

OLYMPIA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Balanced Calendar Exploratory Committee (BCEC)  
November 2, 2022 (Meeting #4 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 thanked everyone for attending, especially in light of the busy week. He also expressed appreciation for the guests from Winlock Schools, a district that has adopted a more balanced calendar beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, noting that OSD can learn from them.

Frank Kwan, In-Person Facilitator, also welcomed BCEC participants and thanked them for attending.

J.Marie Riche, Zoom Facilitator, added that all committee members began this process with an opinion about the balanced calendar, some strongly in favor, some with strong concerns, and others in the middle. She said up till now the committee has been dealing with questions and information to answer those questions and to learn more about balanced calendars. She asked participants to listen carefully and in an open, listening mode to the panel and report outs today and to weigh the question of whether anything heard or learned in the BCEC meetings has led to a change in their thinking or feelings in either direction. There will be an opportunity to discuss these thoughts and feelings later in the meeting.

### **Panel Discussion and Q&A, Winlock Schools**

Dr. Garry Cameron, Superintendent of Winlock Schools, introduced himself and gave a quick synopsis of the process Winlock undertook to move toward a more balanced calendar for the 2022-23 school year. Beginning with the OSPI grant in March 2021, the district engaged in conversation with the teacher's union, which initially was opposed to the idea. A committee was formed; more conversations and study occurred, with a focus on how a change might benefit their students. Winlock is a high poverty district, with a great need for school improvement. They visited schools in Kelso, WA and Michigan that have modified their calendar; those visits helped answer their questions. The Winlock school board approved changing the calendar by reducing the summer break by 3 weeks. School began August 29 and will end June 29. They have just finished their first intersession October 14, and will have an extra day at Thanksgiving, the week prior to Presidents' Day, 5 days at Memorial Day, and Mondays in June off.

Ms. Riche asked if Winlock had approached the change to the calendar regionally. Dr. Cameron said they had not. They moved Homecoming from October 14 to October 7, but had not made

other changes. He acknowledged that there might be some impact to athletics with the February break. Randy Hall, Winlock school board member, related that the board had dialogued with the teachers' union about changing the calendar. The teachers were apprehensive about the change, but wanted to be proactive to make things better. Winlock is 80% high poverty in a region that is otherwise not high poverty. Mr. Hall noted that they had to look at what their students need, and the grant gave them the opportunity to do this other thing.

Michelle Jeffries, Special Programs Director, joined in once the calendar was approved to oversee intersessions. For the October intersession, they asked teachers who wanted to work or not, strictly on a volunteer basis. Many wanted the break for rest; others were excited at the opportunity to teach other subjects. Many held back to see how it would go. They ran the intersession with 3 certificated teachers, substitutes, one counselor, and about half the paraeducators. Already about half of the teachers have signed up to teach in the February intersession.

Over one third of the elementary students signed up; more wanted to attend, but didn't register by the cut-off date. They expect this to improve in future years as awareness about the opportunities grows. About 10-15 middle and high school students signed up on their own, and the district called the homes of all students who needed credit retrieval or tutoring to ensure they knew of the opportunities.

Ms. Riche asked what the biggest benefits are so far. Dr. Cameron noted that it is still early, but connections between students and school / staff are better. On recent instructional walks in the middle and high schools, they also noted that it was calmer after the break. Also, there were some activities they could provide during the intersession that made it special, such as a visit to the Pumpkin Patch.

Mr. Kwan asked how the change is being received by the community. Mr. Hall noted that the union reps are monitoring that closely, but it appears that a lot of parents and teachers are very positive following the intersession. Staff appreciated time to be parents – able to go to their own child's school and volunteer.

A BCEC participant asked if it is hard to keep students focused before breaks. Dr. Cameron said they think it is actually helpful rather than more difficult, but they will need to collect data.

Another BCEC participant asked if air conditioning was a concern. Dr. Cameron shared that their elementary schools have air conditioning, and that they are purchasing mobile ac units for the middle and high school classrooms. They are applying for modernization grants to improve the HVAC systems in the district. He also noted that when there are concerns about winter weather, the school day is cancelled or ended early. They plan to follow the same policy if high temperatures or air quality are a concern on any particular day.

An additional question was raised about how the intersessions are being funded. Dr. Cameron indicated that grant funds are providing the per diems and transportation. He acknowledged that this would be a cost to the district in the future, but that if it keeps their students more connected and improves academics, it will be worth it.

One BCEC member question was whether high needs students receive prioritization for intersession enrollment. Ms. Jeffries said that everyone who registered was able to attend, and one 1:1 student who did not register was also allowed to attend.

