

**From:** [Superintendent](#)  
**To:** [EPS.Maillist](#)  
**Subject:** Welcome Back  
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Dear Colleague:

Each new year, I enjoy the articles that review the past year, often describing the *best* of this and the *worst* of that, whatever that happens to be. Sometimes I hunt around for a bit of inspiration for a message to welcome you back after our winter break – for something that captures this important change in our lives and what might lie ahead in the coming months.

This year, I read an article by [Fara Stockman](#) exploring the questions of, *Just what is it we celebrate on New Year's Eve, and how did we come to do it at a time of year when, at least in our hemisphere, nothing is blooming and the world doesn't feel new at all?*

Stockman's short piece is a fascinating history summarizing how billions of people around the world have overcome centuries of calendar dysfunction to arrive at January 1 as the first day of something new. She taught me that it wasn't until 1752 that our own U.S. colonists adopted the practice.

It turns out the Romans began using January 1 as the first day of the year centuries before North American colonists did. The early Romans based their calendar upon cycles of the moon which has 354 days compared to the 365 days of a solar cycle. Apparently, Roman priests added days to the month of February every other year to make things come out relatively even.

According to Stockman, it was while Caesar was on one of his visits to Cleopatra that an astronomer talked him into using the sun as a basis for the calendar. Though that was not perfect, it was better.

Centuries after Caesar, in 1592, Pope Gregory figured out a way to tweak the calendar to make up for the fact that every 130 years, Caesar's solar calendar is *off* by five hours, 48 minutes and 56 seconds – which adds up over time. The Pope's "Gregorian" calendar adjusted to incorporate the solar blip, and our calendars today include a February Leap year.

**By now you're asking yourself, what was Stockman's point?**

It was, that at this time of year, we might "take a moment to consider the **miracle of collective human experience across the ages.**" That billions of people around the world accept January 1 to be the first day of something brand new is truly astonishing.

Hers was a refreshing look at history and, yes, did make me think about how miraculous it is that so much of the world does agree on the beginning date of each year.

For those of us in education, our "Happy New Year" comes in the midst of an existing school year – a cycle driven more by the agrarian nature of our societal roots than by the Gregorian invention.

I have often reflected upon how celebrating the flip of a calendar page to a new year is also a signal for me of how important it is to continue doing my best in what remains of the school year – and to express gratitude that I work in a profession that enables me to have two, significant "new year" markers to celebrate and upon which to be inspired.

Thank YOU and all of your colleagues for the **miracle of your collective professional dedication and expertise across the school years – and the calendar years.** Welcome back from a well-deserved break. Welcome to 2014 and the work and achievements ahead for this school year and beyond.

Warm wishes for a happy and healthy 2014!

Gary