



## **PROPOSED CALENDAR MODIFICATION** **Effective 2015-16 School Year**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### ***The Progressive Calendar***

#### **OVERVIEW**

The calendar changes that are being considered involve the starting of school two weeks earlier than the current calendar - to the second week of August and ending school before the Memorial Day weekend - the last week of May. The length of the school year would remain the same and students would have the same number of days of vacation. The reason for this is to allow the first semester to be concluded at Winter Break to ensure that high school students have a true break between the semesters, similar to what occurs in colleges. Currently, our first semester ends about two weeks after Winter Break and students spend that 'break' studying and preparing for their final exams. We have identified this as a major source of stress for high school students. This discussion is a result of student surveys and a self reflective process conducted through our participation in the Stanford University *Challenge Success* program.

#### **What about issues with heat in August?**

All of our schools are fully air conditioned, including the gymnasiums at both MCMS and OPHS. PE activities can be shifted indoors on exceptionally warm days. This year, for example, temperatures in August did not exceed heat indexes that would have required us to keep students inside for play and P.E. However, over the long run it is recognized that the two weeks in August are typically warmer than two weeks in early June. The Board resolution that will accompany the proposed calendar change would require the construction of shade structures (sails) above the outdoor play structures at the three elementary schools (this includes the park at OHES). This would be funded from the Measure R bond fund. The District is also exploring the idea of installing 'mistlers' in the outdoor eating areas at all of the schools depending on drought conditions.

#### **Most of the students in our district are in elementary and middle school. How does this benefit them?**

All of our students will eventually become high school students. Currently 73% of our high school students take AP courses. All of our high school courses are either AP (Advanced Placement) or CP (College Prep), which means that they are all demanding and have final exams. The final exam is important and represents a summative assessment of the entire course. Additionally, if a family has multiple children and one child is in high school, the entire family is affected by the study schedule of the high school student.

**How will this proposed change reduce stress for high school students? How about for students at other grade levels?**

By ending the first semester prior to winter vacation and having final exams the last week of the first semester, a break is created between the first and second semesters. During this time students can rest and not worry about studying for finals or completing projects that would be due at the end of the semester. The Board will require that no work be assigned to students at any grade level K-12 over the winter vacation to create a true break for everyone in OPUSD. A Stanford University research project has shown that making this change significantly reduces student stress at the high school level. At one of the schools where the calendar was changed, *More than three-quarters of these sophomores and juniors (77 percent and 76 percent respectively) agreed that rescheduling exams from after the winter break to before the break reduced their stress.* (Conner, Pope, Galloway, 2010)

**Why not just start one week earlier and end the semester before winter break?**

This would create uneven semesters that would be as much as two to three weeks disparate. Many courses at Oak Park High School are semester courses and this would not allow teachers to cover the required content over such an abbreviated first semester. Many of these semester courses are also AP courses where the curriculum is prescribed by the AP Board.

**Why not just start one week earlier, require finals before winter break, and end the semester in January?**

This still creates the problem described in the question prior to this as related to the AP courses. Additionally, it is likely that instruction over the last two weeks (the weeks following winter vacation and prior to the end of the semester) would not be meaningfully connected to the course curriculum.

**Since we are changing the calendar can we have the whole week off at Thanksgiving?**

YES! If we start on the second Tuesday of August and end on the Friday before Memorial Day weekend, we can take the entire week off at Thanksgiving. During our meetings with staff and parents, this idea seemed to resonate. It would provide more time for families who want or need to travel for the holiday and also allow high school students time to organize themselves prior to the end of the semester and finals.

**What about other stress factors such as homework and activities?**

These issues are also being addressed at all levels. Some teachers attended a workshop by Dr. Denise Pope from the Stanford Challenge Success on this topic last school year and the white paper on this topic has also been distributed to teachers and discussed at staff meetings. This is an ongoing process. Research supports the concept that teachers need to assign appropriate homework in order to ensure that students receive the necessary practice that is needed to master content, skills, and critical thinking.

Students also need to read, write and compose, and research outside of class. Other homework that becomes 'busy work' should be eliminated. Read the report here: <http://www.challengesuccess.org/Portals/0/Docs/ChallengeSuccess-Homework-WhitePaper.pdf>

**Will other schoolwork just end up being assigned over the winter vacation?**

The Board resolution that will accompany the proposed calendar change will mandate that no work of any type will be assigned to students in any class, grades K-12 during the winter vacation. The resolution will also eliminate all homework and projects in grades **K-8** for the Thanksgiving week, the 4-day February break, and Spring break.

**How would this change affect summer work for AP students?**

Students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes typically receive work to complete and other assignments for the summer prior to taking the course. The reason for this is our later start than schools across the nation, requiring students to complete a certain body of work required as part of the AP curriculum prior to the AP exams in early-mid May. It is our expectation that teachers will review the summer assignments to determine if they could be reduced.

**Will camps and the AM/PM adjust their childcare and summer camp schedules to meet the needs of parents?**

We have contacted the Rancho Simi AM/PM club and they will offer summer programs that match our new calendar. We have contacted one of the popular local camps, which has assured us that they will have programs available that will serve Oak Park USD students.

**Will summer school still be offered the first summer?**

We are working with Friends of Oak Park Schools on a summer school schedule that will allow students to complete courses and still provide for some time off during the first summer of this transition, which will be shorter. Subsequent summer vacations will be the same length as they are now.

**What other school districts have developed similar calendars?**

Other schools districts that have moved to similar calendars include, La Canada, Beverly Hills, Palo Alto, Glendale, Los Angeles, Simi Valley. Palo Alto is the latest school system to make this change as a result of their participation in the *Challenge Success* program.

**What else has been done to reduce student stress at Oak Park High School?**

The school has already implemented several of the recommendations that *Challenge Success* promotes. These have been in place for many years. These include a block schedule, 7<sup>th</sup> period support, and a later start. The school is looking at other recommendations that include reducing the weight of final exams, including more projects, coordinating projects and exams between teachers and departments, and ensuring homework is meaningful.

