

# **A 2020 VISION**

## **FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION in ULSTER COUNTY**

### **Bell Schedules and Calendars**

November 2014



**The Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach, SUNY New Paltz  
Ulster County School Boards Association**

# Bell Schedules and Calendars

Time is a valuable commodity in education; therefore systematic consideration of its use is crucial. In New York State, the number of days that children spend in school—and how some of those must be used, for example, for statewide exams—is determined by New York State legislation and regulations established by the New York State Commissioner of Education. But how these days are allocated, within the broad framework dictated by the state, is decided locally by school boards. Local decisions include:

- ◆ What date will mark the first day of school, and the last?
- ◆ When will the school day begin and end?
- ◆ How many days must teachers work?
- ◆ How many school days will be used, in whole or in part, for purposes other than instruction of students (for example, for professional development)?
- ◆ What days off will there be, if any, in addition to federal holidays?
- ◆ And how will the school day be divided for purposes of instruction:
  - the number of periods in the school day,
  - the time given to passing from one room to another,
  - the length in minutes of each period?

Boards of Education in each district make decisions about the school calendar, with the advice of professional educators, and often within the context of negotiations with other interested parties (e.g., the teacher’s union). Decisions about the schedule of the school day are often left to administrators. With local control over the inner-workings of the school calendar and bell schedules, the philosophical beliefs of the local education administration are operationalized (i.e., block vs. traditional schedule).

Independent choices made in each district result in differences in school calendars (regarding the number of days students are in school, timing of vacations, and scheduling of professional development days for teachers) and bell schedules (the time of day that school ends and begins, the timing of classes). This local determination is important, as community-centered decision making for education is a core value for New Yorkers. But at a time at which increased inter-district collaboration is being encouraged to reduce the costs of education while sustaining or enhancing educational quality, it may benefit us to think about how coordination of our calendars and schedules might increase our ability to collaborate. For example, professional development opportunities could be shared and coordinated among districts if school calendars were aligned; this would



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be particularly advantageous for smaller districts that have fewer specialized staff and who would benefit from working with specialized staff in other districts.

If we are to advance more collaboration on a regional basis, the parameters created by the calendars and bell schedules of Ulster County school districts must be considered. The challenge here will be to develop a framework for the school day and year that permits coordination while also allowing for individual school district preferences and character. In one approach, school districts might agree to begin their school days at the same time, but still allow flexibility of scheduling (i.e., block schedule vs. traditional schedule) within the school day. Common times would be shared earlier in the morning, before discrepancies among the schedules had time to build and create misalignments among periods. Calendars might align superintendents’ conference days among the eight districts, which would permit the sharing of professional development when appropriate. Such coordinated schedules and calendars within a common framework might create

the infrastructure for sharing educational programs and administrative services now and into the future.

As a first step in identifying opportunities opportunities for collaboration, A 2020 Vision for Public Education in Ulster County set out to understand the alignment, or lack thereof, of calendars and bell schedules among Ulster County school districts. We looked at two things: the organization of the school year (school calendars) and of the school day (bell schedules.)

Following, we depict the bell schedules and calendars of each of the eight school districts in Ulster County. We highlight places of synchronization and areas in which there is a lack of congruence. We focus on high school bell schedules and calendars, since sharing of educational programming is most likely to occur at this level. The bell schedule graph depicts possible sharing across all eight Ulster County school districts as well as blocks of time that are shared among fewer districts than the full eight. This is not an exhaustive list, but it demonstrates possibilities for sharing.

HIGH SCHOOL BELL SCHEDULES



KEY: Number of schools with shared time

8

6

5

4

3

Ulster County High Schools, Bell Schedules

The morning bell rings for the eight high schools in Ulster County between 7:40am and 8:00am. Dismissal times range from 2:08pm to 2:35pm (exclusive of activity periods, which are optional for students). Ulster BOCES, which serves high school students from all component districts begins its first academic session at 8:35am and ends its last academic session at 1:45pm.

Within these start and end times, Ulster County high schools run on varying schedules. Two high schools follow a block schedule, with periods of over 80 minutes, while the others follow a more traditional schedule with

periods of slightly more than 40 minutes. Some school districts end their day with an optional activity period (students have the option of staying late to get extra help or to participate in extracurricular activities), while others do not. The number of periods ranges from four to nine (again, exclusive of activity periods); the length of those periods ranges from 40 minutes to 83 minutes. Ulster BOCES in Port Ewen has four academic sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. The morning sessions run 60 and 57 minutes, and the afternoon sessions run 60 and 62 minutes.

