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Year-round education : a continuing debate

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Year-round education : a continuing debate

Abstract

Year-round education has been a common debate in recent decades. The studies and analyses that are discussed in this paper will give insight to what is being debated surrounding year-round schooling. While many studies have shown a positive relationship between a year-round calendar and academic achievement, others have shown no relationship between the two. This paper sets out to answer several questions regarding year-round calendars and academic achievement. Besides academic achievement, there are several other factors and steps to consider before a district and/or school decides to modify their calendar(s). In order for districts/schools to make a just decision involving year-round education, more in-depth studies are needed to review *all* the aspects to be considered

YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION: A CONTINUING DEBATE

**Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

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I would like to thank my husband, Tim, who was patient and supportive during this process; my children, Spencer and Sailor, for inspiring me each and every day; and my mom and dad for always giving their love and support. Thank you all for believing in me and allowing me to accomplish this goal. I love each of you with all of my heart.

Abstract

Year-round education has been a common debate in recent decades. The studies and analyses that are discussed in this paper will give insight to what is being debated surrounding year-round schooling. While many studies have shown a positive relationship between a year-round calendar and academic achievement, others have shown *no* relationship between the two. This paper sets out to answer several questions regarding year-round calendars and academic achievement. Besides academic achievement, there are several other factors and steps to consider before a district and/or school decides to modify their calendar(s). In order for districts/schools to make a just decision involving year-round education, more in-depth studies are needed to review *all* the aspects to be considered.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In recent decades, the adoption of year-round school calendars has become a common debate. The number of year-round schools operating in the United States has increased from over 400 in the late 1980s to 2,880 during the 1999-2000 school year, according to the National Association for Year-Round Education (NAYRE). In North Carolina alone, the number of year-round schools has grown from 73 in 1994 to 121 in 2000. The Francis Howell School District in Missouri is the longest running modified calendar in the United States. It has been in operation for more than thirty years.

I currently teach at a year-round school that adopted a modified calendar approximately 10 years ago. Currently it is the only year-round school in operation in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. If one were to walk around our building and ask random staff members how they feel about our year-round calendar, the reactions would be positive. The staff loves the calendar; the students love the calendar and the parents love the calendar as well. As a matter-of-fact, the staff wonders why all schools aren't year-round! On the other hand, if one were to walk into another building in the same district that is not on a year-round calendar, the reactions would more than likely be different.

Because of our diverse population and the low-socio economic status of our families, the staff at Polk Elementary feels the year-round calendar is good for our kids. We feel we cut down on the amount of time spent reviewing and our kids seem to retain more due to the shorter summer break. However, I have always wondered...*Does*

attending a year-round school cut back on the amount of time a teacher has to spend on reviewing. Does a longer summer lead to less retention of what is taught the previous year? Do the shorter breaks throughout the year contribute to more retention?

Many studies have shown that there is no link to year-round school calendars and academic achievement. These studies show that scores are not higher on standardized tests, grades are not higher, and students do not perform better when attending a school with a modified calendar. Some schools modify their calendar to be more cost-effective. Again, according to research, year-round calendars have not revealed to be more cost-effective.

The purpose of this paper is to explore research on the effects that year-round school calendars have on academic achievement. This paper will also look into other factors that should be considered before deciding whether or not a school and/or district should follow a modified calendar.

Statement of the Problem

While some studies have shown no relationship between a year-round calendar and academic achievement, others have shown exactly the opposite. There are several studies that have shown positive effects from a year-round calendar. Positive attitudes from the students, staff and communities would be an example of positive effects. The problem is that researchers have not adequately addressed the reasons why achievement may be slightly higher in year-round schools.

According to Ballinger (1995), one possibility is that these schools can use intercessions to provide remediation and enrichment activities. Others say the shortened summer vacation of a modified calendar aids in retention and less reviewing is necessary.

