

Executive Summary of the Barcroft Modified School Year Calendar Evaluation

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Introduction

In December 2019, the Department of Planning & Evaluation (P&E) conducted an evaluation of the Barcroft Modified School Year Calendar (MSYC) to determine if adjustments are worth considering as APS prepared to review all elementary school boundaries and consider program moves that all go into effect for the 2021-22 school year.

P&E gathered and analyzed APS student and finance data. Hanover Research reviewed available literature on modified school calendars to help us understand if there were benefits to the calendar in other districts.

Over the past several years, suggestions were made to align the Barcroft calendar as a cost saving measure. However, it was not clear if this decision made sense. This study looked at the objectives from the 2002 proposal to inform the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget.

As part of this process, staff looked at School Board documentation to understand why Barcroft moved to a modified calendar in 2002. At its September 12, 2002 meeting, it accepted the recommendation of then-Superintendent Robert Smith to approve a modified calendar for Barcroft. The rationale given for adopting this calendar was to increase student achievement and narrow the achievement gap. The Superintendent, Dr. Smith, noted in his approval recommendation that the modified calendar would not incur additional costs.

2002 Goals for Barcroft's Modified School Year Calendar *Adopted by the School Board in September 2002*

Increase student achievement through:

- An extended learning period with a shorter summer vacation to minimize learning loss for all students
- Specialized learning programs that would take place during the three extended learning sessions

Areas Examined & Findings:

P&E reviewed academic data including Reading, Math and Science passing rates for SOL testing between the years of 2014 – 2019. Based on that review, the evaluation found that the Modified School Year Calendar made **no** significant difference in student achievement.

- Student achievement suggests the year-round calendar has had a **neutral** effect based on comparing Barcroft with the other APS Title I schools
- No significant differences in students' performance
 - English Learners assessed to be proficient or making progress, Access 2017 through 2019
 - Reading, Math and Science passing rates, SOL tests from 2015 through 2019

Direct costs to maintain the Modified School Year Calendar are significant

- Barcroft has the highest per pupil cost, \$17,470 for Fiscal Year 2020
- The total cost of \$676,320 is above that of the next highest school (Barrett)
- The Hannover report also states that the year-round calendar may increase district operating costs

Additional Study Findings

- Schools in neighboring districts have moved away from modified calendars. For some the rationale was based on the additional costs of a different calendar and no evidence supporting that a modified calendar has the intended effect on student outcomes.

Findings called out after the review of the study:

Indirect costs to maintain the Modified School Year Calendar are significant

- The typical sharing of staff among schools does not work because the calendars do not align, so APS supplements Barcroft by:
 - Making part-time staffing allocations full time
 - Adding extra workdays (E-days) for Special Education services like speech and psychological and educational testing
- Synergy requires customized programming at additional cost to accommodate the modified school year calendar
- Transportation costs are higher, as bus drivers require an 11-month contract
 - Barcroft staff can focus on supporting students in July, rather than printing and mailing transportation messages ahead of other schools

Additional Rationale

- Barcroft must fill the gaps from missing out on system supports provided to all other schools in August
- Helps APS move from a system of schools to a school system
- Increased collaboration among staff when calendars are aligned

- As a result of the 2020-21 calendar being adjusted, Barcroft teachers are using resources provided for all schools in the virtual environment

Calendar Considerations

Barcroft staff report that approximately 2/3 of students attend the intersession classes; half of the time is devoted to academics and the other half to enrichment activities like camp and cooking classes. Staff reports that it would be possible for these same academic and enrichment activities to take place within the traditional calendar.

Over time, the Barcroft calendar has evolved so that the second semester calendar is now aligned with the traditional calendar; for example, parent-teacher conferences are held on the same days in March as all other elementary schools. In addition, Barcroft students were able to attend APS elementary summer school in 2019.

Currently, APS is considering starting the traditional school year before Labor Day as many of our neighboring jurisdictions do and is now allowed by the state of Virginia. It is important to note that if the APS calendar changes to a before Labor Day start, the time difference with the Barcroft calendar school year start would be significantly narrowed.

In addition to the budgeted costs, there are other costs. For example:

- Curriculum supervisors need to develop separate pacing guides for Barcroft.
- Human Resources needs to develop a separate set of contracts for Barcroft staff.
- Information Services needs to set up a different timeline for Barcroft report cards.
- APS also needs to use E days (additional workdays assigned beyond the 196 days in the T-scale contract) to provide Barcroft with Special Education services like speech and psychological and educational testing because these staff members are on traditional year contracts as they serve students in more than one school.

Conclusion and Possible Next Steps

Closing the achievement gap among all groups of learners remains a high priority for APS. From the data one can conclude that the effect of the modified school year has not had a significant effect on achievement.

As APS continues to move from being a system of schools to a school system, consideration should be given to aligning Barcroft's calendar with the calendar of all other schools. The Modified School Year Calendar might meet its goals if multiple schools across elementary, middle, and high school shifted to the same calendar; however, at this time no school is seeking to change the calendar.