

What am I thankful for?

I am very thankful that Paul Otten, our assistant superintendent, now prepares the annual school calendar.

It is maddeningly complex. There is a long list of factors that have to be considered, and each one has the potential to be a “deal-breaker,” causing the work to start all over again.

We start with state law, which says the school year has to be at least 182 days long. But that school year can also include up to two days of professional development for our teachers, and up to four half-days for parent conferences.

We next look at what is traditional in our district, because not every district is alike in that sense. In Fairfield, we typically try to start school in late August, and end in early June. Winter break falls around Christmas. At Thanksgiving, three days off for the holiday added to two conference exchange days earlier in the week create a full week off, which many of our families use to travel. Then there are the standard holidays, such as Labor Day, New Year’s Day, Memorial Day, etc.

But that’s just the beginning. Next we have to look at the state designated testing dates, and also factor in that grades 9-12 are on a block schedule – each term must have equal numbers of instructional days. Also, the date for graduation is usually already fixed, because the rental of the Cintas Center is arranged several years in advance. (So here’s a heads up to our juniors – your graduation date is Sat., June 5, 2010, at 2 p.m.)

Then there’s the whole subject of spring break and testing dates. In order to make sure our students are properly prepared for the required Ohio standardized tests, we try to have spring break during the week in which April 1 falls. That avoids having spring break too close to either the March or May state testings, and also ensures that spring break is a consistent week each year, which allows families to plan ahead.

Once we finally arrive at a tentative calendar that meets all those considerations, we review it with our principals, with a group representing our teachers, and with a group of senior high school students. We also always try to get it on the agenda for the monthly meeting we have with our ten PTC presidents and get their input. We share it with the heads of our unions – there are five separate employee units in the district. After we have considered all their feedback and made any changes, we add it to the agenda for a school board meeting. The board’s practice has been to discuss it at one meeting, and then vote on it at the next meeting. That allows time for input from the public.

Once the school board approves the calendar, we add in the dates for report cards, progress reports, early dismissals, open houses at each school, and evening conferences.

We are working now on the calendar for the 2009-10 school year. Our plan is to take it to the board for review and discussion at its Dec. 4 meeting, which means the board will

likely vote on it at the Dec. 18 meeting. Of course, we will publish it as soon as it's approved.

Please have a happy and safe holiday.

*Published in the Fairfield Echo, Nov. 27, 2009.*