

OLYMPIA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Balanced Calendar Exploratory Committee (BCEC)
October 19, 2022 (Meeting #3 of 5)
6-7:30 pm
Board Room, 111 Bethel Street NE, Olympia

Meeting Notes

Welcome, coming together

Dr. Patrick Murphy, Superintendent of Olympia School District (OSD), welcomed participants and explained the technology set-up for the meeting.

He related that he'd engaged in conversations with people in the community around this committee's work and wanted to make it clear that no decision has been made on whether or not to move toward a more balanced calendar. He also noted that, even if the district decides to move forward, the very earliest that a calendar change could be initiated would be the 2024-2025 school year.

Dr. Murphy also announced that he had talked with the superintendent of the Winlock School District, which recently decided to try a balanced calendar, and has invited people from their district to come to talk to the BCEC at the November 2 meeting. Additionally, Dr. Murphy spoke with Dana Anderson, the superintendent of the Educational Service District for our region (44 districts in Thurston County, Mason County, Lewis County and more) to share the work OSD is doing and that if Olympia decides to move forward, he will ask the ESD to coordinate a regional discussion of this idea among our neighboring districts.

Frank Kwan, In-Person Facilitator, noted that the Facilitation Team has been working with a variety of members of the BCEC to get answers to the questions that have been raised. He commented that the teamlets are working on the key areas and questions that BCEC has raised, and the next two meetings will be focused on sharing their findings and answers to help move to the next step, including more data from ThoughtExchange.

Review results of asynchronous ThoughtExchange

Survey Question: What perspective would you like BCEC and district leaders to consider as we continue to explore the idea of changing the school calendar?

J.Marie Riche, Zoom Facilitator, shared a PowerPoint presentation with highlights of results from the ThoughtExchange survey fielded to parents, students, staff and select community members October 7 – 18. There were 3,748 participants; 3,528 thoughts were expressed, and 82,644 ratings were given. Of the 3,524 who responded to the question of roles, 80% were parents, 6% students, 19% staff, and 9% community members.

Top thoughts focused on:

- HVAC systems – these thoughts came up most often
- Families with parenting plans, or families with multiple households
- After care, including summer and break enrichment
- The need to align with neighboring districts

Additional prevalent thoughts:

- Childcare – some felt this is achievable; that our community partners will provide programs when needed
- Concern over sports programs, more need to align with other districts
- Comments about families' time
- Concern about summer: work for students and staff, logistical challenges and affordable enrichment activities

Those who are supportive of a balanced calendar represent 47% of respondents; 42% have concerns; and 11% are neutral.

To give a sense of what kind of response the survey received, Dr. Murphy said there are 9,000 students in the district and 1400-1500 staff. The student response was quite low; a suggestion was made that giving secondary students the opportunity to complete surveys during their advisory time would give a higher response rate.

The PowerPoint presentation will be sent out to BCEC participants and posted on the website.

Student Panel – What is most important to students with the school calendar?

Mr. Kwan noted that there was a strong interest at the last meeting on having more student input and participation, and a student panel was convened for this meeting to help meet that need. Ms. Riche invited students in attendance to participate in the Student Panel. Jade Austin, Adi Waters, Malachi Cardona, and Ava Miller volunteered.

Ms. Riche invited students to respond to the question: What excites you about the prospect of a balanced calendar? Students made the following responses:

- A large part of learning can be forgotten over long breaks. A balanced calendar ensures the learning experience can be more consistent for all students throughout the year.
- More balance.
- One benefit of a shorter summer is mental health burnout. Students stay more engaged – bigger breaks during the year lead to mental health recuperation.

Ms. Riche posed the question: What concerns do you have about a balanced calendar? Students responded:

- The fact that people confuse a balanced calendar and year-round school. We need to explain what it is and what it would really look like.
- Most students do not know what this is – many didn't see the invitation to ThoughtExchange.
- HVAC / air conditioning and hotter weather.
- Summer school – how would we do it in a shorter window?
- Summer camps and sports – lots of change. We need to know what it would look like. It won't seem so chaotic if they know in advance how it would affect them.

