

2012 WCSD Calendar Survey: Summary of Findings

The Washoe County School District's strategic plan, *Envision WCSD 2015 – Investing In Our Future*, calls for important reforms to our school calendar to ensure that we are meeting the education needs of all students in the district. The plan pledges that “high-quality instruction will be differentiated and engaging, and those students who need additional support will receive targeted interventions to ensure academic success. In addition, those students who are succeeding and excelling will receive opportunities to achieve even more” (pg. 11). As a result, several changes to the school calendar are outlined in Objective 5.4.3 of the strategic plan, "The traditional school schedule will be revised to accommodate credit recovery systems (e.g. an earlier August start date and/or longer winter break) to provide time for additional credit recovery and intervention programs" (pg. 38).

To meet the goals of the strategic plan, a Calendar Committee was assembled and tasked to develop a district-wide calendar that maximizes student learning and achievement for all students. The committee identified four key goals the new district-wide calendar must meet to best serve WCSD students:

- Add an intersession (break period) to help struggling students recover credits and instructional time and provide higher achieving students with additional enrichment opportunities.
- Shorten the summer break to reduce learning loss, so that less time is spent on re-teaching and more time is spent on new learning.
- End the fall semester before winter break.
- Maximize school district resources and support by starting most schools on the same day (*exceptions include Incline schools and multi-track year round schools*).

Calendar Development

Three calendars were developed to meet the four key goals of the new district-wide calendar. These three options were originally submitted for public feedback via an online survey administered in May 2011. Of the three calendar options presented, 63% of those responding to the survey favored the Option 1 calendar (see below). The Option 1 calendar was proposed to the Board of Trustees in May 2011. Although there was enough support for the Option 1 calendar that the board members could have voted at that time, Superintendent Morrison asked that the Calendar Committee gather more input from staff and community before the trustees vote on the new calendar schedule.

Following this decision, the Option 1 calendar was again presented to the public during 50 town hall meetings scheduled in October, November, and December of 2011. The purpose of the town hall meetings was three-fold: (1) assess the extent of community support for the proposed Option 1 calendar changes; (2) identify the primary concerns or barriers to implementation of the Option 1 calendar; and (3) brainstorm alternative calendar options that meet the goals of the strategic plan and address the primary concerns of the community. To notify parents and WCSD staff about

Four Key Goals of the New District-Wide Calendar

- Provide intersessions
- Shorten length of summer break
- End semester before winter break
- Start most schools on same day



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the meetings, the Calendar Committee sent Connect Ed phone calls and posted the dates and times on Infinite Campus. The local and school district media also published the meeting dates and times on their websites and in print.

Over 60% of the more than 600 people who attended the town hall meetings supported the Option 1 calendar. Of those who were dissatisfied with the Option 1 calendar, 24% requested that school start later in August. Another 23% requested that the length or timing of one or more breaks change. As a result, the Calendar Committee developed the Option 2 calendar, which features a later August start date and June end date. Although some town hall attendees favored changing the timing of the fall or spring break to correspond with Nevada Day and Easter, these changes would conflict with the timing of the High School Proficiency Exam and Criterion Reference Testing (CRTs). The Calendar Committee, the Board of Trustees, a stakeholder committee (comprised of community members, parent organizations, and WCSD staff), and Superintendent Morrison unanimously agreed that both the Option 1 and Option 2 calendars were in alignment with the strategic plan and sufficiently responded to community input.

2013-2014 WCSD Proposed Calendar Schedules

OPTION 1

- **School Year Begins:** August 5, 2013
- **School Year Ends:** June 6, 2014
- **Fall Break:** October 14 - 18
- **Winter Break:** December 23 - January 10
- **Spring Break:** March 24 - April 4
- **Summer Break:** June 9 - August 1

OPTION 2

- **School Year Begins:** August 12, 2013
- **School Year Ends:** June 13, 2014
- **Fall Break:** October 14 - 18
- **Winter Break:** December 23 - January 10
- **Spring Break:** March 31 - April 11
- **Summer Break:** June 16 - August 8

2012 Calendar Survey

Survey Method

As one of the final steps in the calendar decision-making process, the Option 1 and Option 2 calendars were opened to public comment from parents, community members, students, and WCSD staff via an online survey launched from January 12, 2012 through January 26, 2012. Parents and WCSD staff were notified about the survey through a ConnectEd call, a series of local and school district media announcements, and posts on Infinite Campus. Paper copies of the survey were also sent home to parents at 12 schools in which fewer than 30% of all parents logged into Infinite Campus during the previous semester. Both survey versions were also translated into Spanish.

