

**Uniform Regional School Calendar Taskforce
December 16th Meeting Minutes**

Rep. Demicco convened the meeting at 2:04pm.

Rep. Demicco introduced Secretary of State Denise Merrill. Sec of State Merrill talked about the fact that schools are often used as polling places and wants members to consider her points. She provided a list of all the districts using schools as voting locations throughout the state. Because we do not have a county level of government, decisions of polling locations are made by each individual town. Schools make great polling locations because of parking, handicap accessibility, security, large rooms like auditoriums and gyms, etc. Maintaining a safe environment for children is also critical. These needs are difficult to manage on general election days in November and that's why most towns already have election day off. Her office researched which school districts close – 105 towns and 5 regional school districts are closed on the general election day in November and 44 towns and 12 regional school districts remain open. It is Sec of State Merrill's recommendation that all schools close on election day.

Sec of State Merrill stressed this would be for the general election in November. There are other elections – special elections, primaries, and referendums. It's also in state statute that polling places must remain the same throughout the year so to avoid confusion for voters. This becomes difficult because many times these elections that are not in November take place at all sorts of different points in the year and there is usually very little notice to prepare. Also, some elections such as state representative or state senate do not always cover an entire town and often times straddle multiple towns. Any of these things are difficult to prepare for and she is not recommending that schools close for these elections – only the November general election day – and recommends that we consider closing for primaries as well (August in even numbered years, September in odd numbered years), so it would typically be in odd numbered years for Municipal Primaries.

She also said she would never recommend not using schools as polling locations and she opened up the floor to questions. Rep. Demicco thanked her for her recommendations and asked what other states do besides closing on general election days. Sec of State Merrill has heard people talk about it, but in most other states there are county levels of government with much less stringent rules for polling places. Some states close on election day by state law, but Connecticut is very different because of no county level of government.

Paula Colen spoke to the fact that in her RESC, they use election days as professional development days.

Doreen Marvin talked about an email from Charlie Jaskiewicz that he had been communicating with Sarah Hemingway from SDE about the meetings and feels comfortable but cautioned that vo-tech schools and sensitivities of the crossover of regions and counties for these schools be taken into consideration for the final taskforce report, and the chairs added it to the meeting agenda.

Patrice McCarthy and Carolyn McNally both commented about the difficulty of maintaining security at schools on election day and believe closing on election day is an important element of the final report.

Doreen Marvin introduced John Moran from the Office of Legislative Research who passed out a document from research he did as to whether or not other states have a Uniform Regional School Calendar and the short answer was 'No'. Some states provide no guidance, and other states provide some guidance regarding opening dates and closing dates. He said that Michigan stuck out because they have a regional school system and they require regional districts to coordinate their calendars with local districts, however no states require a uniform calendar as we are trying to put together. 37 states leave it completely open to local districts to decide what to do.

Rep. Demicco thanked John Moran and reminded everyone that the taskforce is simply recommending guidelines to the RESC's and not creating an actual calendar.

Doreen Marvin touched on the vo-tech system and other schools of choice, and while in previous meetings this was discussed, no solution was presented. She asked if anyone had any recommendations or if we should label it in the report as something to "think about".

Carolyn McNally believes all the vo-tech schools are under the same organization and she is unsure what the concern would be to ask the vo-tech schools to participate in a uniform calendar as well. Doreen Marvin is unaware of any concern other than the fact that some vo-tech schools stretch across multiple regions.

Tim Nee is interested in knowing how many vo-tech students we are talking about who stretch out beyond one RESC. He recommends we research it as of 10/1/13 and have this reported to each RESC. He knows that in the CREC region, they already have these numbers.

Paula Colen believes charter schools may be an issue if they are not connected to a RESC or a public school and hopes they would want to participate in this, but there is no guarantee.

Doreen Marvin asked if it were reasonable that any schools of choice be invited to taking place in the creation of each regional calendar, and all members agreed. Doreen moved onto review of the guidelines to date and asked members to take 5 minutes to look through the guidelines and re-convene to discuss.

Rep Demicco reconvened the taskforce and asked for feedback.

Tim Nee mentioned that on page 2, he thinks it should be spelled out that while 180 days is a minimum, some districts remain open for longer than 180 days and that is ok.

Paula Colen noticed a recommendation is that the SDE should consider regional opportunity for PD messages be recorded, but if it's recorded it could be played at any time. Doreen Marvin responded that the need for statewide PD days is so that SDE can hold a statewide day and given the technology these days, they can be recorded. Doreen doesn't think it needs to be in there but

wants to honor what was discussed at previous meetings, and she is ok with removing it. There was no objection so it would be removed.

Chris LaBelle talked about flexibility regarding each region determining one start date within their region, because “how are we defining region?” There can be multiple regions within a RESC.

Patrice McCarthy talked about impact on teacher contracts and would like to add “non-certified employees” as well.

Jared Whitcomb talked about the 5 flex days that were discussed at previous meetings but does not see that in the guidelines right now. Doreen responded that it came after a taskforce meeting and wasn't comfortable including it because it wasn't discussed at an actual meeting. Other members agreed they would like to see more flexibility.

Gary Peluchette talked about February break and an agreement because it's difficult to implement – some areas take an entire week and others only do a couple days and this will be difficult because of planned vacations and believes February should be left to local areas. Doreen responded that the taskforce was charged with three vacations, and February would make an extra one, so we would be OK taking that out.

Chris LaBelle thinks if districts do want a February break, they could still do it if we go ahead with the 5 flex days.

Noreen Kokoruda thinks the guidelines are just supposed to help with planning, but why would we need a waiver process when we have all this flexibility built in? She thought this was just a planning tool to give each RESC guidelines, but to talk about a waiver process, she believes this changes the level of flexibility. Doreen Marvin responded that some contracts may have a specific date in them and there might not be room for negotiation until the 2017-2018 school year and that's where there's a need for waivers. She also touched on delays due to construction for additional flexibility. The waiver is only for the start year and nothing else.

Davis Hayes backed up Patrice McCarthy's comment about non-certified employees.

Paula Colen thinks it's important that the report talk about who the waiver requests are being sent to and Doreen Marvin agreed that it would be included.

With no other comments, Doreen Marvin stated this would be the last meeting and work on the final report would commence next week. Her hope is that it would be completed and sent out for review, and take edits and input back as long as it doesn't take away from the substantive nature and then submit it almost on time.

Doreen Marvin and Rep. Demicco thanked everyone for their hard work and adjourned the meeting at 2:58pm.