Ms. Riche asked: What effects do you think changing the calendar in this way might have on your learning? For instance, we talk about a summer learning slide. Do you think this would be helpful or a hindrance?

- A hindrance because teachers say kids forget; even from the weekend some kids are out of it. Teachers avoid giving tests on Mondays because of that. More breaks might lead to more time being "out of it." And maybe more need for review throughout the year.
- Helpful because more regular breaks help with mental health.

Mr. Kwan asked students what would be the best way to reach other students for their input.

- Through their teachers / advisor.
- During advisory periods – get live time responses.

Ms. Riche asked: Is there anything you would like to say that hasn't been mentioned?

- Childcare, summer camps.
- Teachers are busy all of August with planning. This comes out of their summer break. It will impact teachers if summer is shortened.
- It would affect everyone – the purpose is to give more breaks. A model calendar should be designed to help students and teachers as much as possible.
- A shortened summer can also be helpful.

Ms. Riche and Mr. Kwan thanked the students for participating in the panel. Ms. Riche commented that the students echo many of the comments expressed in ThoughtExchange, but that it is good to hear it in the students' voice.

Report outs on answers to questions and research on data needs

Community Partners / Childcare Providers - Allison Weide shared a one-page summary of the information collected by the Teamlet, which will be sent out to BCEC participants and posted on the website. The team has not heard back from everyone, but questions raised so far are:

- Will there be a break leading up to spring testing?
- Is there a bussing program for homeless students?
- Will there be meals during breaks?
- Will there be staffing for interventions?

Providers mentioned potential difficulties, such as:

- Space for their programs due to other events during the year
- Staffing throughout the year since college students will not be available
- Rain interferes with outdoor programs

Benefits mentioned:

- Better engagement with families
- Vacation opportunities on off-seasons
- Opportunities for high school students to have longer shifts during breaks
- With childcare spread out, less financial burden for parents
- For businesses, more revenue
- More family engagement

Ms. Weide said the overall theme from their conversations is that providers feel that the majority preference should rule, and programmatic scheduling will adjust to match the need.

District employee associations – Bonnie Hauschka reported on their Teamlet's work to contact leaders of the 7 employee associations in the OSD. They are collecting responses and will meet to create a summary for reporting at the next BCEC meeting. Themes that have come up so far include concerns about HVAC and the need to match calendars with neighboring districts.

Research – Jayme Fierro presented a one-page synopsis of information gained from a study of available research. This document will be sent out to the BCEC participants and posted on the website. She commented that there is not much research available about balanced calendars. As for summer learning loss, it is an issue, but there is no clear answer to how to prevent it. There is some data about the positive

impacts a balanced calendar can have on marginalized students due to enrichment activities and intersessions, such as opportunities through community partners.

She said some questions arise from the research study:

- Why did local districts adopt or reject a balanced calendar?
- Are we only looking at academic impact or at the whole child? Most of the research is about social / emotional learning. Academic benefits or risks are not as well studied.
- Other areas of research raise questions about how data is collected: standardized testing? Local testing? The data are inconsistent.

Bottom line, says Ms. Fierro, is that we don't have clear answers about the benefits and risks of this kind of calendar adjustment.

Timing – Ms. Riche explained that the Timing teamlet ran into challenges getting together to consider what a more balanced calendar might look like in Olympia. When are the breaks, where would summer be shortened? They will report in 2 weeks.

What were the most important ideas from what you've learned so far - from the research you read as part of your homework assignment, from the ThoughtExchange results, and/or from the reports from the Teamlets?