The survey consisted of four items. The first question, *Is this the first and only time you have completed the January 2012 Calendar Survey?* was asked to dissuade individuals from responding to the survey multiple times. If respondents marked “no” on the online version, they were then directed to the end of the survey and received an automated message informing them that individuals could only respond to the survey one time. On the paper copy of the survey, respondents were asked *not* to cast their vote if they had already taken the survey to allow all participants to have an equal opportunity to share their opinion. A total of 393 individuals indicated on the screener question that they *had* taken the survey previously, and therefore no data was recorded for them. The second survey item asked for respondents to indicate whether they were a: (1) Parent/guardian of a child enrolled in a WCSD school; (2) Student enrolled in a WCSD school; (3) WCSD staff member; or (4)

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Community member without children enrolled in WCSD. Respondents could select multiple options. The third item asked respondents which, of the two calendar options presented, they *most* preferred. Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to provide feedback about the calendar options in an open-ended comment section.

Excluding those who were ineligible to complete the survey because they indicated they had taken it previously, 7,908 surveys were collected. A total of 6,969 individuals responded to the online survey and 939 responded via paper-and-pencil. Statistical software was used to identify respondents who had attempted to “stuff the ballot” by voting more than two times from the same computer. This process allowed two members from the same household to vote on the same computer, but did not permit clear instances of ballot stuffing in which eight or nine votes were cast from the same computer. The open-ended comments from these duplicate submissions were then scanned to further validate that they were submissions from the same person, rather than multiple people from the same household. In almost every case, those identified as repeat submissions had nearly identical open-ended comments. Approximately 157 online survey responses were coded as repeat submissions and were removed from analyses. Responses submitted from WCSD schools were not analyzed for repeat submissions as all WCSD computers are assigned identical IP addresses.

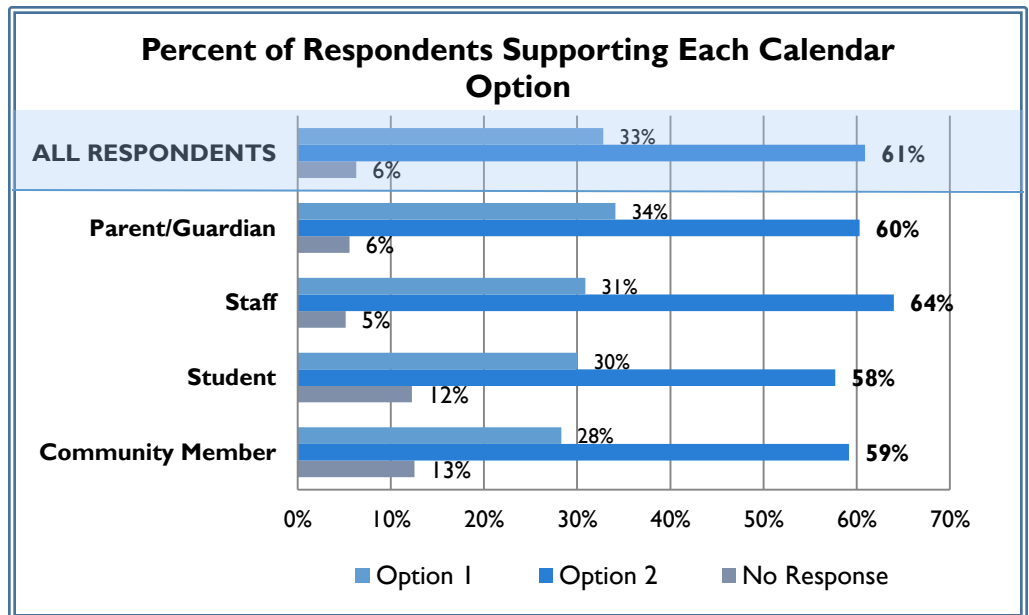
Following this process of data cleaning, a total of 7,751 survey responses were included in the final analyses. Of those, 73.8% described themselves as parents/guardians of a student enrolled in WCSD schools, 23.5% as a WCSD staff member, 7.0% as students at a WCSD school, and 4.0% as community members without children enrolled in WCSD schools. Approximately 8.2% identified themselves as both parents *and* WCSD staff members. A total of 5.4% ($n = 415$) of all surveys were completed in Spanish.

Survey Findings

When asked *Which calendar option do you most prefer?*, the majority of the 7,751 respondents (60.5%) selected Option 2. Another 33.2% selected Option 1 and 6.2% did not respond to the question.

The preference for Option 2 was consistent among respondent groups (see right).