There are academic arguments for and against a modified school calendar as well as nonacademic arguments. One of the biggest nonacademic arguments is the cost of running a year-round school. Some say it is not an efficient use of public money. They say that employees in the school district that are usually paid a 9 month salary, such as maintenance workers, office workers, administrators, and some teaching specialists, would then have to be paid a 12 month salary. Another factor would be a family concerned that their children would be on two different calendars in the same district. This is a common reason some parents are against the year-round calendar.

Research Question

This paper sets out to answer the following questions: Is there a correlation between year-round school calendars and academic achievement? Do students that attend a school with a modified calendar have better grades, perform better on standardized tests, and perform better in the classroom? What other factors should be considered when deciding whether or not to modify a school calendar?

Significance of the Problem

As mentioned in the beginning, the adoption of year-round education has become a common debate in recent decades. More and more studies are showing the relationship between year-round calendars and academic achievement. Some are showing a positive

outcome between the two, although producing a very small effect, and others are showing there is no relation between year-round calendar schools and student academic achievement.

There are many more factors to consider besides student academic achievement. Researchers are stating that some studies are inconclusive and that more extensive research is needed to support the ideas and purposes behind year-round education. One study suggested that studies in the future report the following: intent, nature of the student population, opportunity to learn, class size, and the nature of the curriculum (Kneese, 1996).

Definition of year-round schooling

The NAYRE summed up the definition of year-round as follows:

Year-round education (YRE) reorganizes the school year to provide more continuous learning by dividing the long summer vacation into shorter, more frequent breaks. Students in a year-round program attend the same classes and receive the same amount of instruction as students on a nine-month calendar (usually 180 days). The year-round calendar is organized into instructional blocks and vacation periods that are evenly distributed across 12 months.

The term “year-round” can be deceptive. Simply because it implies that students attend school for additional days each year. However, there are several ways to modify a

school calendar into what is called “year-round”. There is the “9 weeks on, 3 weeks off” configuration, also known as “45-15”. There is the “12 weeks on, 4 weeks off” configuration. These are both descriptions of what is known as “multi-track”, a system that California public schools use in most of their schools. In a multi-track system, students are placed on alternating vacation sequences.

Typically, a multi-track school is specifically designed to alleviate overcrowding. Multi-track schools are considered one of the most common types of year-round schools in California. In this system, buildings operate year-round, but students and teachers are assigned to one of several “tracks”. These tracks cycle through periods of vacation and school. There are several types of multi-track schedules (Orellana & Thorne, 1998). There is a four-track schedule in which $\frac{1}{4}$ of the student population is on vacation each quarter and a three-track schedule where $\frac{1}{3}$ of the student population is on vacation at a time.

In a single-track school, all students take their vacation together, but the timing of the vacations is shifted. In this system, vacations are more evenly distributed throughout the year. Polk Elementary in Cedar Rapids, Iowa operates on this type of system. Our summers are shorter than traditional-calendar schools and we have evenly distributed breaks throughout the year.

Districts have reasons for choosing each one of the modified calendars. Each of them proposes issues, questions, and concerns for those involved and for those contemplating changing their school calendar. Researchers often state that improving academic achievement should not be the sole factor in deciding whether or not a school system or an individual school is going to modify their calendar.

There are many factors to consider. These include issues of support services, inservice and professional development, staff collaboration, communication, parent involvement, daycare issues, vacation time for families, attendance, and overcrowding issues.

Organization of Paper

This paper will consist of 4 chapters. Chapter One will introduce the topic, state the problem, examine its significance, state the research questions, and provide definitions of the topic. Chapter Two will give the history of year-round schooling in the United States as well as look at one district in particular that has been in operation for more than thirty years. Chapter Two will also provide academic and non-academic results and provide an analysis based on the research. In Chapter Three, the author will present factors to consider before transitioning to a year-round program. The author will also provide steps to consider before making the transition. Chapter Four will conclude the information in this paper, and make recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2

Introduction

As mentioned earlier, year-round schooling has become a common debate in recent decades. In early years of formal schooling in America, school calendars were designed to fit the needs of particular communities (Association of California School Administrators, 1988). In agricultural areas it was typical for children to attend school for only 5 or 6 months so that they were free to participate in the farming economy, from planting to harvesting (Cooper et al, 1996).

