

## **Creating a School District Calendar**

To the public at large, the creation of a school-year calendar would seem to be a relatively straightforward process yielding a series of reasonably spaced breaks for students and staff.

Unfortunately, the reality usually involves several Board Committee meetings of animated discussion, along with three or four versions of calendar options before the full Board votes on a final calendar.

Every school district in New Jersey is confronted with a task that is more difficult than it would initially appear. We are an ethnically and religiously diverse state that values local school board control, yet the state officially lists 73 religious holidays distributed over 63 calendar days. To add to the challenge, there are discretionary federal holidays such as Martin Luther King's Birthday, Columbus Day and Veterans' Day.

School districts, by law, must provide a minimum number of instructional days for students, two NJEA Convention days for teachers, three in-service staff training days on mandatory topics such as Affirmative Action, Right to Know and Disaster Training. A negotiated teacher's contract also requires time for parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school evenings, which have calendar implications.

Some additional mitigating factors include national and municipal elections in November, School Board elections, scheduled by County law in April along with a significant number of State-mandated assessments such as GEPA, HSPA, and NJASK. As a final consideration, reserve days must be built-in to accommodate emergency closings during the year.

When the above considerations are applied to a school calendar requiring 180 instructional days, the boxes fill in rather quickly and the spaces for intermittent, reasonably spaced vacation days become scarce.

As you can see, the challenge is formidable and the limited solutions are, at best, a compromise among conflicting options.

Typically, the Board looks at least three to four alternative versions of the calendar, including the above mentioned factors, and then makes a decision that best serves the educational needs of the greatest number of students.