Three calendar proposals for the 2012-13 school year in Holyoke School Dist. Re-1J were the center of extensive discussion at the Feb. 27 meeting of the Board of Education.

Two calendars with 175 student-teacher contact days were reviewed, as well as a third calendar with 180 days of instruction.

Input from each board member was heard, with a final compromise leaning to Calendar B. It will be on the March 6 meeting agenda for further discussion.

The calendar includes 175 days of instruction starting Wednesday, Aug. 22 and ending Friday, May 24. Testing will be conducted prior to the start-date.

Four days for spring break and nine staff and 10.5 student vacation days at Christmas are part of the proposal.

Seven professional development (PD)/staff meeting days will be scheduled before the start of school, with half-days for PD in October, January and February; and half-days for work in October, December, January, February and May.

Late starts will be scheduled every Friday with time every month to focus on utilizing data.

Supt. Bret Miles recommended the 180-day calendar, but said all three proposals meet the parameters set and will support district goals. He said he supported any of the three calendars.

Kim Killin cited a recent article in the American School Board Journal titled “Does More Time Help Student Achievement?” She said data from the article indicates the U.S. is not behind other countries.

She said adding time to the school year can be effective, particularly for disadvantaged students. Killin pointed out the after-school centers provide that time and amount to about five more calendar days.

She emphasized the 89 percent decline in numbers on the ineligible list from a year ago. “Just adding time isn’t going to take us where we need to go,” added Killin.

Reporting from the leadership team, Linda Jelden said everyone loved the concept of two testing days before school starts and liked the additional work time half-days. She said the two 175-day calendars really maximize work time and they are the ones she favors.

Dennis Herman pointed out repetition helps. The more time spent educating kids, the better educated they’ll be. He said the drop in numbers on the ineligible list is great, but until test data can show improvement, results won’t really be known.

Michelle Van Overbeke said with kids moving in and out of the district, the data doesn’t always present a clear picture of the results. She cited targeted instruction as being so much more valuable. As a result, she sees the after school program as an additional five days of instruction.

She said the 180-day calendar has been tried this current year and they’re hearing that it’s been stressful.

Herman acknowledged he’s willing to concede based on the two testing days before school equating to extra days. Additionally, the after school program has bought five focus days.

King was emphatic in his support for the 180-day calendar. “I still don’t see how we can do more with less,” he said. He noted he’s worried about the bottom 50 percent of the students. “We’re handcuffing administrators if we don’t give them 180 days.”

Kris Camblin said he understands where each board member is coming from, but supports the 175-day calendar to create more family time. “Hopefully the after school center will pick up those on the low end,” he added.

Jelden expressed confidence in the administrative team, but still thinks they’re not leaving half the kids behind with a 175-day calendar.

Jeff Tharp said he’s willing to see what a little breather time will do after a year of a 180-day calendar. He added he’s not committing for the long-term, but is willing to try it for this year.

Herman pointed out it will be very difficult to add those days back once they’ve been taken away.

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