

Short spring break gets thumbs down

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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CG-B School Board responds to survey that shows parents, staff overwhelmingly support longer vacation

Students and staff in the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District will have a week-long spring break next year.

The School Board originally considered a 2012-13 calendar that called for three days off around the Easter holiday — March 28 and 29 and April 1.

On Monday, the board approved a calendar that calls for a week-long break — March 25 to 29, returning to school April 1, the day after Easter.

The last day of school for students will be Thursday, June 6. The teachers' last day will be Friday, June 7.

An on-line survey of parents and staff members showed the one-week spring break was favored almost two to one.

Of the 338 respondents, 214 wanted the longer spring break and 124 preferred the shorter break.

Teacher Scott Tipple said teachers took a separate survey to gauge the degree to which they favor or oppose a one-week spring break. He said 40% preferred one week and 27% strongly preferred one week, while 32% didn't care.

"So, it's about two-thirds to one-third in favor of one week," Tipple said.

Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger, who has three children in the school district, said the board has to decide if it wants to follow the survey results.

"I've gotten lots of calls both ways," he said. "To me it doesn't make a difference. But if you survey people and ask their opinion and not listen to them, people will be unhappy."

If board members had been wavering, that comment put all of them behind the longer break.

The calendar includes a two-hour early release day the third Wednesday of each month for teachers to work on curriculum development, something that was also controversial when initially proposed at the Feb. 15 School Board meeting.

Middle and high-school students will be dismissed at 1 p.m. and elementary students at 1:45 p.m. Buses will take students home after dismissal.

While some parents questioned the need for two hours, Tim Hatfield, eighth-grade social

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studies teacher, said it is needed to get any meaningful work done.

In the on-line survey, elementary parents were asked if their children would participate in after-school activities until 3:30 p.m. if they were offered, but no busing would be provided.

Of the 149 parents who responded, 49 said their children would participate, while 100 said they would not.

"I would like to have them stay there, but I don't have a ride for them to come home after activities," said board member Gina Sotelo, who lives in Belgium. "I think other parents felt the same way."

First-grade teacher Kris Sass cautioned that any activities provided in the school should be supervised by qualified people and it should be of a quality that reflects well on the district.

"You could have 300 children. That's a lot of children to keep track of," she said.

The question of who would pay for the programs also arose.

"I think we should release them and be done with it," board member Chad Hoopman said. "If outside groups want to offer something, that's up to them."

Sass said she was concerned about the lack of time to prepare quarter progress reports. In the past, students had a half-day off the day before quarter grades and a full day off the day before semester grades.

Elementary teachers provide detailed progress reports to parents at the quarter, she said.

"Those are valuable work days," Sass said. "I'm not just working on them in school. I'm also working on them at home. I write comments on each one."

The board decided to make the day before the first and third quarters half days for students.

The calendar had 191 work days for teachers, which is 11 more than required by the state.

"That's what we always had," Supt. Steve Shaw said. "That way if we have a snow day, we have the flexibility not to have to make it up."

With the added half days off for the quarter, there will still be 10.7 additional student contact hours than required, he said.

Because the spring break will start March 25, the end of the third quarter, originally set for March 27, was changed to March 22.

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The first day of school for students will be Tuesday, Sept. 4. Teachers will have in-service days Aug. 27 to Aug. 30.