

When Does School Start?

For the past two years, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) has been considering a calendar that would end the first semester at winter break by starting school the third week of August and ending school the first week of June. This proposed calendar is an outgrowth of the AUHSD Strategic Plan and negotiations with the AUHSD teachers, which is required under collective bargaining. The AUHSD has been considering this calendar for the following reasons:

- The calendar provides longer blocks of uninterrupted instructional time throughout the academic year, especially in January and February after winter break. (January is broken up by two legal holidays, a teacher workday, and four half-days for semester exams before two legal holidays in February.)
- The calendar provides students with a true, two-week winter break by completing first semester exams in December. There are no exams hanging over the students during winter break, which has been identified in some research as one factor that can reduce student stress. (Acalanes and Miramonte high schools are working with the Stressed Out Students Program at Stanford on ways to reduce student stress. Ending the first semester at winter break is one change that schools have made to address stress.)
- Students return in January refreshed to start a new semester rather than two weeks of review and/or new material prior to semester exams.
- The calendar is consistent with the AUHSD Strategic Plan (Action Plan 3.3).

Under the collective bargaining agreement, the calendar was agreed to by both the District's and the teachers' negotiation teams in the spring of 2007. The AUHSD Board considered the proposed calendar on June 6, but did not vote; on August 29, but had a tie vote; and on October 17 when it adopted a traditional calendar for 2008-2009. The Board then directed staff to form a Calendar Committee to consider issues when developing the 2009-2010 academic calendar.

The committee composed of 24 individuals (3 students, 3 administrators, 18 parents representing all K-8 districts and AUHSD) will meet five times before presenting its report to the AUHSD Board. The committee is reviewing the key issues (e.g., starting date, alignment with K-8 districts, impact on family vacations and summer programs, student stress) and will present information on both sides of the issue for consideration by the AUHSD Board. The committee will not make a calendar recommendation since the calendar is subject to collective bargaining. Five public forums have been held to allow parents to provide input on the calendar.

Additionally, the six districts (Acalanes, Canyon, Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda, and Walnut Creek) held a joint meeting conducted by an outside facilitator to identify the common issues and barriers to the calendar. Each district was represented by the superintendent, a Board member, and a teacher, classified employee, and parent representative. An online parent survey is tentatively planned.

On March 19, the Calendar Committee will present its report to the AUHSD Board, but the Board will not make a decision. At the April 16 AUHSD Board meeting, the Board will give direction to the district negotiation team in Closed Session, who will then negotiate the calendar with the Acalanes Education Association. Negotiations are not a public process. Once negotiations are complete, the calendar will be presented to the AUHSD Board to ratify.

On the AUHSD webpage, www.acalanes.k12.ca.us, the following information is available:

- Report of the Calendar Committee (available March 17)
- Board reports and a FAQs on the calendar

For additional information or to provide input, contact Superintendent Jim Negri at jnegri@acalanes.k12.ca.us with 'Academic Calendar' in the subject line.