

## **2013-14 Early Release Days**

The school calendar for 2013-14 was posted on the District website following Board approval on Monday evening. Some concerns have been raised about the “early release days” scheduled for next year specifically related to the loss of instructional time, childcare arrangements and communication of the change. Following is more detail on each of those issues.

The school calendar is built as a collaborative effort between Nicolet High School and the three feeder districts, Fox Point-Bayside, Glendale-River Hills, and Maple Dale-Indian Hill because we share transportation. With Nicolet being the largest, we generally try to match our calendar to the Nicolet calendar to avoid additional transportation costs. Next year Nicolet will have early release on the same days as our district; we followed their lead when they went to this model. As a district if we use an alternate schedule, we pick up the extra transportation costs. In this time of tight budgets we cannot afford to take on increased cost such as this.

The early release model of professional development is preferred because it allows teachers to work together on a regular basis to meet the new state accountability measures recently put in place. One example of this is the structure allows teachers to get together on a routine basis to review student assessment data to determine what areas of instruction need greater emphasis. This regular review of data allows for instructional adjustments and timely student interventions throughout the year rather than on sporadic half days. This model is currently used by Shorewood (they have early release every week), by Whitefish Bay and many other school districts in the area for these same reasons.

In terms of lost instructional time, our students will actually gain instructional time next year. The five half days we have this year for professional development and/or work days account for approximately 15 hours of lost instructional time. With school ending 70 minutes earlier on early release days next year that would increase by 2.5 hours without further adjustments. However there are two more student days built into the calendar in 2013-14 as compared to this year for a net gain of approximately 10 hours of instruction.

We recognize that the early release days will have to be structured so that students do not lose the same academic time that falls into the last hour of the days each time there is early release. This can be accomplished by rotating classes on early release days so that a particular class or content area is only missed twice throughout the year or by shortening each class by a few minutes on early release days. At the K4 level the priority on early release days will be academics. All school districts routinely deal with schedule adjustments to accommodate conference days, early release days, testing days, etc. and there are a variety of ways to do this.

In efforts to communicate this change as early as possible, the calendar was approved in February, well in advance of the next school year so that parents have time to plan for childcare next year. With the timing of early release days following the Nicolet schedule older siblings or teen babysitters are one option for childcare. In addition we are willing to look into the option of providing extended care through the YMCA or another avenue at a reasonable cost to parents if there is enough parent interest to make it viable. In other districts it has been a challenge to offer this option as too few parents took

advantage of and/or stayed committed to the service to make it financially feasible. Nevertheless we are certainly willing to look into this option if there is enough parent interest.

As you can see there are many factors to consider when developing the school calendar. We are well aware that with every change, there is a period of adjustment. The new state accountability measures that school districts face will require us to continue to look for ways to meet the learning needs of our students as well as the professional development needs of staff. If this explanation of thinking behind the calendar development does not fully answer your specific concerns, please feel free to call the District Administrator, Dr. Rachel Boechler for further conversation. She can be reached at 414-247-4164. As always your support is appreciated as we work to offer the highest quality of learning experiences for your children.