

TO: School Committee

FROM: Emily Parks, Superintendent

DATE: October 30, 2018

RE: J-Term Pilot Report

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Attached please find a summary report of the J-Term Pilot. The information in the report was compiled by the J-Term Steering Committee, a group of teachers and administrators who oversaw the development and implementation of J-Term. This committee did extraordinary work over a more than two-year period to bring this program to life. The group was responsible for shaping the vision of J-Term, planning and implementing the professional development associated with J-Term, and executing the myriad of logistical challenges associated with a project of this scope. Notably, the group volunteered their time for this project.

My sincere thanks to the members of the J-Term Steering Committee:

Erin Armstrong, Science Teacher  
Sean Bevan, WHS Principal  
Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent  
Tim Chant, K-12 Director of Wellness  
Katherine Clifford, Math Teacher  
Amy Davenport, WHS Dean of Students  
Alison Donahue, Social Studies Teacher  
Kathryn Egan, English Teacher  
Heather Fatcheric, Social Studies Teacher  
Nicole Haberman, WHS Assistant Principal  
Kate Holmes, English Dept. Head  
Brian McEachern, Social Studies, Teacher  
Emily Miller, Science Teacher  
Katrina O'Brien, English Teacher  
Steve Ouellette, Director of Technology, Learning, and Innovation  
Jonas Sherr, District Professional Development Coordinator and Social Studies Teacher  
Caitlin Whelan, English Teacher  
Angela Wilson, Instructional Technology Coach and English Teacher  
Fritha Wright, English Teacher

I especially want to thank Jonas Sherr who skillfully chaired the Steering Committee and ensured the success of J-Term. His leadership and insight was instrumental in this process.

# **WHS J-Term Pilot: An Overview**

J-Term at Westwood High School was a 5-day experience piloted in June 2018, in which students took one intensive course that was outside of the traditional curriculum. All J-Term courses were taught by WHS faculty, and were offered on a pass/fail basis. Many courses involved off-site travel, while others were completely onsite. The Vision Statement of J-Term follows below:

*J-Term at WHS provides an opportunity for students to dive deeply into an existing area of interest or explore a new interest during an immersive learning experience of their choosing. J-Term courses are challenging and experiential; they involve, not just inform. Students explore, create, study, think and do. J-Term allows students to experience learning without the external controls that steer much of their education (e.g. classes constrained by bells and achievement measured by a grade). While each J-Term course is unique, all courses culminate in:*

- *a final product or performance, and/or*
- *a shared experience, and/or*
- *a reflection upon what was learned*

## **J-Term 2018 At-A-Glance:**

- 36 courses (see below for a list of course titles)
- 34 of 36 courses co-taught, varying in teams of 2-5 instructors
- 750 students total (9th, 10th, and 11th graders)
- Courses mixed by grade level
- Average class size: 20.8 students
- Student/Faculty ratio: 8:1
- 58% of students received their first choice course, 89% received one of their top 2 selections, and 98% received a course in their top 3.
- Approximately 60 students requested a course change after their initial placement. The vast majority of these requests were granted, with a small number choosing to remain in their original course based on capped enrollment in other courses.
- 26 of 36 courses involved some form of off site travel during the week.
- Instructional Aides assigned to courses based on students' special education needs
- Average number of student absences per day: 35.5 (4.7%)
- 14 students notified administration that they would be missing J-Term for travel or work obligations (about half the number of students who typically request to take exams early). Accordingly, J-Term did not appear on their academic transcript.

## **J-Term Development Timeline: Key Dates**

- **April 27, 2016:** J-Term concept introduced to faculty during Professional Development.
- **November 8, 2016:** Faculty develops initial course concepts during full day Professional Development, emphasizing skills of ideation and peer feedback.
- **November 28, 2016:** First meeting of J-Term Steering Committee (12 teachers, 4 administrators, 1 school committee member).
- **November 30, 2016:** First of two initial student focus groups held to review initial course ideas and provide feedback about the J-Term concept.
- **April 12, 2017:** First faculty peer feedback session during Professional Development.
- **October 5, 2017:** Superintendent and Principal meet with parents during Curriculum Night for a “Coffee with Administrators” session to describe J-Term and field questions.
- **November 20-21, 2017:** J-Term Shopping: Course instructors run eight, 10-minute sessions to introduce their course to students prior to course registration.
- **November 28, 2017:** Student Registration for J-Term is opened.
- **January 31, 2017:** Students and parents notified via email about course placement.
- **June 18-22, 2018:** J-term