By the turn of the century, the implementation of standardized, grade-leveled curricula created pressures to also standardize the amount of time children spent in school. The present 9-month calendar, under which schools are closed in summer, emerged as the norm when 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture. Today, only about 3% of Americans' livelihood is tied to the agricultural cycle, but the school calendar has not changed (Cooper et al, 1996).

Why do we continue to organize learning schedules for students based on the agricultural practices of 100 years ago (Warrick-Harris, 1995)? In the 1980s, a renewed interest in changing the school calendar emerged.

There are hundreds of studies that continue to debate the "summer slide" issue. Are students losing academic learning over the summer months? Is there a difference between low socio-economic status and middle-class status students? Why are students losing learning over these months? These are just a few questions and topics being discussed and debated in recent research.

Research-based findings on the implementation of year-round schooling are growing everyday. Numerous researchers have found positive effects of a year-round school calendar on student achievement (Varner, 2003). One of the benefits they say about year-round schools is the increased retention of knowledge due to not having such a lengthy summer break. However, there are mixed reviews on whether or not attending a year-round school actually increases students' achievement.

Several reviews of the existing literature on year-round education have been conducted and the outcomes are at least as positive as or better than those achieved under the traditional school calendar (McMillen, 2001). However, the number of quality studies is limited.

When implementing a year-round calendar, the debate does not solely involve academic concerns. There are other non-academic variables taken into consideration when examining the effects of a year-round school calendar. These include but are not limited to: cost-effectiveness, attendance, parent, teacher, and student attitudes, and community attitudes.

History

In the early 1800s, rural and urban schools operated on different calendars. Urban areas had 11 to 12 month schedules, with one-week breaks interspersed throughout the year. In rural areas, the children were out of school during the peak harvesting seasons (National Education Association Research Division, 1987). In the mid-1970s, modified schedules were again introduced as a solution to overcrowding. By 1975, there were about fifty-six schools throughout the United States operating on a multi-track calendar.

Move forward to 1985, the number of schools had jumped to 410 in 16 states. And by 1996, according to the National Association for Year-Round Education, 2,368 schools in 39 states had adopted some sort of year-round schedule. In the school year 2000-2001, more than 2.16 million students in 45 states attended more than 3,000 schools that operated without the long summer break (National Association for Year-Round Education, 2000). That school year the state with the largest number of students in modified calendar schools was California, followed by Arizona, Nevada and Texas (Cooper et al, 2003). In 2005, over 60% of the nation's year-round-school students were enrolled in the California public school system alone (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005).

The Francis Howell School District in Missouri has been the longest running modified calendar in the United States. It has been in operation for more than 30 years. Prior to the Francis Howell School District, many districts across the US had attempted some type of modified calendar change. As early as the 19th century year-round education was implemented for immigrant children in Buffalo, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and New York (NEA, 1987).

However, early failure of these programs was attributed to a range of factors. Graduating too young to work or attend college and poor public relations were two of these factors. Many of these early programs failed as the result of reduced depression spending and/or faded with the onset of World War II (Serifs, 1990).

Francis Howell School District: Year-round schooling's best kept secret!

Gene Henderson was the superintendent of the Francis Howell School District in St. Charles, Missouri, when they decided to modify their calendar in 1969. He once said,

“As far as we knew children had never been asked to come to school on July 1. We were kind of amazed that they showed up.”

Henderson was superintendent of Consolidated District No. 2 which was named Francis Howell School District the year after he arrived, 1965. There were about 2500 students in the whole district. Then all of a sudden, there was a 30% growth in population. There were many reasons for this growth. One was that people were moving to St. Charles because land was cheaper there than in St. Louis. There had also been a merge between 2 districts resulting in a large influx of black students into city schools. Therefore, people wanted to move to another school district.

