

## **Enhancing school calendar**

### **The prime consideration should be the impact on students' learning**

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Area school officials are demonstrating progressive leadership in considering a new, balanced school schedule. They are also wise to invite input and take a careful approach.

Metro Nashville schools and Williamson County schools are looking at plans that would alter their annual education calendars. Williamson County could go first, possibly implementing a new calendar for the 2006-07 school year; the Williamson school board is expected to consider the change next month.

In Metro, the change could come in the 2007-08 school year. The schedule would send students through four nine-week school sessions, interspersed with one-week breaks during October and November and a two-week break in March. The summer break would be reduced to eight weeks.

Arguments for the more balanced schedule have grown in recent years. The concept gets away from a time when schools accommodated a more agricultural environment, when children were available for help in the fields. More recently, families have used the long summer break to take vacations. The shift to shorter breaks, however, helps students retain what they have learned. It can be difficult to restart the learning process after a long hiatus.

Not surprisingly, school officials are finding strong opinions among parents on each side of the issue.

The driving force in the discussions should be what is the best for children's education, not what's best for the summer vacation. If educators see evidence that a balanced schedule benefits students academically, they should use that persuasive point. Nevertheless, strong feelings against the change should be respected. No one should feel that they haven't had a chance to be heard.

The fact that a summer break could still be eight weeks long should go a long way in breaking down opposition. Schools should be commended for conducting a serious conversation on this issue. •

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