Memorandum

To: BBRSD School Committee
From: Carol L. Costello, Superintendent of Schools
Date: March 12, 2024
Re: FY25 School Calendar Supporting Information

Berlin Boylston Regional School District

Proposed Calendar Summary: As we look to the vote on the FY25 calendar, I would like to provide you with additional considerations to inform your decision-making. The Berlin-Boylston Administrative Team, with support from the Berlin-Boylston Educators' Association, has recommended the continuation of a pre-Labor Day start date for staff and students. In addition, we have reallocated some Professional Development Days so that staff members at all levels will be able to collaborate with one another and access district training and workshops on a more consistent basis. This is, in fact, an expectation of the MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education:

"High Quality Professional Development is a set of coherent learning experiences that is systematic, purposeful, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving teacher practice and student outcomes."

Website: https://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/

To that end, this is the first year we have proposed a significantly larger number of early release days with the goal of utilizing the time in response to inquiries about improving student assessment performance. Our goal is to provide opportunities for educators to meet in vertical teams across elementary and middle/high school on a more consistent basis. During these professional development times, educators will concentrate on topics such as: 1) vertical alignment of curriculum and scope and sequence of content; 2) data analysis; 3) training in areas of literacy and mathematics to close specific gaps made evident through benchmark and summative assessments.

The Administrative Team recognizes that a move to additional early-release days will result in child-care issues to families, particularly at the elementary level. To this end, the Team is willing to provide building space and work with various organizations from both the town and within the school clubs, to provide lunch and care for these students as much as possible during that time. We estimate a window of 3.5 hours, at which time our regular after-school program will commence. Parents who have chosen to utilize the extended care service will be responsible for student pick-up and possible fees depending on how the program is structured. We are committed to continuing to work in collaboration with other groups to make this work.

Post-Labor Day Calendar - A draft post-Labor Day calendar has been provided for your perusal. I have also provided for your reference, a list of area school districts and the start dates for each of them. The Administrative Team has discussed this option and in consultation with the Berlin-Boylston Educators' Association do not support the later start at this time for the following reasons:

1. **Athletics** - The MIAA has indicated that fall sports start on August 19th. For athletes, this means an end to summer vacation on August 18th. Currently, athletes involved in fall sports are expected to attend practice after this date, and rely on parents or the ability to drive themselves to and from practice before buses are available. Moving the date will mean an additional week of transportation arrangements for families.
2. **June Extension** - The unpredictability of the actual "end" date for the school year is a concern. We find that, oftentimes, families are already making vacation plans for the last weeks in school. Camps tend to begin at that time, and summer courses for teachers often begin as well. If the last regular day of school is scheduled for the last full week in June, *and* there are snow or other emergency days, we potentially will not end the school year until June 30th. It is always good to have the five-day cushion as a precaution, however, each day "lost" will mean an additional make-up day. (N.B. the additional holiday now on the calendar that pushes a later close date).
3. **Staggered School Start Transition** - we have found the staggered start to the school year beginning prior to Labor Day, three days the first week, four days the second week, and five days the third week, to be the most advantageous time for our students and staff to begin their learning experience.
4. **Additional Learning Days** - By starting earlier, we have additional time to prepare students for end-of-year assessments including MCAS and AP testing.

In conclusion, should the School Committee wish to pursue further discussion on this topic, my recommendation would be for building principals to include this topic in the agenda for their School Councils in the coming year. At that time, further study can take place.