Another reason was the number of large companies in St. Louis. The employees who were affluent and well-educated were looking for a different educational setting for their kids. The district couldn't borrow money quick enough to build schools to accommodate the growing population. To remedy this problem of not enough space and too many students, an idea was brought up to Henderson at a principal's meeting. One of the acting principals realized their problem was an economic issue, plain and simple. He proposed using the facility twelve months a year by cycling the students' attendance. John Anderson, the acting principal, called this plan the 45-15 day schedule.

Eventually, this is what the Francis Howell District implemented. There were many, many hours of planning, many ups and downs along the way, and many revisions that were made when issues presented themselves during the implementation of the modified calendar. The change started in one school and eventually the whole district was operating on a modified-school calendar.

Wilma Cole, principal in the Francis Howell School District, and Gene Henderson, superintendent, overcame pressing educational problems, took personal and professional risks, and made decisions that were not always popular. They worked together to overcome unforeseen difficulties, work out problems, and fine tune the scheduling innovation. The outcome of their hard work and dedication proves that it is possible to find new solutions to educational problems.

Yes, change can be difficult and challenging, but educators with a sense of humor and imagination may effect successful change (Shields & Oberg, 2000).

Summer Learning

There are many studies that suggest a longer summer is detrimental to one's education. However, there are also studies that show there is no difference in academic gain if one attends a modified school calendar. Benson, Borman, and Overman conducted a study comparing spring-to-fall reading achievement data in order to measure summer gains and losses for a sample of over 300 elementary school children from high-poverty schools.

Their results suggested that parental expectations, learning activities in the home, and parental effort more generally did not explain much variation in summer achievement. There is ample evidence suggesting that students tend to exhibit achievement losses during the summer months and that the magnitude of these losses is strongly linked to differences among families, most notably the parents' socioeconomic status (Benson, Borman, & Overman, 2005).

Cooper et al. (1996) noted that for nearly 100 years researchers have documented summer learning losses, or the “summer slide”, by noting that students’ fall achievement test scores tend to be lower than the scores they achieved a few months earlier during the previous spring. They concluded that a typical child loses a little more than 1 month’s worth of skill or knowledge in math and reading/language arts combined.

This “summer slide” also has a particularly harmful effect on poor children’s reading achievement. These children’s scores show marked declines while the middle-class child’s scores remain essentially stable (Cooper et al., 1996). Why is this so? One suggestion is that compared to middle-class families, poor children’s families tend to have less educational resources within their homes and communities to provide opportunities to practice reading and to learn new literacy skills.

This came from the research of Alexander and Entwisle in Baltimore as well as Heyns in Atlanta. These researchers tracked students’ school year and summer achievement growth which has been helpful in establishing the importance of a seasonal perspective on student learning (Benson, Borman, & Overman, 2005).

Entwisle et al. (2000) also came up with what they call the faucet theory. When school is in session, the resource faucet is turned on for all children, and all gain equally; when school is not in session, the school resource faucet is turned off. During the summer, poor families cannot make up for the resources the school had been providing and their children’s achievement is stable or declines. On the other hand, middle-class families can make up for the school’s resources to a considerable extent, though at a slower pace than during the school year (Benson, Borman, & Overman, 2005).

Academic results

In earlier studies, students attending year-round schools demonstrated major gains in reading, math, and language arts as they progressed from 4th to 8th grade (Dossett & Munoz, 2000). The researchers behind that study, Shepherd & Baker (1977), argued that the effects of year-round schooling may not be seen until the students have attended a year-round program for at least four years. Peltier (1991) also found that students at the elementary and junior high levels increased their scores on annual reading, writing, and math assessments after an extended school year was implemented.

There are several studies that have found positive effects of attending a year-round school. Some of these studies used comparison schools, in other words they compared scores from year-round schools with traditional schools. A research conducted in 1992 (Alcorn) compared scores of 3rd, 5th, and 6th graders using the California Assessment Program and the California Test of Basic Skills. The overall findings indicated that students in the year-round school had higher scores than those in schools with traditional calendars (Dossett & Munoz, 2000). Gandara & Fish (1994) also found significant gains in reading scores among elementary students attending year-round programs compared to control schools.

