

## 2011 CALENDAR SURVEY REPORT: Summary & Recommendations

The school calendar is but one of many educational issues that affect student learning. For parents, however, the calendar is the very tangible and concrete outcome of District-teacher-administration discussions that impacts families' every day lives. And as such, feelings about it run the gamut – some parents love the calendar; some don't; some just want someone else to make the decisions so they can plan around it; and some are unhappy for the very opposite – that they can't be more involved in those decisions.

The range of opinions notwithstanding, hearing from parents whenever possible is helpful to the District; it informs their work and their decisions. So that even while the lack of flexibility imposed by the budget complications and negotiations meant that the calendar did not get top billing in meetings this fall – they recently requested APCP create a parent survey to help plan for the next go-around. The goal was to collect important data, and take the pulse on parents' satisfaction and preferences. It was also to help get information to the community about how the calendar is determined - its impact on student learning, the need to account for state mandates, conference and collaboration time, the importance of optimizing classroom learning and maximizing daily attendance/minimizing absences. Parent preferences are weighed along with all the above by the District, administration and teachers during contractual negotiations.

### Objectives:

- To give parents **an opportunity to weigh in** – especially in light of the changes (necessitated by the Havens rebuild and budget crisis-related furlough days) to this year's calendar compared to prior years:
    - **2010-11:** longer summer/fewer breaks; for K-8, new conference timing (full Monday and Fridays off 2x/year); new collaboration schedule (weekly early Monday release at 1:45/55)
- VERSUS**
- **Previous Years:** shorter summer/more vacation breaks; for K-8 conference timing of full week of minimum (noon dismissal) days 2x/year; conference schedule of monthly minimum, noon dismissal
  - **To educate and provide information about the process**, including the role of parents in affecting the outcome – that their input is weighed by teachers and District along with a variety of factors, the most important of which are the needs of students and student learning
  - To take the pulse of families for **overall satisfaction** (or lack thereof) with the calendar (vacations, start/end dates, etc.)
  - To better understand **parents' preferences for shorter summer/more frequent breaks vs. longer summer/fewer breaks**
  - To get actionable data regarding **parents' preferences for the new conference/collaboration schedules** in order to implement schedules for 2011-12.

- To get a picture of parents' **satisfaction with the calendar process**.

**Survey Results:** We got very clear comprehensible – and actionable – information.

- The calendar survey **participation rate was very high**
  - 720 families responded to the survey, up 33% vs. the 2007 calendar survey
- **Satisfaction: There is high overall (and increased vs. the previous survey) satisfaction** with the calendar and the calendar development process
  - In general, **people are satisfied with the current calendar. ¾ of the respondents (75%) were generally or very satisfied.**
  - The overall satisfaction with the calendar was **up 20% from the 2007** calendar survey.
  - **Over ¾ (77%) were satisfied with the new school schedule (collaboration days/conference weeks).**
  - In addition, of those who felt the calendar was an important educational issue (which was 95% of those who responded), **83% were satisfied with the calendar development process.**
- **Vacations: there's no way to make everyone happy!**
  - **The majority of respondents with an opinion preferred a shorter summer** (62%) while 38% preferred a longer summer. *2% of respondents* had no opinion.
  - **The single most popular response was, "Strongly prefer a shorter summer."** *37% of respondents with an opinion gave this answer.*
  - Thus, people seem to prefer more frequent full week breaks during the year.
  - Further supporting the idea that longer breaks make more sense is the fact that a third *of all parents* admitted that they were likely or very likely to take their kids out of school to lengthen a long-weekend – supporting the District's need to minimize student absences (which mean a loss of state funding in subsequent years).
- **Collaboration days: the new schedule is well-liked and people want to see it continue.**
  - **80% of respondents with a preference and for whom it was applicable wanted to continue with the new collaboration day schedule.**
  - **Monday was preferred over Wednesday** (the only two days given as options) for collaboration day by a margin of 2-1.
- **Conference week: respondents like the new schedule, and feel very strongly about keeping conferences** (both k-5 spring ones and 6<sup>th</sup> grade ones).

**Recommendations:**

Thanks to the clarity of the data, we suggest that APCP should continue to work with the District to take a survey every other spring, coordinating its timing with any other important issues being considered by the community (i.e. Parcel Tax). Its goals should be similar to those this year – to get

a sense of parent satisfaction with the calendar, but also to have one or two actionable items attached to it. Given the results, we recognize the importance of engaging with parents, both in communicating clearly District policy and procedure – as well as soliciting their input. Parents are stakeholders and as such should be given the opportunity to weigh in. A bi-annual survey would provide an important opportunity to both educate and engage parents. Carefully constructed and thoughtfully solicited, those results would be worth their weight in gold.

APCP Perspective:

While the calendar is an issue that sometimes arouses strong opinions from parents, APCP feels in the grand scheme of things, it is not one of the more pressing educational issues on the district plate.

One or two comments suggest that because the schools rely on parent support and donations, this is reason enough for the District to cater to parents' preferences for setting the calendar. Philosophically APCP does not support a “retail” model of philanthropy. Because the District currently works collaboratively with parent support groups already, APCP instead endorses a different approach to school philanthropy: a model which provides *more* not less flexibility for the District, staff and administration. They are the experts in education and the more flexibility they have to design and implement program, which includes setting the calendar, the better. This is especially true in difficult economic times.

Generally, and especially this year with negotiations and a budget crisis at hand, we feel that taxpayer money has been better spent by their implementing program, balancing the budget, and working on bigger picture issues. However we understand that information about the calendar was in short supply this year and therefore support all efforts to enhance communications between school and parents. To that end, APCP stands ready to help in whatever capacity makes the most sense for all.