DISTRICT	START TIME (may include homeroom)	NUMBER OF PERIODS	PERIOD LENGTH	DISMISSAL & DISMISSAL WITH ACTIVITY PERIOD
Ellenville	7:50	8	47	2:34
Highland	7:40	8 & activity	47 (28 min. activity)	2:17 & 2:48
Kingston	7:50	8 & activity	42 (44 min. activity)	2:11 & 3:00
New Paltz	8:00	4	82 (29 min. lunch blocks)	2:20
Onteora	7:40	9	42	2:35
Rondout Valley <sup>1</sup>	7:40	4	80 (40 min. lunch blocks)	2:22
Saugerties	7:45	8 & activity	43	2:08 & 3:00
Wallkill	7:49	9	40	2:21
Ulster BOCES	8:35 & 11:40	2 & 2	60 & 57, 60 & 62	10:35 & 1:45



**The bottom line:** there is not currently one full time period (coinciding start and end time) shared by any of the Ulster County high schools. Moreover, there is not a single chunk of 30 minutes that spans the eight high school schedules. The longest portion of shared time across the eight districts is 27 minutes from 8:00 am to 8:27 am.

If economy or sustaining educational opportunities for students requires shared use of distance or blended learning technologies, or even the sharing of staff, coinciding chunks of time that are common across school districts are needed. To be sure, sharing instructional resources would not

necessarily require that bell schedules be identical across all eight school districts. It is possible that aligning a few parts of the schedule would allow for sharing among high schools. Moreover, it may not be feasible—or even desirable—for sharing to occur among all eight high schools in all circumstances. There will certainly be instances where sharing among just a few districts fills a particular need. Looking within the eight schedules, we can see more, and longer, chunks of time that are shared among fewer than the full eight. Nevertheless, not having the option to share among all eight school districts serves to limit the potential of that sharing.

Ulster County High School Calendars

The start and end dates of the 2014-15 school year for Ulster County school districts are almost entirely convergent. School began for teachers on September 2 in all eight Ulster County school districts and Ulster BOCES. Seven of the eight Ulster County school districts and Ulster BOCES opened to students on September 3; one opened to students on September 4 (school was open to teachers on September 3 in this district). The last day of school is June 25th for seven of the school districts and Ulster BOCES; three of these districts remain open for teachers on June 26th. One school district closes its doors to students on June 24th, but remains open for teachers on June 25th.

However, within this fairly consistent framework the calendars of the eight school districts vary significantly. All share only one Superintendent’s Conference Day (September 2); seven of the eight and Ulster

BOCES share another (May 7). Other Superintendent’s Conference Days, scattered throughout the school year, are common between or among only two or three districts.

Schools in all eight districts and Ulster BOCES are closed for federal holidays (Columbus Day, Presidents Day, etc.). Vacation periods centered around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter are generally consistent across the eight districts and Ulster BOCES, though some districts extend these vacations (i.e., the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving, the Monday following Easter) while others do not. Early dismissals fall on different days. Finally, the number of days students spend in school also varies across the eight school districts, with 176 being the fewest days and 181 being the most.<sup>2</sup>

SEPTEMBER 2014

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
	<sup>1</sup> CL - ALL	<sup>2</sup> SC - ALL	<sup>3</sup> SC - O CL½ - S	<sup>4</sup>	<sup>5</sup>	<sup>6</sup>
<sup>7</sup>	<sup>8</sup>	<sup>9</sup>	<sup>10</sup>	<sup>11</sup>	<sup>12</sup>	<sup>13</sup>
<sup>14</sup>	<sup>15</sup>	<sup>16</sup>	<sup>17</sup>	<sup>18</sup>	<sup>19</sup> CL½ - W	<sup>20</sup>
<sup>21</sup>	<sup>22</sup>	<sup>23</sup>	<sup>24</sup>	<sup>25</sup> CL - ALL	<sup>26</sup> CL - E SC - H	<sup>27</sup>
<sup>28</sup>	<sup>29</sup>	<sup>30</sup>				

OCTOBER 2014

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
			<sup>1</sup>	<sup>2</sup>	<sup>3</sup>	<sup>4</sup>
<sup>5</sup>	<sup>6</sup>	<sup>7</sup>	<sup>8</sup> SC - K	<sup>9</sup>	<sup>10</sup> SC - N CL½ - H O R S	<sup>11</sup>
<sup>12</sup>	<sup>13</sup> CL - ALL	<sup>14</sup>	<sup>15</sup>	<sup>16</sup>	<sup>17</sup>	<sup>18</sup>
<sup>19</sup>	<sup>20</sup>	<sup>21</sup>	<sup>22</sup> SC - E	<sup>23</sup>	<sup>24</sup> CL½ - R	<sup>25</sup>
<sup>26</sup>	<sup>27</sup>	<sup>28</sup>	<sup>29</sup>	<sup>30</sup>	<sup>31</sup> CL½ - H W	

■ CL= closed full day ■ CL½ = closed half day ■ SC = sup.conf. full day

BOCES Ellenville Highland Kingston New Paltz Onteora Rondout Valley Saugerties Wallkill



NOVEMBER 2014

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
						1
2	3	4 SC - <b>K S</b>	5	6	7 SC - <b>O</b>	8
9	10	11 CL - <b>ALL</b>	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 CL½ - <b>W</b>	25 CL½ - <b>W</b>	26 CL - <b>H* K O S R*</b> CL½ - <b>E</b> SC - <b>B N W</b> SC½ - <b>R*</b>	27 CL - <b>ALL</b>	28 CL - <b>ALL</b>	29