Kneese (1996) conducted a review of 15 studies that focused specifically on achievement in traditional calendar and year-round schools. Her conclusion was that achievement in year-round schools appears to be slightly higher than in traditional calendar schools (McMillen, 2001). In 2000, an analysis of Advanced Placement Index (API) scores for California public schools was conducted. The results of this analysis

showed that schools on year-round calendars outperformed gains recorded for traditional calendar schools (Stenvall, J. & Stenvall, M., 2001).

A few more studies that show *positive* academic achievement outcomes in year-round schools (Davies & Kerry, 1999):

- Farrell (1991): 11th grade students in Virginia that took the Science Research Associates achievement test improved by as much as 18% when compared to scores of students in traditional schools.
- McCasland (1992): In a Texas school district; 3rd grade students performed better in a YRE school than students in 3 comparable traditional schools in the areas of math, language arts, and social studies.
- Lloyd (1991): YRE students showed 7 months more of growth in reading in a Texas district than those students in a traditional school.
- Fardig & Locker (1992): In year 1 of YRE in a Florida district, 3 elementary schools produced better test results in reading and math than did comparable traditional schools.

Though there are many studies that show positive academic achievement outcomes in a year-round setting, there are also studies that have shown little or *no* growth in academic achievement when comparing year-round school calendars to traditional ones. Pittman & Herzog (1998) conducted a study in a rural district in NC. They set out to evaluate the achievement outcomes of an implemented year-round program within a community. The findings for academic achievement were that there was *no* difference between a traditional school and the year-round school.

In 1991, Zyskowski et al. found there was no statistically significant difference in student achievement between year-round students and traditional school students.

Campbell (1994) also conducted a review to compare the achievement of at-risk elementary students in a year-round school with the achievement of at-risk students in a traditional calendar school. Again there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students at the end of two consecutive school terms in achievement (Dossett & Munoz, 2000).

Merino (1983) also found no differences in achievement between students in year-round and traditional schools (McMillen, 2001). In a review synthesis by McMillen (2001) no statistically significant differences in either reading or math achievement between students attending a year-round program and those attending a traditional calendar program were found.

Non-Academic Results

Several studies have shown results on *other* components of a year-round calendar program besides academic achievement. Pittman and Herzog looked at a rural school system in NC and wanted to find out the impact of a year-round calendar implementation not only on student achievement but attendance and community attitudes as well. They concluded that the YRE schedule had no differential influence on a student's attendance (Pittman & Herzog, 1998). The teachers who taught in this community were given a chance to complete a survey about their feelings of a year-round calendar. Most were positively predisposed toward the year-round schedule, and once they experienced it, their attitudes became *more* positive (Pittman & Herzog, 1998). The teachers who had only taught in a traditional schedule were not interested in the YRE program mainly due to interruptions in their personal schedules. Parents whose children were enrolled in this

district in an YRE program were very supportive of it. As a matter of fact, they wanted to make sure it was retained and expanded.

Cost-effectiveness is also a variable taken into consideration when modifying a school calendar comes into play. A study conducted by Dossett and Munoz (2000) demonstrated that that the year-round program was more expensive and less cost-effective than a regular calendar program. The attendance in this study was lower for students in the traditional calendar programs than those in the year-round programs.

Cooper et al. (2003) conducted a review synthesis that showed the results to surveys given in year-round districts. The respondents overwhelmingly described the experience of a modified calendar as positive. This review also found that attitudes were also more positive in a year-round program. In a study conducted in the Buena Vista School System, attendance improved in a year-round program as well as dropout rates (Serifs, 1990). Worthen and Zsiray (1994) found that most parents are satisfied with a year-round calendar. They also found that teachers and students have more positive attitudes in year-round schools (McMillen, 2001).

