

**From: Heather Worms <heatherworms@gmail.com>**

**Date: March 23, 2015 at 4:27:27 PM PDT**

**To: cmarten@sandi.net**

**Subject: HELP NEEDED....CONCERNS FROM A GROWING GROUP OF PARENTS!!!**

Dear Superintendent Marten,

My name is Heather Worms and I am a parent of two children in the Mission Bay Cluster. I am writing in regard to the Calendar Committee's proposal to move the school year start date to August.

The Calendar Committee has posted several reasons for an earlier start date. However, I feel their reasons are very one-sided and at this time the committee has no data to prove an earlier start date is beneficial to ALL students in the district. I urge the district supervisors and Board of Education members insist the Calendar Committee produce this data before going forward with a vote regarding this issue.

Please read below for questions and information regarding Calendar Committee claims that an earlier start date is better for our students. These claims and statements are taken directly from the SDUSD website at [www.sandi.net](http://www.sandi.net).

*1. Aligns the district calendar with the majority of school districts across San Diego County. Of the 42 districts in the county, only four, including San Diego Unified, start school in September. The other 38 districts start in July or August.*

San Diego Unified School District is the largest school district in San Diego County and the second largest in California. What is the reasoning for attempting to align with other districts? Many of these districts start one, two, or even three weeks before SDUSD. Moving to an earlier start date isn't true alignment if all the other districts have different start dates as well.

The next largest school district in San Diego after SDUSD is Sweetwater, which has a little over 40,000 students compared to SDUSD student population of over 131,000. The Sweetwater district currently operates on a year round schedule, so regardless of a new start date our district would not be aligned with the next largest one in San Diego county.

*2. Maximizes instruction time for students prior to the administration of standardized tests, which are given in the spring.*

Representatives from the Calendar Committee have previously stated other districts get many more instructional days before testing in the spring. The Calendar Committee has no data to show a few more instructional days would be more beneficial before testing in the spring, or that it would yield higher test scores. My main concern is more instructional days in the summer means potential loss of instructional time when classrooms are too hot for adequate learning. This is a reality for our students and teachers since there is no air conditioning in any schools in the Mission Bay Cluster. We had two days in September when schools shut down early due to the excessive heat. Adding more school days in August puts the district at risk for shutting down additional days in hot weather.

Furthermore, our cluster leadership knows the CST's are administered a certain amount of weeks into the school year. These testing dates are controlled by the district, and to some degree the individual

sites. The CAHSEE is administered multiple dates during the year and the SBAC tests will be administered during a 12 week window at the end of the school year at the discretion of the District.

More importantly, the California Department of Education has regulations as to when these testing windows can occur. That means the district sets the date based on how many instructional days have passed in each school. So, if our schools start in September, we do not take the tests on the same day as a school that starts in August. The CDE regulation for CAASPP testing for Grades 3-8 states that "The testing window shall not begin until at least 66 percent of a school's annual instructional days have been complete, and testing may continue up to and including the last day of instruction for the regular school calendar." Meaning, with a 180-day school year, 66 percent of instructional days occur after the 120th day, which allows for a 12-week window (for testing) beginning on the 121st day. Therefore, it doesn't matter when school starts.

The rationale for the Calendar Committee's second point is misleading and not accurate.

*3. Properly prepares our students for success on the Advanced Placement (AP) tests. AP tests are administered the same two weeks in May every year so the district needs to make sure our students have the same amount of teaching time as students across the county and the country.*

Many school districts that start in mid-August have more breaks than SDUSD during the school year. For example, Poway Unified School District started in mid-August two weeks before SDUSD. With their non-instructional days and extra time off in February, they only have THREE more instructional days than our students. At this time, the Calendar Committee has provided NO data to prove an earlier start date will lead to higher test scores, or that there is a benefit to high school students who are taking AP tests.

The percentage of SDUSD students taking AP tests in May is small compared to the number of students not partaking in these tests (especially when you include elementary and middle school students). Should all students be forced to start school earlier to benefit this small percentage of high school students? Again, the district has NO data to support the idea that these students would achieve higher success in AP tests with a few more days of instruction nine months prior to the test dates.

*4. Aligns the district calendar more closely with the San Diego Community College District and other university academic calendars, which expands opportunities for high school students to participate in early summer special enrichment programs or pre-collegiate classes.*

The summer classes at SDCCD schools start at the very beginning of June (for Summer 2015 the first day of classes is June 1). The proposal of the new start date for 2016-17 means school would end June 14, 2016, which is approximately two weeks after San Diego Community College summer courses begin. Based on this information, SDUSD high school students would not be able to take advantage of the summer courses at San Diego community colleges. The above reason of the Calendar Committee is, in fact, incorrect.

