



HAWAII EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

Informing the Education Community

Single School Calendar for Hawaii's Public Schools

Reinventing Education Report 2 October 2004

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In her address to a joint session of the State Legislature on January 28, 2004, Superintendent Patricia Hamamoto noted that the traditional school calendar served an agrarian society of the past, a time when children were needed by their families to harvest crops during the summer months.

Act 51 (SLH 2004) mandates the Board of Education to adopt a single school calendar that all public schools (with the exception of multi-track and charter schools) will use beginning with the 2006-07 school year.

Background:

With the Legislature's passage in 1989 of School/Community-Based Management (SCBM), school-based decision-making gave SCBM councils the right to ask the Board of Education for exceptions to the traditional school calendar established yearly by the DOE. SCBM schools began to adopt year-round and modified calendars that worked best for their school communities.

This school year (2004-05), only 96 regular and 8 charter schools are using the traditional calendar. 63% or 178 schools (160 out of 256 regular and 18 out of 26 charter schools) are on a year-round or modified calendar.

Multiple school calendars present significant problems beyond the considerable ones experienced by families whose children attend different schools with differing start and end dates, as well as differing vacation or intercession periods.

The Department of Education believes a single school calendar will help it become more efficient. In addition, it cites the dramatic increase in student transportation costs as well as the difficulty in scheduling training for teachers. Also, teachers may miss out on professional development opportunities when national experts are in Hawaii for only a limited time. Further, community programs such as summer fun programs have been negatively impacted by multiple calendars.

Single Calendar Decision-Making Process:

Of the 13 calendars currently in use by Hawaii's public schools, a small team of DOE and community members led by Dr. Robert Campbell (Director, Program Support and Development) has narrowed the field to 5 calendars. Consideration was given to the school calendar's impact on student achievement, family and community life, and employee pay and benefits.

Starting November 4 with a return date of December 15, a paper survey with a printing of almost 400,000, will be distributed via schools, including multi-track, to students, staff and parents for their ranking of the five calendars. Results will be forwarded by schools' SCBM councils or SCC's (School Community Councils in the 22 pilot schools) to the State DOE, and these rankings will be used to identify the most desirable calendar. A recommendation will then be presented to the Board of Education.

Five Calendar Options:

In each calendar option, a quarter contains 45 instructional days and 1st semester ends prior to the winter (Christmas) break.

- A. 2-3-2. Two weeks fall break; 3 weeks winter break; 2 weeks spring break; 6 weeks summer break. Start date: July 26; End date: May 31
- B. 2-2-2. Two weeks fall break; 2 weeks winter break; 2 weeks spring break; 7 weeks summer break. Start date: July 26; End date: May 23
- C. 1-3-2. One week fall break; 3 weeks winter break; 1 week spring break; 7 weeks summer break. Start date: August 3; End date: May 31
- D. 1-3-1. One week fall break; 3 weeks winter break; 1 week spring break; 8 weeks summer break. Start date: August 3; End date: May 23
- E. 0-2-1 (traditional). No fall break; 2 weeks winter break; 1 week spring break; 10 weeks summer break. Start date: August 17; End date: May 17

Notes and Analysis:

Because the choice of calendar may have implications for employee pay and benefits, union consultation and negotiation may be needed.

Act 51 calls for greater local autonomy with schools controlling 70% of their budgets and academic and financial decision-making being made through School Community Councils (SCC). The adoption, then, of a single school calendar to replace calendars that schools have adopted to meet their own community needs, may seem a step backwards.

Greater learning retention is often cited as a major benefit of year-round and modified- calendar schooling. Since there is more of a continuous learning environment (the "summer of forgetting" is minimized), teachers do not need to spend as much time reviewing subject matter after breaks, and students are ready to learn new material sooner. The research is inconclusive as to whether year-round schooling results in greater student achievement.

In 1994, The National Education Commission on Time and Learning" issued "Prisoners of Time." The report concluded: "The six-hour, 180 day school year should be relegated to museums, an exhibit from our educational past. Both learners and teachers need more time – not to do more of the same – but to use all time in new, different and better ways. The key to liberating learning lies in unlocking time."