Analysis

In the study conducted by Pittman and Herzog (1998), several explanations were provided regarding the decline and increase in the grades for students in a year-round program. One they gave is that it took the students a year to adjust to the schedule. Once they adjusted, their grades reflected the improved level of learning (Pittman & Herzog, 1998). Another explanation based on this particular study is that the 5th grade teachers in the YRE program regularly assigned lower grades than their colleagues. They concluded that students' grades are not influenced by type of schedule.

In the same study, no major changes in attendance patterns were observed suggesting that YRE schedule has minimal impact on attendance.

Mitchell & Mitchell (2005) suggested that when students attend classrooms tracked by calendar, they end up in groups also characterized by segmented demographics and program services. Which in turn lead to differentiated *learning opportunities* as a consequence of YRE track selection.

Some conclusions were formulated based on Cooper et al's meta-analysis by Davies & Kerry (1999). They suggested that at best, students show little or no academic growth over the summer; and at worse they lose, on average, between 1 and 3 months of learning. They also said that the greatest loss in the summer is in mathematics. Another conclusion is that summer vacation increases the disparities between middle class and disadvantaged students' reading scores.

Cooper et al. (1996) indicated that achievement test scores decline over summer vacation. They also suggested that the loss equals about one month on a grade-level equivalent scale.

Some researchers suggest that one reason that achievement is higher in YRE schools is that they use intercessions to provide remediation and enrichment activities (McMillen, 2001). Year-round school advocates claim that dividing the long summer vacation into smaller pieces helps alleviate some of the "forgetting" that occurs over the summer in a traditional school program (McMillen, 2001). McMillen also suggested that achievement of students in year-round schools is equal to that of students in traditional schools. He also says that year-round calendars may be particularly beneficial for lower achieving students.

Differences in the outcomes of each study on year-round are due to many factors. One being the number of students in the study; some samples are larger than others. The number of days in the calendars can also provide differences in outcomes when looking at academic achievement. Whether or not the district holds intercession during breaks in the calendar would be another deciding factor. These are all things to take into consideration when analyzing YRE programs and the affect they have on academic achievement as well as non-academic components.

Summary

Year-round schooling continues to be a debated topic in the United States. One big question that remains is why does most of America continue to operate on a school calendar that was created based on agricultural practices of 100 years ago?

The Francis Howell School District in Missouri has been operating on a modified calendar for the past 30 years. There is mainly a positive response to this change that they made among the teachers, students, and all families who attend this district.

Studies continue to conflict one another with the “summer slide” debate. Do students lose academic learning over the summer months? Is a longer summer break detrimental to one’s learning? These questions and more continue to be disputed in recent studies. One thing that they do agree on, however; is that there is a bigger loss of learning among students who have a low socio-economic status versus their middle-class peers.

The debate on the subject of year-round education will continue and so will the research and studies regarding it. There are many researchers who have found that being in a year-round calendar school has academic benefits and positive outcomes. Several

studies show that academic achievement is higher among students who attend a year-round school compared to those that attend a traditional school.

However, not all studies have found a strong positive relationship between year-round schedules and student achievement (Dossett & Munoz, 2000). On the other hand, several studies have shown that there is little or *no* difference in academic achievement among students attending both year-round schools and traditional schools.

Chapter 3

Introduction

Year-round education is described as any change made in the school calendar that reorganizes the standard 180 day school year (Serifs, 1990). Strengthening instructional programs and alleviating overcrowding are two reasons a district might decide to move to YRE. There are many elements to administer when deciding whether or not to implement a year-round program. These include but are not limited to: analysis, judgment, planning, and leadership (Serifs, 1990). If the need and climate for change exist, setting up an YRE program needs commitment from the district. It must also involve teachers and staff, education professionals, local organizations and the community at large (Serifs, 1990).

Factors to consider

Educational change is a very complex area (Dossett & Munoz, 2000). Before a district decides to modify its calendar, there are some factors to consider. These include but are not limited to:

- Support (district, teacher, staff, parent, community)
- Intercession (how often, how long, what to do during)
- Instructional programs (academic needs, non-academic needs, program adjustments)
- Available staff
- Parental input (survey)
- Student input (survey)

- Funding (local, state, federal)
- Resources
- Professional development (when, where, who, what, ongoing)
- Bussing (availability)
- Communication (between staff members, administration and staff, parents and staff, staff and students, etc.)
- State policies, requirements, and incentives
- Etc.