Ms. Riche asked participants: from what they have heard and read, from conversations with neighbors and others, what is rising to the top regarding the possibility of a balanced calendar? Participants formed into breakout groups to consider this question. Comments from the groups are as follows:

- We need a clear understanding of what a balanced calendar is before we can support it.
- Having calendar models as examples
- More consultation with the students. Students can be reached through their advisory room, but could they have a presentation first – in a student friendly language?
- Realistic concerns of staff for outside work and work-life balance
- Student summer work is impacted
- Work-life balance
- What are the challenges? Are we doing all we can to address those within the current format?
- Is there enough compelling evidence to support this change?
- Academic vs. social / emotional benefits?
- What is the policy about assigning homework over the breaks? Having homework will not help mental health. Multiple breaks might mean multiple projects.
- Many impacts for divided families.
- Difficulty transitioning sports/activities = social impact
- Running Start, standardized tests, how will they be impacted?
- More data on learning loss – address it directly; maybe we don't need a balanced calendar
- Will there be more unnecessary review? This might not be an issue but we want student perspective.
- A minimum reduction of summer might not be so large.
- Research is inconclusive; what is the problem we are trying to solve?
- Where could we have an impact on learning loss? (identify and resolve)
- The research on either side is not pushing one way. Votes in the community are tied. There are no clear lines to show what works on learning loss. All of this is from pre-covid. Mental health, academic gap has all shown up since then.
- Cost factor: HVAC, pay for teachers
- Enrichment during breaks

- Alignment with other districts. North Thurston? We are spinning our wheels unless there is community buy-in. Tumwater, Griffin, Yelm, Shelton, etc.
- Are we wasting our time?
- Even if we do not follow this with the balanced calendar, this process has identified multiple shortfalls of our current system that need to be addressed.
- Forgetting curve? Research.
- Balanced calendars for elementary vs secondary have different effects.
- Additional transitions could be difficult for special ed students and staff.

The following comment was submitted by an attendee after the meeting:

- Each level of education would be impacted in different ways. The elementary years are crucial for developing a love of learning and for a student to even see themselves as a “learner”. This may seem simple but it’s huge and there is a lot of research to suggest this. Elementary years impact middle and high schools. The balanced calendar would potentially look different (in terms of programming only) for grade levels and from one building to the next. This would allow creative planning that meets the needs of each building’s student’s/family’s learning needs within their balanced calendar. So, again allowing some ownership at the building level for how to potentially implement programming.

Review of agenda

Ms. Riche explained that the next meeting on November 2 will be organized much the same as this one. BCEC will hear from a panel from Winlock School District; there will be more reports from teamlets, and participants will have more time to talk.

This will give participants an opportunity to consider the opinion they came with into this committee, and how that perspective has been confirmed or changed by what we have learned together.

At the 5th and final meeting in mid-November, participants will be asked to talk about that: how do you feel now? Had your perspective changed? Then we will divide into groups based on support or opposition, identify pros and cons, and have time to talk about those.

Meeting Evaluation

What worked well:

- Student Panel – it was good to hear the student perspective
- It’s nice to see people in the room; Zoom participants, try to attend in person

Dr. Murphy thanked the teamlet members for their volunteer work. Ms. Riche echoed appreciation for all the participants and especially for the students who had been willing to express their thoughts out loud in a room full of committee members.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm

BCEC Participants Attending:

- Jade Austin
- Taylor Bannister (Zoom)
- Kolanye Bykoff (Zoom)
- Malachi Cardona
- Jennifer Cole
- Scott Cushing (Zoom)
- Quinn Dickason

- Tad Earley (Zoom)
- Jayme Fierro
- Kaylin Furry
- Azisa Glast (Zoom)
- Emily Griffith
- Bonnie Hauschka (Zoom)
- Imran Kasmani (Zoom)
- Elliot Malpass-Branch (Zoom)
- Ava Miller (Zoom)
- Suzanne Murray (Zoom)
- Abby Neumiller-Hanell (Zoom)
- Bethany Opstedal (Zoom)
- Colette Paulson (Zoom)
- Jeff Pearson
- Sarah Pearson
- Joel Plewa (Zoom)
- MJ Sather
- Paul Sierra
- Heather Slater (Zoom)
- Steve Roth
- Carrie Tradewell (Zoom)
- Amanda Villani
- Adi Waters
- Allison Weide
- Frank Wilson
- Dana Woods
- Karen Zarate (Zoom)