*5. Students who participate in fall sports, including: football, field hockey, water polo, and cross country, begin training in August to be competitive with the other districts that start school in August. In essence, their summer break is already over.*

High school athletes in fall sports start practicing as soon as CIF regulations permit. For the 2015-16 school year, fall sports may not hold official practices until August 10, regardless of their first instructional day of school. This CIF regulation is for the entire state of California, including all San Diego county schools. SDUSD students don't start training in August to be competitive with other districts that start school on an earlier date; rather they start training in August because that is when CIF allows them to do so.

In actuality, our district's fall athletes have an advantage in athletics compared to other San Diego county school districts that have an earlier start date. This is because they don't have school days imposing on their practice schedules. Once school starts, these athletes are limited in the amount of time allotted for practice and training for their fall sport.

Does the district have any information or data to show fall sports in SDUSD would have a greater advantage with an earlier start date? Has the district reached out to the high school Athletic Directors? Their input would be critical in determining what the best school start date would be for their young athletes. I've spoken with a few high school staff members who coach fall sports for schools in our district. They feel an earlier start would be detrimental to their training programs leading up to their fall season, therefore making them less competitive compared to other schools in San Diego county.

*6. Provides students looking for summer employment/internships equal access to these opportunities as students in other districts.*

The Calendar Committee has not shown any data that states SDUSD students are at a disadvantage when applying for employment and internships. Many local businesses, such as summer camps (which offer many jobs and internships for high school students), base their summer schedules off the SDUSD school year calendar.

For example, the San Diego Junior Lifeguard Program, which serves over 1400 San Diego youth each summer, bases their entire program on the SDUSD traditional school year calendar. They also have a paid intern program for 16 and 17 year old high school students, and their intern position start dates are also based on the district calendar.

*7. Not being tied to the definitive start date of the day after Labor Day provides flexibility for the end of the school year so it does not end on a Monday.*

Ursula Kroemer, SDUSD Chief Public Information Officer, has stated that principals are strongly against school ending on a Friday due to the higher risk of incidents/accidents for high school students on weekends following the end of the school year. Monday, while not ideal, is better than Friday. Regardless, this rationale is incredibly weak.

Lastly, I would like to address the following statement made by the district along with the above reasons:

*"Excessive heat in August is often a concern for parents, staff and administrators. Air conditioning is being installed in classrooms across the district to ensure students and staff, are more comfortable in our unpredictable hot weather days."*

This statement is extremely concerning for me because it is simply not true. This implies that all schools without air conditioning will have it installed in the near future. However, you can also find information

on the district website about which schools will be have air conditioning installed and not all schools are included. Currently, there is no plan or funding for air conditioning in Zone 1, which includes not only the Mission Bay Cluster but several other clusters as well. During the hot days in September, my children were in classrooms that exceeded 90 degrees, and some classrooms were nearing 100 degrees. This presents a huge health hazard and safety concern for all students and staff in schools where no air conditioning will be installed. August is the hottest month of the year in San Diego, so without air conditioning we risk more loss of instructional time due to excessive heat days. This is certainly not a benefit to all students.

The Calendar Committee has not presented any information to the public about the cost of this significant change of an August start date. To name one example, the cost of increased usage of air conditioning during school days in the summer will be very significant. The Los Angeles Unified School District reported a huge increase in electricity bills when they moved their start date up to earlier in the summer. The first year LAUSD imposed the earlier start date the district saw a \$1.4 million increase in electricity bills and nearly \$800,000 in the second year. Currently, their Board of Education voted to start school later and will be investigating the possibility of returning to a post-Labor Day start since their district has seen no improvement of student achievement. You can read an article regarding this information at:

<http://www.dailynews.com/social-affairs/20150310/lausd-to-start-2015-16-school-year-one-week-later>

Another important fact is SDUSD has had the post-Labor day start date traditionally for over 50 years. There are some families that simply will not change their family schedule or vacation plans. Some will decide that their family traditions are more important than the first week of school. We have very few deep-rooted traditions in this district. The post-Labor Day start signals a new beginning as it has for more than 50 years. If the Calendar Committee wants to change this long-standing tradition, then it must come up with sufficient reasons to do so. So far they have failed in this endeavor.

Are the Calendar Committee and the district willing to accept the thousands of dollars lost in Average Daily Attendance? This needs to be considered, especially now in another shortfall year. Where will the money come from to make this major calendar change? Do they have a plan to manage the additional utility costs? They have not presented answers or solutions to any of these important questions.

Before the Board of Education and District Supervisors vote whether or not to make this major change to the school start date, an in-depth review of all the costs and benefits is required. The Calendar Committee's reasons for an earlier start date are not supported by any facts or data. Without this data, along with the lack of air conditioning in ALL district classrooms, the Calendar Committee cannot justify making such a significant change.

I strongly urge you to push for a full review of all possible information before this proposal goes to the Board of Education for a vote.

Thank you for your consideration and immediate attention to this matter. I would greatly appreciate a personal response to this email.

Sincerely,

Heather Worms

Parent of 2 children in the Mission Bay Cluster