As mentioned above, educational change is a complex area. In doing so, a district making decisions based on upcoming change should recognize some fundamental characteristics of change itself: change is always accompanied by anxiety; change takes time; different people will perceive change differently; and change is generally accompanied by an “implementation dip” (Shields, 1996). In order for the change to be effective and ultimately more effective than the previous practice, support, time, and effort are required (Shields, 1996).

Steps to consider

The first step of any organizational change should be to determine the level of support necessary to improve student academic and non-academic performance by reviewing the school’s learning environment. Once a district has decided to modify its calendar and move to YRE, there are steps to consider for implementation. Davies and

Kerry (1999) drew on the best practices in the USA in terms of implementing YRE and summarized it as follows:

- Involve the wider community from the beginning
- Allow enough time for planning
- Examine a variety of calendar options
- Set up a consultation group of all interested parties
- Provide alternatives within a geographical area
- Pursue incentives for change within the local area agencies
- Hypothesize about the difficulties and be ready to meet them
- Challenge false information designed to denigrate the system
- Take it slow

Several studies touched on the list above elaborating on some. For example, *examining a variety of calendar options* is important because there are so many.

Choosing a year-round calendar will depend on the particular needs of a district. In most year-round calendars, the year is broken up into a number of periods or terms, punctuated with vacations and/or intercessions. Some different calendar options include the 45-15, 60-20, 60-15, 90-30, trimester, quarter, quinmester, five week five track, concept six, and the flexible all year plan. These are all examples of modified calendars in use (Serifs, 1990). The calendar chosen should be in function of student learning and not the opposite (Dossett & Munoz, 2000).

Involving the community is also important. The public needs to be involved early in the planning process so that they will have time to buy into the program (Serifs, 1990).

This can be done with in-services, visitations, information gathering and sharing, etc. A public that is well informed and that participates will most likely minimize conflict during the transition.

In a study conducted by Shields (1996), administrators interviewed believed that *difficulties that may come up* could be overcome by utilizing different communication strategies, changing the timing of in-service activities, extending school activities out into the community, or by having a variety of events to which all members of the school community were invited.

Take it slow. Any change of this magnitude is going to take time and lots of it. Remember, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. Getting the best benefits out of any new program is going to be a slow process. Once a plan is adopted, ample time must be allotted for successful implementation of the program (Serifs, 1990).

Carolyn Shields and Steve Oberg also provided suggestions for districts planning to modify their school calendars. These come from the implementation of the Francis Howell School District in Missouri. A barrier that they mention that often comes up before changing to year-round is air-conditioning. Shields and Oberg say there is a general belief that YRS cannot operate without air-conditioning no matter where it is being considered.

These authors also touched on the importance of having parental support. Ensuring that parents understand and support a new calendar is particularly critical. Protests can be a threat and could be initiated by several special interest groups: parents, camping associations, teacher unions, or other dissatisfied or fearful parties. Shields and

Oberg also say the media can play a critical role in the making or breaking of a year-round school initiative.

Administrator burnout is another issue often addressed in YRS programs (Shields & Oberg, 2000). Principals find it difficult to take personal time when school is still in session. That being said, the authors stated that although principals in their study identified personal disadvantages and challenges, over 95% of them felt that some form of YRS is definitely more advantageous for teachers and that YRS also clearly facilitate student learning.

Summary

There are many factors to consider before deciding to modify a school calendar. As well as these considerations, there are many steps to be taken to ensure a positive and successful year-round program. When/if there is a need for a district to make such a vast change, analyzing, judgment, planning, and leadership all have to play a huge role in this process. Because student achievement is the ultimate goal, districts need to keep this in mind before implementing a year-round program.

