related to the early start and fall break, particularly related to collective agreements.

Transportation is also an issue as many students in travel not only by yellow bus but also by ETS. By starting in August, an added month of busing and bus pass subsidy is incurred by schools and the District.

With summer school operating in nearly all district high schools a fall break would provide an additional window for both custodial and maintenance staff to complete tasks that require an empty school. This was seen as an advantage in Elk Island and could be viewed positively in EPS as well.

In conclusion, it is difficult to provide an analysis beyond the obvious positives and negatives of beginning school in August and having a fall break. As stated most research is based upon year round schooling not the addition of a single week to balance off a fall break. Until M.E. LaZerte has completed a full year of their modified calendar, beyond anecdotal data from neighbouring district, Elk Island, it is difficult to present a definitive analysis of advantages or disadvantages of shortening the summer break and adding a fall break.