## **J-Term 2018 Course List** (For course descriptions, see [www.whsjterm.org](http://www.whsjterm.org))

*A Deep Dive into Anime and Fan Theory\**  
*A Foodie's Guide to Boston\**  
*Art of the Moving Title*  
*Basic Carpentry and Wiring*  
*Be a MAKER: Experiments in Sculpture*  
*Be Afraid: Horror in Film and Literature*  
*Become a Certified SCUBA Diver*  
*Bon Appétit: French Immersion Week\**  
*Camp Counselor Boot Camp*  
*Catan & Beyond: Exploration of Strategy Games*  
*Climb Your Family Tree: An Intro to Genealogy*  
*CSI Westwood\**  
*DeMOCKracy\**  
*Destination Aviation\**  
*Detail Vehicles like a Professional*  
*Dissecting Disney*  
*Exploring Scientific Discovery & Truth\**  
*Expression through Music Production*

*Faster, Better, Stronger: Be Your Fitness Pal*  
*Hot Topics in Biotechnology*  
*Life Hacks: #Adulging*  
*Numbers Game: Analytics & Economics in Sport*  
*Painting with Purpose*  
*Photography in the Field*  
*Project Runway: Own Your Style*  
*Psychology of Teamwork and Teambuilding*  
*Pursuit of Happiness*  
*So You Think You Can Rock*  
*Society through Sports on Screen\**  
*Sow the Seeds: Start a School Garden*  
*Spanish Immersion Experience*  
*Summit New England's Peaks*  
*The Criminal Mind\**  
*The Stories that Connect Us*  
*Top Chef Westwood*  
*Weather and Geology of New England*

\*Courses likely not running in J-Term 2019

**J-Term Pilot Cost:**

Total Cost:	\$ 52,385
Less value of durable goods:	<u>\$ 9,939</u>
	\$42,446

Cost detail:	Transportation	\$13,158
	Consumable materials	\$11,638
	Entrance fees	\$10,098
	Speaker fees	\$ 355
	Food (course-related)	\$ 4,017
	<u>Other</u>	<u>\$ 3,180</u>
	Total	\$42,446

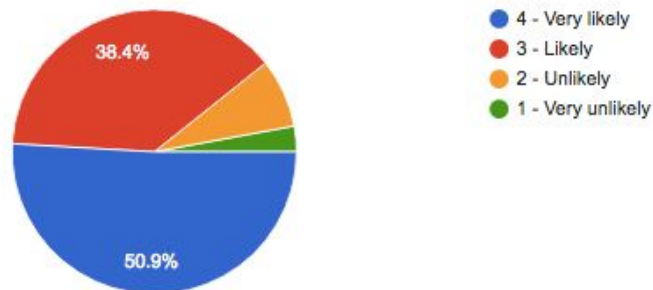
With the exception of SCUBA, which resulted in a certification and necessitated that students purchase their own equipment, there was no cost to students. The per pupil cost (less the cost of durable goods) was \$57/student.

The Foundation for Westwood Education provided a grant in the amount of \$20,000. The remainder of the cost of the pilot was supported by the operating budget, both through funds specifically earmarked for J-Term and through the district's curriculum and instruction budget.

## Post J-Term Feedback: Students

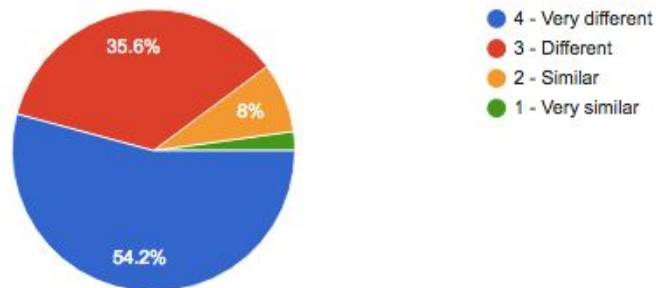
How likely are you to recommend this J-term course to a classmate?

