

Survey helps schools firm up calendar



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When the school calendar was discussed — specifically when and how long student breaks occur — Heidi Taylor-Eliopoulos noticed all of the declarative statements.

“Everyone prefers this” or “no one wants that” often prefaced questions about spring break, for example. And one definitive conclusion frequently conflicted with another.

The superintendent of the Chippewa Falls School District decided to find out if, in fact, there were universal truths when it came to the

school calendar. Did everyone really feel one way?

So she got together with Jeff Heinzen, president of McDonell Area Catholic Schools, and the schools surveyed their staff and parents with the idea that the results could help determine the school calendar beginning next year.

Those results are in, and allowing for the expected differences of opinion that come with nearly every question, clear lines were drawn. It is expected to be one of the main topics at the annual joint meeting between the public and private schools Thursday afternoon at McDonell High School.

“I thought it would be closer, but the results really weren’t close,” said Taylor-Eliopoulos, noting that the information was used to whip up a draft of a calendar for the 2016-17 school year that will be presented Thursday.

One area they looked at was reducing breaks in the school year or shortening them, allowing students to finish up earlier. Of the 1,159 people who were surveyed, 50.8 percent preferred keeping spring break and holiday break the way it is, while 39.9 percent wanted fewer or shorter breaks to end school by the first Friday in June.

Another question saw 41.8 percent vote for a week-long break in March, while 26.1 percent wanted a full week break in February, and 19.3 percent opted for a break of less than a full week. Only 4.7 percent wanted no break.

Two other findings:

- 46.2 percent want no school on Dec. 23, while 24.4 percent opted for school to be held, and 29.3 percent had no preference.
- 38.9 percent said school should be in session on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week; 25.8 percent wanted it off for students, and 35.3 percent said either

way was acceptable. The last few years the Chippewa Falls School District has used those two days for teacher development, with students being off the entire week.

Working together

Shortly after Taylor-Eliopoulos took over as superintendent in July, she met with Heinzen. The school calendars used to match up, but some requirements from each side have created slight differences in recent years.

“This is the first year we’ve actually had some early collaboration on the calendar,” said Taylor-Eliopoulos. Getting a head start could allow the schools to better align their school days, a goal of both school leaders.

“The important piece is we really try to work together for the betterment of the families and the kids, and what is best for them,” Heinzen said. “This is another one of those pieces.”

The schools share a busing system, and when school is called due to snow, the cancellation applies to both schools.

The Chippewa Falls School District has worked up a draft for 2016-17. It has students beginning school on Thursday, Sept. 1, which is the first day public schools in Wisconsin are allowed to start. That is four days prior to Labor Day.

Thanksgiving break would return to a three-day format; holiday break would begin Friday, Dec. 23 with students returning to the classroom on Tuesday, Jan. 3; and spring break would be the week of March 20-24. The last day for public school students would be Friday, June 2, with graduation Saturday, June 3.

The calendar also moves the public school’s early-release days, which are designed for teacher development, to four Thursdays that precede an off day for students, and one Friday.

Should the two schools come to an agreement on the calendar, it could be approved in December.