

Rethinking the Traditional School Calendar

By Christopher J. Rice, Superintendent



Hello and Happy Holidays to our school family and community. The district, its students, and staff continue to be a great source of pride for all of us. Thank you to LMS Teacher Tony Karsen for his excellent article demonstrating the emphasis we place on student leadership.

They say if you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got. Some say this is true with respect to school calendars which have gone largely unchanged since the late 1800's. Many call this the agrarian calendar. While summers off from school did allow previous generations of children to work on the family farm, a primary motive of the nine month school calendar was to provide time in the summer for the many American immigrants to learn the English language. We have come a long way since then. The Van Buren ISD, which provides certain services and guidance to all schools in the county, is studying the concept of a "balanced calendar." There are many ways to balance a calendar but in very general terms, it involves replacing some of the summer break period with breaks during the typical school year. The length of the school year (180 days) does not necessarily change. For example, in a balanced calendar system, school might start in early to mid-August with scheduled weeks off in October and February. Traditional breaks during the winter holidays and spring would remain as well.

Why make such a change? Research is quite clear about the loss of learning that occurs for many students during the summer break. Reducing the length of time students are away from school can reduce that loss of learning. Among the other advantages of a balanced calendar are anticipated reduction in student and staff absences especially during cold and flu season. Balanced calendars have been successfully implemented in hundreds of schools across

the country.

Are there disadvantages to the balanced calendar? Yes. Changing any process, especially something as ingrained as the school calendar, is never easy. Athletic schedules, family vacations, child care, and summer employment are among those things that can be affected by a shorter summer.

The school districts of Van Buren County have been asked to seek input from their communities regarding the balanced calendar concept. In the near future, it is quite likely that a survey will be developed that will allow our stakeholders an opportunity to provide input. When that survey is prepared, you will be notified via the school messaging system or social media. In the mean-time, feel free to call or email me to share your questions or thoughts.

Speaking of the school messaging system, it is important to remind our school family of the importance of keeping your contact information up to date. Phone numbers and email addresses are our primary means of contacting you with important information such as school closings. If you no longer wish to receive school messages, please contact any school office or the Superintendent's office (624-7901). School closing information is also provided to local media outlets and posted on the district Facebook and Twitter pages.

In closing, January is school board recognition month. If you see one of our board members (Stephen Carroll, Bryan Cronenwett, Kathy Drew, Toby Fields, Wally Hitchcock, Matt Ryan, and Tim Somers) please be sure to thank them for their service to our school district.



Food Service Payments Available Online

By Bill Maury

Did you know we serve breakfast every morning beginning at 7:25? We have a variety of options available for your child to choose from, including hot breakfast sandwiches, pancakes, cereal, and even pizza. Every Friday we offer an oatmeal mix-in bar! A bowl of hot oatmeal that students can top with a variety of fruits, granola and yogurt. Included with each of these choices are fresh fruit, juice, and milk.

Did you know along with the items listed on the lunch menu, there are alternative choices available for students to choose from? For grades 1-5 the choices on any given day may include ham and cheese sandwiches, turkey subs, or a chef salad. Good ole' PBJ is always available as an option as well. All choices include a visit to our spectacular salad bar that is filled with healthy fruits and veggies.

Did you know your child may be eligible to receive their lunch (and breakfast) at no charge, or at a reduced price of 40 cents? Applications for free and reduced meals are available in the office, through our food service department, or on our website at www.lawtoncs.org.

Did you know you can view your child's lunch account online and also

pay for lunch online using your credit card? You can access your account at <http://food.lawtoncs.org>. E-mail Kay Walters at kwalters@lawtoncs.org or Bill Maury at bmaury@lawtoncs.org to get your user name and password. You will receive a 5% bonus when you deposit \$25 or more into your child's lunch account. This option is available to student accounts that have a \$0 or above balance. You may also stop by the food service department in any of our buildings, or send payment in with your child in an envelope with your child's first and last name on it. If you have more than one child attending school, it is only necessary to write one check. Let us know how much goes into each child's account and we will deposit it accordingly. Please pay by check. Sending cash is at your own risk.

Did you know our food service staff enjoys being able to serve your student healthy meals with kind words and a smile? We are proud to be a part of the Lawton Community Schools team! Check us out on Facebook, Lawton Community Schools Food Services.