

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

October 23, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Innovative School Year Calendar Update (03-12-19-05)

Question

During the Innovative School Calendar discussion, Ms. Dixon requested an update to the full Board regarding the extended school year plan's progress.

Response

On July 8, 2019, Arcola and Roscoe R. Nix elementary schools began the 2019–2020 school year with a calendar spanning 210 days. In advance of the first day of school, a community door knocking campaign was arranged in both schools' attendance areas in order to inform families of the first day of school. At Roscoe R. Nix Elementary School, students were safely in class by 9:15 a.m. and at Arcola Elementary School, students were in class by 9:45 a.m. The smooth opening of schools may be attributed to clear structures and procedures designed to efficiently welcome students and support them in their arrival in their classrooms.

Mindfulness and Project Lead The Way

Innovation for these two schools comes by way of two instructional programs—Mindfulness and Project Lead The Way (PLTW). In June and early July 2019, staff at Arcola and Roscoe R. Nix elementary schools participated in professional learning for both of these programs.

Subsequently, both schools have established mindfulness structures for staff and students. A master schedule was created that outlines consistent implementation of the program throughout the week and school year. Each day begins with a Mindful Moment on the morning announcements. Mindful spaces also have been established in classrooms and staff at the schools has been intentional about using mindful terminology when interacting with students. The schools have emphasized bringing an awareness of mindfulness to all staff, ensuring a shared understanding of mindfulness, and identifying the benefits of creating a mindful culture.

Students engage in mindful moments through their Town Hall meetings, and parents/guardians experience mindfulness strategies during parent/guardian coffees. Staff members at both schools have noticed an overall calmness among students.

The implementation of PLTW is proceeding as planned. During the first marking period, staff received materials and began developing a shared understanding of what is needed to implement the program. PLTW coaches have led the planning and implementation through strong collaboration with classroom teachers and guidance from central services staff. To extend their learning further, a group of teachers at Arcola Elementary School is engaging in a project-based learning study group.

Student, Staff, and Parent/Guardian Engagement

Keeping in mind that the academic year is extended, staff members in both schools have been intentional about engaging students, staff, and parents/guardians in activities to maintain energy and provide opportunities for refreshment. In addition to Mindfulness and PLTW as engaging instructional activities, students have benefited from opportunities for outside programming, such as an assembly focused on conflict resolution, field trips to area museums and cultural centers, and visits to a local farmers market. Students also were treated to ice cream on Fridays during the summer. Based on input from staff, both schools organized a variety of social events in support of a collaborative and collegial school environment. On the thirtieth day of school, staff members celebrated their work and participated in health and wellness activities.

Since the beginning of the school year, both schools have held several parent/guardian involvement events in addition to Back-to-School Night. Schools hosted open houses, teacher meet-and-greet events, kindergarten parent/guardian workshops, summer socials, parent/guardian coffees, and a movie night. The Innovative School Year Calendar was a topic of discussion at Arcola Elementary School's Parent Teacher Association meeting on September 23, 2019, and at Roscoe R. Nix Elementary School's parent/guardian meetings on September 26, 2019. Both schools have held parent/guardian coffees where parents/guardians have had an opportunity to explore PLTW activities and learn more about the implementation of the Innovative School Year Calendar.

Feedback on the First 30 Days

In an effort to gauge the perception of implementation, an open-ended survey was distributed to staff, who provided the following feedback regarding positive experiences.

- "Time built in with student for personal relationship building and establishing routines."
- "It was very beneficial for the students to have more time to practice grade-level concepts. I witnessed a lot of growth with my students."
- "The building was cleaned and ready in a short amount of time. Copy Plus had a very quick turnaround time. Although we had air conditioning issues at the beginning of the 30 days, they were addressed in a timely fashion and the building was cool for the majority of the summer session."

- “A lot of students came to school. The staff were dedicated to making it work and were positive with the students. The children quickly got into the routine of school.”

Staff provided the following feedback on changes they would like to see for next year.

- “Ensure that central services curriculum teams communicate expectations for curriculum and assessments prior to the start of the ISYC. Consider drafting a curriculum that spans an 11-week marking period.”
- “Ensure that all resources, such as OASIS, special education related services, transportation, and district formatives are available on the first day of the ISYC.”
- “Allow more time for students to work on social competencies, such as self-regulation, communication skills, and relationship skills during the first 30 days.”

Plans for Evaluating the Program

Staff in the Office of Shared Accountability is in the process of finalizing the program evaluation plan that will focus on implementation during the 2019–2020 school year, as well as examine the relationship of the initiative to student engagement and achievement. They have continued to engage staff and parents/guardians to gather input on the types of feedback to gather, when to gather feedback, and which structures to use when gathering feedback. The goal of the evaluation is to provide feedback to support the development of an effective model of an extended school year calendar. The evaluation will examine stakeholders’ experiences related to implementation of the Innovative School Year Calendar; describe the degree to which professional learning was provided to and attended by teachers; and assess the extent of program implementation in the two schools.

Planning and Implementation Meetings

The Innovative School Year Calendar Planning and Implementation committee, consisting of parents/guardians and staff, continues to meet throughout the year. An update to the full Board is scheduled in spring 2020.

If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Niki T. Hazel, associate superintendent for curriculum and instructional programs, Office of the Chief Academic Officer, at 240-740-3970.

JRS:MVN:NTH:mec

Copy to:

Executive Staff

Ms. Webb