Responding to a question about administrative coverage, Ms. Jeffries said that if the intersession caused administrative personnel to work above their contract, they would be paid from grant funds. In the schools, principals and vice principals split their time, so that there was always one administrator in the building.

BCEC participants were encouraged to write down any additional questions, and the Facilitation Team will follow up with the guests from Winlock to get answers. No additional questions were submitted.

Dr. Murphy and Ms. Riche thanked Dr. Cameron, Mr. Hall, and Ms. Jeffries for taking the time to come to this meeting and share their information and experience.

## **Report outs on answers to questions and research on data needs**

### **Timing**

Suzanne Murray reported for the Timing teamlet. They were heavy on elementary representation on their team and were concerned about not having sufficient perspective from the high school, so asked Ms. Riche to follow up with HS staff, which she did. They worried that spring scheduling around testing might make the scheduling of additional breaks difficult at the high school. Their team was also moved by student and ThoughtExchange comments that ramping up and down for breaks takes time and energy; so they thought it would be better to add time to existing breaks rather than create additional ones, such as:

- Turning Thanksgiving into a full week off (+2 days in November)
- Turning Presidents Day Weekend into a full week off (+3 days in February)
- Perhaps making Spring Break into a two week break (+ 5 days in April)
- Extending Memorial Day break, perhaps not into a full week (+1-2 days in May. This break in particular depends on compatibility with HS testing needs)

They felt October is early to have a break as so many things have just begun, such as kindergarten, special programs and clubs, and they felt that students and staff might still be feeling the excitement of the start of the year and not yet need a break.

As for how to make up the time, the teamlet wanted to avoid ending the school year close to July 4<sup>th</sup>, so thought it would be likely that at least some of the made-up time would need to go in August.

They question what absenteeism is like at the end of the year and in addition to the HVAC concerns, and wonder if having more school in the summer would lead to increased needs for watering of fields and playgrounds.

Ms. Riche shared highlights of her conversation with the high school assessment director about the teamlet's concerns over the timing of the breaks conflicting with assessments. The director said that it really depends on what the calendar looks like, but they already adjust assessments to work with the calendar. She did mention that it is important to work with other districts in our region as there are many cooperative agreements for providing special programs, not just athletics.

Ms. Riche thanked the teamlet for their work. She mentioned Bethany Opstedal had also worked on this issue, but had been unable to attend this meeting.

### **Research**

Mr. Kwan shared that Ms. Fierro had indicated there was not much more to add to the report she made at the previous meeting.

### **Traditionally marginalized and high-needs students and families**

Robbi Kesler reported that the teamlet was able to talk to a few different groups, and those groups are reaching out to parents. Most are concerned about summer learning loss, but it is difficult when so much about a balanced calendar is unknown.

Special Education - Transitions are hard for special education students; loss happens at every break. More breaks would be more disruptive. There is a concern about whether services will continue during breaks; support for a balanced calendar is likely if students could receive extra services and none will be cut back.

The general feeling from most is that if this will be a benefit to schools generally, most would support it even if it is not directly beneficial.

There is a concern about credit recovery if students transfer from a balanced calendar to a district with a traditional calendar.

Immigration & Refugees – Most comments were positive. It would give more exposure to English, more enrichment, and more connection.

Improvements in process – The teamlet concluded that this is a large task for volunteers and suggested staff, such as the family liaisons and bilingual family engagement specialists, be involved in getting additional information from these groups.

Mr. Kwan thanked Ms. Kesler for her work, especially since she had been dealing with a family health issue.

### **District employee associations**

Bonnie Hauschka thanked Frank Wilson for his work on this teamlet and reported that they had contacted leaders of all 7 employee associations. She reviewed the main thoughts that came out of their conversations.

Benefits:

- Not Restarting
- Still have long summer break
- Consistency

Challenges:

- HVAC
- Child care
- Scheduling sports
- Not being able to have other summer jobs (hardship for classified staff)

Impacts to those in the associations:

- Contracts would need to be rewritten
- Difficult to accomplish projects with less summer work time
- Not enough recharge time
- More staff needed for increased workload
- Instruction would need to be adjusted to fit breaks

Impacts to student learning:

- Less learning loss
- Intercession Learning Opportunities
- Who pays for it?
- Who attends? Who teaches it?
- Breaks are necessary, would assignments carry over?
- Harder on students who struggle with transitions
- Benefit: school may be only food source
- Kids may be alone more often
- Inability to regulate building temperature

Impact of a shorter summer:

- Difficult for staff and students who work other jobs in the summer.
- Significant maintenance happens in the summer in schools
- Loss of income for families

Effect on extracurricular programs:

- HVAC concerns
- Summer school opportunities provided throughout the year
- Transportation concerns for sports
- Difficult if it does not match the surrounding districts

Ms. Haushka noted these are the reflections of the leaders of each group; the members have not been polled.