Respondents were invited to explain their views in greater detail through open-ended responses to the question, *What concerns or questions do you have about the calendar options presented?* A total of 2,421 (31.2%) survey respondents shared a concern, question, or comment. These open-ended responses were then coded to determine the primary reasons individuals supported or did not support the calendar options.





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Approximately 276 (3.7%) respondents were *supportive* of one or more calendar options, 1,749 (22.6%) were generally *unsupportive* of the options, and 396 (5.1%) comments were generally *neutral* about the proposed options or wanted more information about a specific aspect of the calendar plan or implementation process. In cases in which open-ended responses contained multiple concerns or comments, the dominant, overarching theme was coded. When respondents left phone numbers or email addresses with their comments, staff contacted respondents to address their concerns or questions. On occasion, when two or more concerns were equally dominant, the first mentioned was coded as the primary concern. This coding process provides a rough estimate of the number and type of beliefs and concerns guiding respondents' calendar preference.

Among supportive comments, three common themes emerged. The majority of comments ($n = 241$) related to the positive impact the new calendar would have on student achievement by reducing summer learning loss, supporting credit recovery efforts, or preventing student and teacher burnout. Another 20 comments indicated support for having all students on the same calendar schedule rather than multiple schedules. A total of 15 comments supported completing the fall semester before winter break.

Among comments that did not support either calendar option, eight common themes emerged. Approximately 596 comments indicated opposition to an earlier August start date or a shorter summer break. Common reasons provided for not wanting a shorter summer break included possible interference with family vacation time, students' summer enrichment activities, and students' ability to work during the summer. Other respondents expressed concerns about students beginning school in August rather than September, including the possibility that families would miss out on warmer August weather or that students would be in school during a month with traditionally higher temperatures. Another 421 did not support either calendar option and specifically indicated that they would prefer the calendar to stay the same. These comments centered on beliefs that the traditional calendar is already effective, or that the changes would be too disruptive. Another 340 responses related to wanting one or more other breaks change (fall, winter, or spring). Most wanted to see one or more breaks shortened or lengthened, others wanted winter break to begin earlier to avoid conflicting with the holidays, and several preferred that the breaks occurred at the same time as those at the University of Nevada, Reno.

A total of 108 respondents were concerned the changes would not have a significant enough impact on credit recovery or student achievement to warrant altering the current calendar. These comments primarily centered on concerns about the effectiveness of intersessions, how the timing of breaks would affect AP tests, finals, or other testing procedures, or how more frequent breaks throughout the year might disrupt learning flow. Another 98 comments were related to concerns about having to obtain child care during breaks. Thirty-eight comments centered on the possible economic impact on local businesses or teachers' ability to maintain

Common Themes in Open-Ended Responses

Supportive Responses ($n = 276$)

- Positive impact on credit recovery and student achievement, including reduction in summer learning loss
- Completion of finals before winter break
- Support for having all WCSD students on same schedule

Areas of Concern ($n = 1,749$)

- Length or time frame of summer break
- Length or time frame of fall, winter, or spring break
- Child care during breaks
- Impact on student achievement
- Economic impact
- Large change for small population of students



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second jobs during the summer. Twenty-seven comments related to concerns that the new calendar penalized students who did not need extra academic supports or credit recovery. Another 121 comments were classified as “other” concerns, including non-specific negative comments (e.g. “I hate this idea”), or other concerns that could not be otherwise categorized.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Will changes affect all schedules, including year-round and multi-track?
- How will the changes affect teacher and other staff contracts?
- How will attendance in intersessions be enforced or encouraged?
- How will having Count Day before Labor Day affect attendance estimates?
- What enrichment activities will be available?
- When will the new calendar schedule take effect?

Among those with questions about the change or a neutral comment, most wanted to know more information about intersessions, including how students would be selected for intersessions, what types of enrichment activities might be available for higher achieving students, and how many credits could be recovered within a week or two-week long period. Other respondents wanted clarification about whether the new district calendar would override other alternative calendars, including multi-track green and year-round calendar options that exist at other schools. Additional questions surrounded when the calendar would take effect, how the new calendar schedule would affect WCSD staff contracts, and other logistics of implementation.

Next Steps

This report and other information collected during this year-long decision-making process will be presented to the Superintendent and the school district’s Board of Trustees in a February meeting. If the Board votes that the Option 2 calendar is in the best interest of WCSD students and the broader community, a plan for the implementation of a new calendar will be developed. Responses to all of the frequently asked questions noted here and the full implementation plan will be made available to students, parents, staff, and the community to ensure that all stakeholders are sufficiently prepared for any changes to the 2013-2014 school district calendar.