550 responses



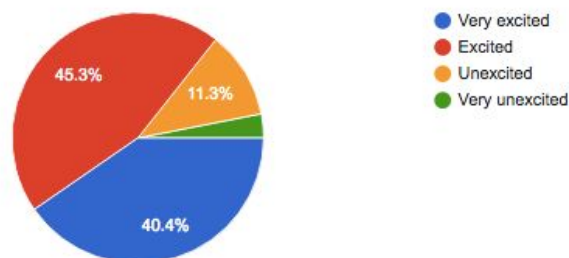
How different from or similar to "normal school" was your J-term experience?

550 responses



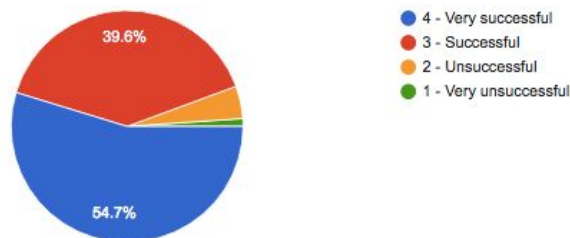
How excited would you be to participate in another J-Term course next year?

550 responses



J-term's mission was to provide an opportunity for you to dive deeply into an existing area of interest or explore a new interest. J-Term courses were intended to be challenging and experiential; to involve, not just inform. The goal was for you to explore, create, study, think and do. Based on your experience, how successful was J-term in achieving its mission?

550 responses



### Qualitative Feedback from Students:

Theme: Students were generally excited to attend school, viewing J-Term as a less stressful learning experience without the external pressures of grades or homework:

*"J-term was more of a relaxed place to be. The field trips made it fun to learn about new things. Also being with kids from different grades, I met new people from upper and lower grades. It was similar in the fact that we were learning, but there was no homework."*

*"I had such a great time and learned many new techniques. I was actually excited to go to school. The teachers were very helpful and made sure that the course was fun and organized. I am more open to trying new things and challenging myself."*

*"I didn't have any stress or competition...this course worked to improve my mental health instead of giving me things that made my life more difficult."*

Theme: Students enjoyed the change from the traditional structure of school:

*"It didn't feel like the normal day. I didn't really care that the bells were off and didn't depend on that schedule."*

Theme: Students enjoyed having more self-direction than in their normal school experience:

*"We had a lot more freedom and were able to make our own decisions and have a project that was truly our own - we had no rubrics or guidelines, however we all produced beautiful things with obvious effort."*

Theme: Students showed a preference for courses that included offsite travel:

*"The only day we were really in the classroom was the first day, all the other days were in Boston or down the cape or hiking. It was awesome, I got to meet new people and explore places I've never been while still learning about my course."*

Theme: Students experienced the end of the school year **prior** to J-Term (end of Term 4, final exams) as more stressful than in previous years:

*"The time leading up to J-Term was tough because teachers had to provide a ton of information because they had 5 less days in the year than normal."*

Theme: Students wanted to learn more about what was happening in other J-Term courses:

*"I think it would be cool to see what other courses were doing or at least have an idea. Each course felt very isolated."*

Theme: Students were able to articulate specific learning outcomes for themselves:

*"I will take away the fact that even if you seem very different then someone, there is always something to connect with, if you just open up. Not everyone is as different as they seem."* --Stories that Connect Us

*"I found J-Term to be a really great learning experience, not just about animation and using new software, but also working with time constraints and technical difficulties... You always listened to my input and helped me get through the most frustrating and painstaking parts of the creation process."* --Art of the Moving Title

*"This course was a community experience with a really nice group of people who could all be happy together. I had a really good time meditating and doing yoga which are things I'm planning to integrate into my school year so I can have more energy and improve my psyche."* --The Pursuit of Happiness

*"[This experience] was extremely memorable in the way that I was able to connect with people I normally wouldn't, as well as have an adventure of a lifetime. I took away that even when things get really difficult, you can figure it out by taking a step back, staying calm, and having a positive attitude."* --Summit New England Peaks

*"It was valuable because now I know how the land I am living on was made. I will take away a love for weather and glaciers."* --Weather and Geology of New England

*"I will take away my knowledge of identifying tempo and time signatures, as well as how samples and remixes are created."* --Music Production