Chapter 4

Introduction

There are a number of issues concerning year-round schooling which need more attention: issues of support services, inservice and professional development, staff collaboration and communication, and administrative support and vacation time (Shields, 1996). The issues of class, politics, and power should be addressed head-on (Orellana & Thorne, 1998). The basic idea is to develop new educational paradigms that incorporate support services with strong inter-relationships among students, school, and families (Dossett & Munoz, 2000). Rearranging the traditional calendar is not the unique factor that explains educational achievement. There are more elements that have to be taken into consideration when approaching the issue of student achievement (Dossett & Munoz, 2000).

Recommendations for further research

Cooper et al. suggested that more research be conducted at early grades as well as high school levels (Cooper et al., 1996). They also suggested researchers also begin to examine the broader question of how much time can pass between lessons and tests before there is an overall negative influence on the instructional program (Cooper et al., 1996).

Impaction is a significant factor that requires further study. It is also suggested that further research be conducted in terms of programs, both curricular and parent-

oriented. The authors suggest this would further restructure the effect of SES, LEP, and lunch programs (Stenvall & Stenvall, 2001).

A case can still be made that the effect of calendar modification on achievement is cumulative; however, a well-designed longitudinal study is needed to test this hypothesis. The conclusion they drew from this synthesis is that a truly credible study of modified calendar effects has yet to be conducted. (Cooper et al., 2003)

The findings from the study by Dossett and Munoz (2000) show the importance of examining non-cognitive factors when investigating the impact of the year-round schedule. Further research is needed to examine the impact of year-round programs using longitudinal research approaches (Dossett and Munoz, 2000).

Although there were slight positive findings for YRE in Kneese's meta-analysis, significant questions were still raised. The sample of studies was extremely small. Differences in initial achievement, demographic characteristics, and experiences unique to particular schools were evident. As a result, the author suggested further research to control for these factors. She also suggests longitudinal studies be conducted to study the achievement effect of students over time in the year-round calendar school. Several conclusions can be drawn based on this research.

Kneese's meta-analysis indicates that year-round education has a positive but very small impact on student academic achievement. The studies that were conducted most recently appear to produce the more positive effects. It is suggested that studies in the future report: intent, nature of the student population, opportunity to learn, class size, and the nature of the curriculum (Kneese, 1996).

Using lesson plans as tools when researching year-round programs was identified in the study conducted by Varner. Varner stated that future research would be helpful to pursue and refine procedures using lesson plans as tools. Additional studies should also be conducted at other grade levels and in additional subject areas. Pre and Post test data on the subjects in future research would help to ensure that the groups of subjects are initially comparable (Varner, 2003).

According to Varner classroom observations should also be conducted to observe the teaching skills of the research subjects. This is needed in order to attempt to control for the inequality of teaching ability. The ability to control the use of textbooks and supplemental materials used in the classroom and the use of ability grouping would also be beneficial in future research. Another aspect to consider for future research would be teacher burn out. Further studies in this area could help explain why many teachers leave the profession. It would be helpful to conduct interviews or questionnaires on teacher and student burn out rates during different times of the school year (Varner, 2003).

McMillen stated that researchers also need to differentiate between the effects of a year-round calendar and additional instructional time on student achievement. The reason for this is that there is a question of whether the total amount of instructional time (including intercessions) or the distribution of that time across the calendar year is responsible for the achievement advantages in a year-round school (McMillen, 2001).

McMillen also states that further investigations that a) consider the length of time that a school has been operating year round and b) measure possible differences in pedagogical techniques between traditional and year-round education are also needed (McMillen, 2001).

Based on the study by Shields and Oberg (1999), when educators are seeking solutions to contemporary dilemmas facing urban areas, year-round schooling may be considered a viable educational option.

Summary

Year-round programs will continue to be debated in the education field in years to come just as it has been in years past. The studies and analyses that have been discussed in this paper have given insight to what is being debated surrounding year-round schooling over past decades. As noted by several researchers, more in-depth research on several aspects of YRS is needed in order for school districts to make a just decision about modifying their school calendars.

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