

Uniform Regional School Calendar Taskforce Meeting Minutes 10/30/13

Rep. Mike Demicco convened the meeting at 2:10 PM

Rep Demicco introduced Doreen Marvin from LEARN as the new co-chair, recognized Jared Whitcomb as the First Student appointee for the next two meetings and went over future meeting dates. He also announced the next meetings as Monday, November 18th and Monday, December 2nd – both at 2pm in 1D.

Rep. Paul Davis made a presentation on the MORE Commission's deliberations that led to this taskforce being put together.

Rep. Davis was sub-committee chair of the MORE Common Calendar sub-committee. He was a teacher for 34 years in West Haven. His wife was a teacher in another school district and from that he got to experience calendar issues. Paul comes from a time when school districts are local and small with little concerns surrounding regional issues. Common Calendar's goals were (1) Looking to have a state wide suggested calendar but more importantly a regional calendar and looked at the RESC's as being the leadership group in those areas, (2) improve transportation opportunities, (3) integrate professional development from different districts, (4) which calendar do magnet schools follow? The district the child is from or where the school is? (5) issues involving storm days and different school systems staying open or closed. (6) also talked about teachers and family situations.

Rep Davis is hopeful that taskforce members had a chance to look at meeting minutes from the MORE Commission which are available online. They were looking at a 3-5 year phase-in because of teacher contracts, para contracts, support service personnel contracts that run 2-3 years. They felt 3-5 years would make those transitions easier. They also looked at a flexible calendar that would allow local districts to make adjustments as the year moves on. Minimum 180 days but have 5 or 6 'flex' days built into the calendar for this purpose. There were many transportation issues that he stated must be brought up with the necessary Transportation companies. Rep Davis opened to floor to other questions.

Charles Jaskiewicz asked about PD Days – that many districts spend a lot of money and planning and feel that it could be more regionalized. He also thinks this could be done across the state (gave Waterbury to Norwich as an example) rather than just regional. Charlie asked if there were any discussions that revolved around that. Rep Davis responded that all those points were raised. He also stated that many districts are using teacher contact time – reducing it for the purpose of more PD days. Some districts may have a few half days and use PD time there.

Rep Kokoruda touched on regionalizing bus contracts related to cost savings. For smaller towns that don't have regional systems, she asked what kinds of savings could actually be done. She pointed out the town next to her is in a two town region. Rep Davis talked about a common garage where both towns can utilize the same company but deferred it to the transportation

experts. Rep Kokoruda asked about property taxes related to bus services and Rep Davis responded this was something that must be negotiated with bus companies.

Craig Edmondson pointed out that another concept was Vo-Tech schools and driving through multiple towns where each community in a different town would drive a single bus and spoke more about integrating those in order to save dollars. He pointed out that many of these buses only end up having a handful of students ride them each day. He also said another issue about PD days surrounds coordination of activities and the flex days would be used for unique circumstances. In his area, the Durham Fair comes to mind – they must close down schools so the town can use the buses (for a flex day example). He thinks working on start days and end days would take a ‘bite’ out of this issue and stated start days and end days were major issues when trying to negotiate with bus companies. Charles Jaskiewicz pointed out that start days are easy but due to storm days, the end days are trickier even with flex days in mind. He doesn’t think the end date goal is plausible. He pointed out 6-figure savings across the state if the entire state has an April vacation at the same time.

There were no other questions for Rep Davis.

Rep Demicco talked about information from OLR regarding calendars and school opening and closing dates. He turned over to John Moran from OLR to make some explanatory remarks. He spoke about a document that had been passed out and had originated from SDE. It’s for the current school year and has start dates, last dates, recesses, vacations, and total number of school days. It covers the entire state and in the later pages has the vo-tech’s and charter schools. Some of the vacations are largely on the same break notably December and April. The one item that’s not on the list are PD days so a request was put in to each RESC for their calendars.

Charlie Jaskiewicz pointed out that collective bargaining units are very flexible in making modifications to calendars and times. He applauded these units for their work on modifications for Commissioner’s Network Schools / Alliance Schools.

Rep Demicco reminded members of the 4 guidelines of the taskforce – (1) 180 days of school, (2) uniform start date, (3) uniform PD Days, and (4) no more than 3 vacation breaks. Rep Demicco believes that many of these goals have already been accomplished or could be accomplished relatively easily.

Tim Nee pointed out that on that document, CREC’s ‘early dismissal days’ are used for professional learning opportunities and in other cases are used for Parent/Teacher Conferences. He also spoke to professional learning – that we must be cautious as to how many days when taking into account professional learning guidelines.

Paula Colen has been talking to superintendents about the 4 guidelines and they expressed concern with their varying ‘student days’ – one district has 183 and another has 185 and wants members to be thinking about strategies concerning this issue.

Patrice McCarthy had 3 observations – (1) she agrees with the point of how professional development is changing (2) while most districts start in August, many wait until after labor day,

and (3) while this is generally the calendar for districts, these are altered sometimes for school construction projects (get out as early as they can in June and start as late as possible the following year).

Chris LaBelle re-iterated Patrice and Paula's comments concerning internal conflicts of PD days.

Rep Demicco asked all members to identify areas not considered previously of major concern. He opened the floor to those.

Carolyn McNally asked about schools with half-day kindergarten and if that has any consequences regarding what the taskforce is trying to do.

Paula Colen agreed about the vo-tech problems raised by other members. Charlies Jaskiewicz pointed out that this has been discussed starting 4 years ago and recognized it as a key issue.

Carolyn McNally wonders if the 3 cities that have open choice programs have been accounted for (New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford) would have to have agreements with the towns they send kids to.

Patrice McCarthy spoke to timing – pointed out that just two hours before, they were receiving inquiries about 2014, 15, 16 calendars and that's done years in advance to allow families to plan far into the future.

Rep Demicco planned out the agenda for the next meeting and adjourned at 3:03 PM.