Ms. Riche commented that all teamlet reports will be included in the full documentation of the BCEC's process. Participants will receive copies of the reports with the meeting notes, and the reports will be posted on the district's website.

Ms. Riche also noted that the teamlet reports are dipstick assessments in each case. Every teamlet has identified additional questions. If the district decides to move forward, each committee has identified ways to dive deeper into exploring the issues surrounding a move to a more balanced calendar. As an example, each employee association would need to initiate a deeper conversation with its members.

### **Student Voice**

Ms. Riche reported that there had been a conversation with district leaders to brainstorm ways to understand a student perspective on the balanced calendar issue. A few strategies were suggested as possible:

1. A ThoughtExchange targeted to students, administered in their advisory period;
2. Work with teachers to facilitate a dialogue with students – also probably during their advisory period.
3. Create focus groups of cross-sections of students

As with the questions for the associations, a deeper dive in this area is a good idea to pursue if the BCEC and the School Board determine there is merit to continue the exploration. For now, it was decided it would be too rushed to try to gather this information between meetings 3 and 5, and it would shortchange the process. It would be better to host a focus group of students to craft questions that would be meaningful to them and then to implement either a survey or class dialogues. This will be documented in the BCEC report as a suggested next step to explore the student perspective.

### **Committee dialogue**

Ms. Riche asked BCEC participants to form into groups of 4-5 to talk with each other and share how their thinking has shifted based on all we have heard and learned, not just tonight, but over the full process. Participants were asked to jot down anything that might need to be included in the meeting notes.

### **Reflections**

- Family benefits
- Students needing support – hard to replace all of those
- High school is already short of staff – how service special needs
- What is the research? The data is not there
- Will we need to add instructional time?
- Concerns about weather, mental health of students not outside enough if summer is shortened
- Testing must not happen directly after breaks
- Coordinate breaks to fit with schedule so students don't have to study over breaks
- Concerns for marginalized and traditionally underserved students

- Noting most districts with balanced calendar – staff appreciate and like it. Appreciate what it does for kids and atmosphere. Enrichment can change the environment at school, the climate and attitude toward school and learning in general. There are other components to learning loss.
- We underestimate students – if they understand the reasons for this, they will be on board
- Coming with a childcare perspective – it's been good to hear reasons to make this change.
- If OSD went ahead with this, it might help other districts to get on board. Understanding the problems involved in not working regionally, but recognizing sometimes there is a need to make a change, to be the first
- Important to support students and staff – how affects burnout, learning loss?
- How would we pay for this? Would it be better to use the money to support the students who need it? What is the most cost-effective way to support students and staff?

Ms. Riche thanked everyone for reflecting and sharing, and indicated this will be at the heart of the work at the next meeting.

## **Review of agenda**

Ms. Riche reviewed the agenda for the next meeting, in which the BCEC participants will further reflect on their views and identify areas of common ground and disagreement as well as next steps.

## **Meeting Evaluation**

What worked well:

- Appreciate the extra meeting time available from not having introductions

Ms. Riche encouraged everyone to attend the next and final meeting. Dr. Murphy expressed that he was very grateful and thankful to the participants for their work. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.

BCEC Participants Attending:

- Kolanye Bykoff (Zoom)
- Malachi Cardona
- Jennifer Cole
- Scott Cushing (Zoom)
- Tad Earley (Zoom)
- Jayme Fierro (Zoom)
- Kaylin Furry (Zoom)
- Corrie Gerou (Zoom)
- Eowyn Grubbs
- Bonnie Hauschka (Zoom)
- Pastora Hernandez-Barbee
- Sandy Hallstrom (Zoom)
- John Hanby (Zoom)

- Leslie Huff (Zoom)
- Robbi Kessler
- Elliot Malpass-Branch (Zoom)
- Ava Miller (Zoom)
- Suzanne Murray (Zoom)
- Abby Neumiller-Hanell (Zoom)
- Colette Paulson (Zoom)
- Jeff Pearson
- Sarah Pearson
- Audrey Perry (Zoom)
- Joel Plewa (Zoom)
- Steve Roth
- MJ Sather
- Heather Slater (Zoom)
- Carrie Tradewell (Zoom)
- Allison Weide
- Frank Wilson
- Condee Wood (Zoom)
- Dana Woods (Zoom)