\* Closed for students  
\* Open for teachers

DECEMBER 2014

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
	1	2	3	4	5 CL½ - <b>H</b>	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 CL - <b>N</b>	23 CL - <b>N S</b>	24 CL - <b>ALL</b>	25 CL - <b>ALL</b>	26 CL - <b>ALL</b>	27
28	29 CL - <b>ALL</b>	30 CL - <b>ALL</b>	31 CL - <b>ALL</b>			

JANUARY 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
				1 CL - <b>ALL</b>	2 CL - <b>ALL</b>	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16 CL½ - <b>S</b>	17
18	19 CL - <b>ALL</b>	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30 CL½ - <b>O</b>	31

FEBRUARY 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 CL½ - <b>H</b>	13 CL - <b>B H K N O W</b> CL½ - <b>S</b>	14
15	16 CL - <b>ALL</b>	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

■ CL= closed full day ■ CL½ = closed half day ■ SC = sup.conf. full day

BOCES Ellenville Highland Kingston New Paltz Onteora Rondout Valley Saugerties Wallkill

MARCH 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6 CL - <b>H*</b> CL½ - <b>O W</b>	7
8	9	10	11 SC - <b>K</b>	12	13	14
15	16	17	18 SC - <b>S</b>	19	20 CL½ - <b>R W</b>	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 CL - <b>ALL</b>	31 CL - <b>ALL</b>				

\* Closed for students  
\* Open for teachers

APRIL 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
			1 CL - <b>ALL</b>	2 CL - <b>ALL</b>	3 CL - <b>ALL</b>	4
5	6 CL - <b>K S W</b>	7 CL - <b>W</b>	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

MAY 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 SC - <b>B E H K N</b> <b>O R S</b> CL½ - <b>W</b>	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22 CL - <b>S</b>	23
24	25 CL - <b>ALL</b>	26	27	28	29	30

JUNE 2015

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25 SC - <b>R</b>	26 CL - <b>B H K O R S</b> SC - <b>E N W</b>	27
28	29 CL - <b>ALL</b>	30 CL - <b>ALL</b>				

■ CL= closed full day ■ CL½ = closed half day ■ SC = sup.conf. full day

BOCES Ellenville Highland Kingston New Paltz Onteora Rondout Valley Saugerties Wallkill

Conclusion

Different bell schedules and school calendars do not allow maximum flexibility to share programs and resources. That said, it is unclear how much of the bell schedule and calendars need to be common in order to maximize educational opportunity and efficiency. For example, the demand for distance or blended learning might be met through two common periods in a day. Or, it may suffice to have all high schools begin at the same time, so that a portion of the first period may be dedicated to distance/blended learning before the particularities of the separate bell schedules (block scheduling vs. traditional scheduling) drive a divergence in the beginning and end of periods.

Importantly, goals of efficiency and educational enhancement might not be served by the same approach to bell schedules and calendars. For example, a common bell schedule might make a regional approach to transportation — for efficiency — more expensive because more buses might be needed to transport all Ulster County high school students at the same time. A common calendar, however, would make a regional transportation model with shared busing less expensive, eliminating the need for buses to serve only some districts on some days.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to educational enhancement, shared educational programming would likely require both a coordinated bell schedule, so that districts share some common instructional periods, and a common calendar, to allow sharing of courses and professional development.

*A 2020 Vision for Public Education in Ulster County* recognizes that bell schedule and calendar choice reflect a careful weighing of values by school boards and school administrators, responsive to the individuality and educational philosophies and approaches of each district. It is important to maintain that individuality. However, in an increasingly constrained resource environment, we need to be aware of the way that our current method of deciding about bell schedules and calendars, and the results, may limit our ability to work together. In the end, we should be deliberate about crafting bell schedules and calendars that best serve our objectives, rather than limiting our options.

The mission of *A 2020 Vision* is to promote countywide, regional thinking, among the eight Ulster County school districts to enhance educational opportunity and promote greater efficiency. The School and School District Structure study group hopes that the issue of bell schedules and calendars will be the subject of thoughtful, measured deliberation at the reconvening of *A 2020 Vision for Public Education in Ulster County* in December, 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Rondout Valley publishes a 9-period schedule, but periods are combined in practice to create a block schedule, which applies to most students. Periods 1 and 2 form the first block and periods 3 & 4 the second block. Of the three 40 minutes lunch periods (5,6 & 7), two form another block. If a student eats period 6, he/she probably has a study hall the other two periods or may be a special education student with split classes. The day ends with periods 8 & 9 forming the last block.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are the number of days that students attend school for at least half of the day. Therefore, Superintendent’s Conference Days are excluded from this calculation; early dismissal days are included in this calculation.

<sup>3</sup> A director of transportation in one of the eight Ulster County school districts went so far as to state that a statewide calendar—that applied to private schools and schools that serve students with special needs—would facilitate the coordination of transportation and make it more efficient (Interview, March 2014).

Ulster County  
School Boards Association

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