

Q&A: Sweetwater assistant superintendent

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Karen Janney is an assistant superintendent for the Sweetwater Union High School District. She is coordinating efforts to institute a common school year calendar for all South County public schools.

QUESTION: What is a common calendar?

ANSWER: A common calendar would mean that all schools in our district would start and end the school year on the same dates. Sweetwater is moving in the direction of adopting a common calendar in collaboration with the Chula Vista Elementary School District. Together we're working toward the day when all South County districts are on the same calendar.

Why are South County school districts considering this?

A common calendar benefits our students by ending the first semester before the winter break without interrupting studies and final exams. A common calendar better serves families by reducing the coordination problems created for parents who have children on one or more school schedules. Finally, in a time of scarce financial resources, a common calendar offers substantial savings by eliminating the duplication of district efforts and costs in operating schools on both year-round and traditional schedules.

If the common calendar is adopted, when does school start? When is vacation?

A proposed common calendar would begin in the 2009-10 school year. The proposal features a start date in late July with classes ending the first week of June 2010. The calendar includes two-week breaks in fall and spring and a three-week break in winter.

Why are some schools currently on year-round calendars and others on traditional calendars?

In the late 1980s, Sweetwater High was the first school in our district to adopt a year-round calendar. The move was prompted by data and studies showing students retained more learning with shorter vacation breaks. As new schools were built, they were automatically placed on a year-round schedule. Among our older schools, only Montgomery Middle and Montgomery High schools voluntarily adopted a year-round calendar. The remaining established school communities chose to keep a traditional calendar.

How can I learn more about this?

The proposed common calendar and task force background information and findings are available for reading on our district Web site at www.sweetwaterschools.org. Readers are invited to share their comments online at the Web site or by calling the Common Calendar phone line at (619)585-6050.

– *Chris Moran*