

Calendar 2.0: Where do we go now?

By Jay Nichols

The Champlain Valley Superintendents recently voted to take the proposed Calendar 2.0 off the table for implementation for the 2014-2015 school year. This vote was due, in large part, as a result of overwhelming public sentiment from parents and an advocacy group at four regional forums. More importantly, the task force put forth the 2014-2015 date as a target to inform our work; I don't think too many people in leadership roles felt implementing this calendar this quickly would be a good idea. The bigger purpose is to start having a conversation. Superintendents are committed to looking at ways to better support student learning. Our school calendar is one tool to that end.

The major concerns that I've heard from the over a thousand-plus people who attended the four Champlain Valley Regional Forums as well as from the hundreds of conversations and emails I've had on the topic can mostly be summed up as follows:

- Shortening a summer break that many think is already too short
- Buildings being too hot if we start school a week earlier and end a week later
- Not enough research to justify the change
- Wanting to know exactly how intersessions would be conducted
- Teachers and parents not having enough input in the process
- Cost concerns
- Daycare concerns
- The change is too drastic

The major positives I've heard from people, including many of our teachers in Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union (FNESU):

- The 175 days will be spaced better for student learning
- The intersessions would allow more time for students who need more support
- Schools and organizations could run academic supports and enrichment programs during the intersession weeks
- The additional one week break in the fall (October) would allow teachers and students to catch their breath and get caught up – 14 straight weeks of school without a break is too long
- The change is very minor

At FNESU, we conducted an anonymous survey for teachers who have seen my Calendar 2.0 presentation. The survey asked, "Do you think that this change is better for public school students in Vermont?" As of this writing, 138 teachers have filled out the survey. 63% responded that Calendar 2.0 is either *Much or Somewhat better than what we have now*. 15% said Calendar 2.0 is *Somewhat or much worse than what we have now*. The remainder ranked the two calendars as *Neither better nor worse than what we have now*.

In terms of next steps, Champlain Valley Superintendents will be collating all of the opinions shared with us thus far on the Calendar 2.0 concept. We will then have to make a decision as to where we go next. The fact that we are actually having a conversation about changing something that is so ingrained in our culture as our more than a century-old school calendar is wonderful. I personally think we need to continue to look at how we can better use time to better support teaching and learning. If a new calendar of substance ever became our calendar, I would work with parents, students, teachers and community members from our local area to collectively plan how best to use the new calendar to support student learning in a way that makes sense for our communities. Whenever I must make a major decision, I first run it through the Vermont Superintendents Association Code of Ethics. The very first bullet in that document states: *The Superintendent makes high quality education and the well being of students the fundamental values for decision making.* I take this very seriously and believe other Superintendents do as well. If this is the case, we have to continue to challenge the status quo and continue to look at ways to make our public education system better for our students, first and foremost, in every decision we make.