Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning  
Executive Director Communication  

January 6, 2016  

Dear RMSEL Parent Community,  

Welcome back to a New Year and the start of new learning expeditions, fieldwork, and portfolio preparation as we begin the remainder of the 2015-2016 school year. I am writing to share an amendment to the 2016-2017 and subsequent school year calendars for which we are inviting stakeholder feedback prior to a finalization by the RMSEL BOCES Board. My intent is to provide a narrative to the decision, explanation of impact, and process for providing feedback prior to finalization.  

Electronic communication is not always best for creating dialogue; however, it serves an important niche in efficient delivery of information to a large group of stakeholders who may be limited on time. I use this introduction to share a project I have been working on here at RMSEL with our entire staff. We have many issues each and every day that ultimately, at the end of the day, impact student achievement directly or indirectly. As we look at curriculum, resources, trips, budget, development, etc., in service of achievement, we have two overarching limiting factors: financial resources and time. With financial resources being continuously flat and or growing at a rate disproportionate to the cost of doing business, I wish I had more direct control, as do our five superintendents and district boards. With my inability to directly control an increase in public school revenue, I shifted my focus to the finite resource of time.  

Time is certainly not in abundance and no matter how many manipulations of discrete mathematics I conduct, I can’t seem to figure out a solution which would result in an 8-day week or 25-hour day. Time is a finite variable in our school; it cannot be duplicated and/or purchased even with the best of intentions. Each school year, I have observed a decline in teacher energy and morale as the workload compounds to an insurmountable level. In a traditional school this is typical and RMSEL is certainly no different in the level of excellence we expect from our staff.  

To achieve our results of performance expected at RMSEL, we conduct weekly Professional Development every Wednesday after school from 3:30-4:45 pm. In addition to this requirement, we invite staff to participate in a shared leadership model through participation in our Organizational Leadership Team, Instructional Leadership Team, and/or District Accountability Committee. With these expectations to lead in a small school, the impact results in each school level (lower school, middle school, high school, and specialists) having all and/or most of their team serving on Tuesdays after school from 3:30-4:45 pm. The result of Professional Development and Shared Leadership results in an additional 9 hours of meetings per month to fulfill these two requirements, not including a weekly school level team meeting which adds another 4 hours per month outside of teacher planning time.  

The initial inclination is to get rid of meetings, right? By cutting down on meetings we can give time back to teachers and staff, however, making this simple corrective action eliminates shared professional growth and shared leadership that are essential to our success as a high achieving school. We cannot toss out meetings and/or reduce professional learning as it will limit and stifle the development and collaboration that makes us so successful.  

Our school district partners accommodate similar needs within their schools through a modified calendar with weekly and/or bi-monthly early release and/or late starts to the school day. I have always expressed concern and resistance to making a modification to the school calendar with a late start of 10:30
am and/or an early release of 1:00 pm weekly, as these directly impact accessibility to our amazing school to families that already travel up to one hour daily to attend RMSEL.

To have a more complex understanding of the finite resource of time utilized daily by our teaching staff, I conducted a 10-day time audit in which teachers tracked and recorded their daily time in 15-minute increments from 6:00 am – 8:00 pm daily. Teachers were not expected to fill a fourteen hour day, but many recorded personal time and the time in which they returned to the responsibilities required to be prepared as the best professional possible in the classroom. The target outcome of this work is to assist in supporting essential practice refinement such as grading, planning, assessment, fieldwork, etc. and the overall volume of time spent working on and/or attending professional meetings/events. From my analysis, I am humbled but concerned by the amount of time our teachers commit to being successful practitioners in an Expeditionary Learning School. I believe that work/life balance may not exist, but the health of the human has a direct result on performance in your profession.

To assist in supporting teachers in balancing time commitments and providing additional time to support classroom instruction, we are researching an amendment to the 2016-2017 and subsequent school year calendars. This amendment and impact is outlined in the bullet points below:

### 2016 – 2017 Calendar Amendment Consideration

- **August 2016 – May 2017** includes (35) Wednesdays throughout the calendar year.
- **On Wednesday** we would operate on a modified start time for school from 7:50 am to 8:50 am; essentially, a one hour late start each Wednesday of the school year for a total of 35 instructional hours.
- **We would provide supervised access to campus at 8:30 am** for families, as we do now every day at 7:30 am. This would require parents to drop off one day a week an hour later, but is not disproportionate to other schools in our districts that regularly start at this time.
- **By offering the weekly late start of 8:50 am we would eliminate the Tuesday/Wednesday after school meetings by holding the meetings at 7:00-8:40 am on each Wednesday.**
  - 1st, 2nd, 3rd Wednesday of the month – Professional Development 7:00-8:40 am
  - 4th Wednesday of the month – Organizational and Instructional Leadership Team 7:00-8:40 am
- **This structure would not disrupt already scheduled daily planning of teachers.**
- **This structure would eliminate “Extended Crew” on Wednesday mornings and add minutes to daily crew to account for the shift in time.**
- **No academic instruction would be impacted by a one hour modified start time.**
- **This would restructure the required meeting time of teaching staff, resulting in a total reduction of outside-of-the-day meetings from 9 hours to 2 hours monthly.**

We are seeking feedback from our teaching staff and parent community in how to best accommodate this amendment to the calendar through providing feedback directly to the following options:

**Option #1:**

- Adjust every school day by 10 minutes, extending school to 3:20 pm daily,
- Transition the ½ day on the Friday prior to Winter Break to a full day of school (December 23, 2106), and
• Transition the Tuesday after Memorial Day to a full day of school (May 30, 2017).

Option #2

• Adjust every school day by 5 minutes, extending school to 3:15 pm daily,
• Transition the ½ day on the Friday prior to Winter Break to a full day of school (December 23, 2016), and
• Transition the (2) Full Day Professional Development days after Fall/ Spring Break to full days of school.

Option #3

• Adjust every school day by 5 minutes, extending school to 3:15 pm daily,
• Transition the ½ day on the Friday prior to Winter Break to a full day of school (December 23, 2016), and
• Transition the (2) Full Day Staff Retreat days in February prior to Winter Conferences to full days of school.

On Tuesday, January 5, 2016, I solicited feedback from our staff regarding the three options above and wish to provide a few considerations from the team as you respond as a parent community to the options listed above. The comments from staff are presented not in a rank order but as considerations as parents reflect and respond.

Staff Meeting Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option #</th>
<th>Percentage of Favorable Staff Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option #1</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option #2</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option #3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Staff shared that Full Day Professional Development after Fall/Spring Break provides staff with the opportunity to collaborate, revise, and adjust long-term plans prior to the start of school. This day also provides the specialist team with an opportunity to collaborate with classroom crew leaders to enrich learning expeditions.
• Staff shared that the Full Day Staff Retreat prior to the start of the school year and during February results in a strong relational school culture that connects professionals and aligns with the design principles of our organization.

I ask that you consider this feedback when making your decision but understand, as a parent, you also have considerations that should be included when making an adjustment to the annual school year calendar. Attached on the RMSEL News Page directly below this communication is a direct link to a survey to provide feedback to the amendment to the school year calendar. I feel strongly that this amendment will support our teaching staff with time and not inhibit our families’ ability for access to RMSEL since it is not beyond a reasonable start time once a week with our district partners. Many schools in our partner districts have a modification similar to this type of calendar; I have researched the topic and feel that this request is the least disruptive to the multiple stakeholders that share in making RMSEL a success.
If you have any questions or concerns, I request that you please contact me directly or set up a time to meet in person. My door is always open and I invite this type of dialogue as we make decisions that impact our school community.

Sincerely,

Chad