*"I learned a lot about being a leader, and it helped me with public speaking as well."* --Camp Counselor Boot Camp

*"I have found a new love for the ukulele and a new way to play and make music with the people around me who also love it."* --So You Think You Can Rock

*"I learned how to cook new foods and I learned to try new foods that I love and I now can cook a good meal for my family."* --Top Chef Westwood

*"I learned a lot about money and budgeting."* --Life Hacks

*"This course was valuable for me because I am very interested in psychology as well as criminology, and taking this course confirmed that I want to study these subjects in the future. " --The Criminal Mind*

*"[I learned] that you can do something so small and it can help you in such a big way and impact your life in a big way." --Faster, Better, Stronger*

*"I really liked learning about so many new technologies that might be able to help or harm our modern society. I enjoyed debating about how ethical certain things were, and I will always take those skills with me when making decisions. I know that there isn't a clear-cut answer to what is right and wrong and there is a lot of gray areas." --Hot Topics in Biotechnology*

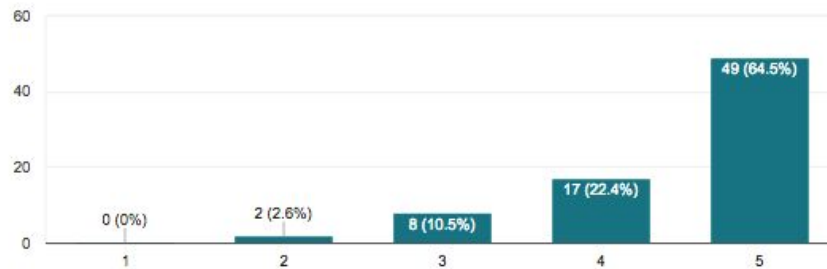
*"I grew most in my speaking abilities. I was encouraged to take risks, provided with vocabulary and exposed to a part of the cultures that I grew to be familiar with and could talk about." -- Spanish Immersion Week*



## Post J-Term Feedback: Teachers

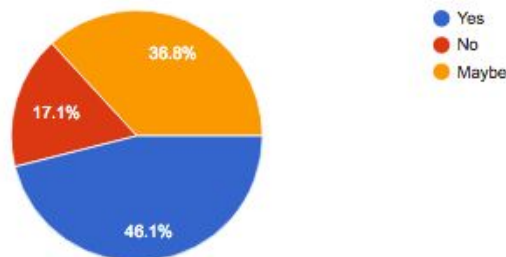
J-term's mission was to provide an opportunity for students to dive deeply into an existing area of interest or explore a new interest. J-Term courses were intended to be challenging and experiential; to involve, not just inform. The goal was for students to explore, create, study, think and do. Based on your experience in your course, how successful was J-term in achieving its mission?

76 responses



Do you believe your experiences developing and teaching your J-Term course will have any effect on your overall teaching practice going forward?

76 responses



### *Qualitative Feedback from Teachers:*

Theme: Many teachers noted that the structure of J-Term allowed them to develop more meaningful relationships with students:

*"J-Term offered new perspective on students' experiences. We developed a strong bond in our course, extraordinarily strong for the 1 week duration of the course. Students reported appreciating the social/emotional aspects of the course -- the chance to check-in, offer feedback, debrief activities, etc. and shared a desire for more of this within the fast-paced schedule of the typical academic day."*

*"I met a lot of students I would not have met otherwise. I got to see other aspects of current students' personalities that I hadn't see all year. "*

Theme: Teachers experienced high levels of student motivation without the use of grades:

*"The students really impressed me with how genuinely interested they were in the course subject matter without any external motivator. Students were HIGHLY engaged, but this engagement came from a combination of internal motivation, curiosity, and peer encouragement."*

*"J-Term was learning in its purest form. Students were excited to come to school and would say things like, "I'm having so much fun!" or "I'm learning without worrying about the grade!"*

*"My expectations of how hard the kids would work and how invested they would be were FAR exceeded. The kids worked hard and had great attitudes all week."*

Theme: Many teachers made connections about how J-Term might impact their thinking about their traditional course instruction:

*"I think I will be less afraid to work through 'uncomfortable' moments (silence). I learned one of the things that students value really highly is how much their teachers care about them and that they can visibly see that their teachers enjoy what they are doing. I learned that not everyone will connect with every activity/experience and that is okay as long as you offer variety."*

*"Seeing the joyfulness of our learners reminded me that kids are innately interested in engaging material, and we have to figure out the best way to do that."*

*"I'm thinking a lot more about classroom community and its role in student buy-in."*

*"This course reinforced for me how important it is for students to see the link between what they're doing and how it impacts their perspective on or approach to life beyond the school."*

*"We need to find ways to involve students much more in the learning process rather than just deliver content. J-Term was fertile ground for this type of instruction."*

*"[This experience] allowed me to become a bit more flexible in my planning. I had things planned for the week, but based on student input and excitement, there were times when we pivoted in an unplanned direction."*

*"Student-centered, hands-on, grounded in something real and authentic -- these things create powerful learning...Also I was reminded about the value of having a really good framing question to return to."*

*"J-Term offered a new perspective on students' experiences....Students reported appreciating the social/emotional aspects of the course -- the chance to check-in, offer*

*feedback, debrief activities, etc. and shared a desire for more of this within the fast-paced schedule of the typical academic day."*

*"I think it got me to think about the pressures students put on themselves to perform and do well. I knew it was always there, but I did not know the extent."*

*"I really have an increased perspective of what students connect to and what kind of experiences they truly value."*

Theme: Similar to students, many teachers experienced increased stress in the days leading up to J-Term (end of 4th Term and final exams):

*"The students and staff had visibly increased anxiety at the end of the school year compared to previous years. This was, in part, due to curriculum from the classroom being condensed into a shorter amount of time. More assessments and projects were crammed into a smaller window on the calendar, thus increasing stress."*

Theme: Co-Teaching was generally a positive and new experience:

*"I completely enjoyed the experience of working so closely with colleagues that I previously had not known well. They are great, smart, accountable, tough, and caring people! It makes me want to reach out to collaborate more."*

*"I have never co-taught before, and I found that experience both valuable and affirming. Just seeing how someone else plans and operates has given me some ideas that I will put to use in my own classes in the fall. Having a trusted colleague at your side emboldens you to do things you might not have thought possible in the classroom."*

## **Post J-Term Feedback: Parents**

*"My daughter came home yesterday from her Spanish immersion class and was just so excited to talk about her day. She kept saying how awesome and nice the teachers are and how she understands much more Spanish than she thought she would. What is better than a confidence boost to a 16-year-old girl?...It's the end of June and students are still excited to be learning."*

*"[My daughter] came home utterly exhausted, but beaming. She said - and I quote - 'This was one of the best weeks of my life - incredibly rewarding!' I asked her what her biggest takeaway was and she said it really showed her to try new experiences, even if they feel a bit frightening."*

*"I cannot imagine how much planning, coordination, communication, and angst goes into making something like this happen....If you are wondering if it was all worth it, have no doubt, it was worth every bit of it."*

*"Quick note to thank the WHS faculty and staff for the awesome vision, planning, and work to make J-Term a terrific success...I have really enjoyed looking at the Instagram photos -- seeing all the ways kids are learning and engages with the resources around them...Very jealous that no such opportunity existed for me back in the day..."*

## **Proposed New Courses for J-Term 2019**

*Agriculture & Farming*

*A Muggle's Look into the Magical World*

*Crazy Rich Asians! & Other Film Studies*

*History of Video Games: From Pong to VR*

*Bodybuilding 101*

*iTerm: Making J-Term Documentaries*

*The Great Outdoors*

*Teenagers in TV and Film*

*Urban Walking: Discovering Boston's*

*Neighborhoods One Step at a Time*

## **Next Steps**

**November 4-8:** Student focus groups to provide feedback on new course proposals.

**November 13-16:** Steering Committee members meet with teaching teams to share feedback and continue course planning process.

**December 18:** J-Term Course Shopping. Students attend six 10-minute sessions to learn about any courses they select.

**December 19-21:** Course Registration opens.

**Late January:** Students notified of course placement for J-Term 2019.

**May 8 & June 5:** Faculty Professional Development for J-Term course development. (Teachers creating new courses may use additional professional development time for course design.)

**June 11-17:** J-Term 2019 (dates subject to snow days)