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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes certain aspects of the extended school year concept and outlines the advantages and disadvantages of nine different variations of the extended school year. It lists general conclusions drawn from a review of the literature and from professional insights developed by conducting seven feasibility studies for school districts in Illinois. Discussed at greater length are curriculum concerns, student achievement levels, financial factors, community factors, and pitfalls that accompany inadequate planning. (Author/MLF)

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THE EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR
EVALUATION AND PITFALLS

A SIMULATION NOTEBOOK

PRESENTED AT

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The Extended School Year
Evaluation and Pitfalls
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The concept of the Extended School Year has many variations. Although the 45-15 Plan is the most frequently cited plan in the literature, probably due to the publicity stemming from the Valley View School District in Romeoville, Illinois, each plan has its advocates. The purpose of this paper is to analyze certain aspects of the Extended School Year concept for purposes of evaluation and for avoiding pitfalls related to the concept. Prior to this analysis, however, a brief summary of alleged advantages and disadvantages of the various plans are presented.

Plan #1 Two Semester Plus Modified Summer School Plan

Description--Students attend one hundred and eighty days plus thirty-five to forty days during the summer. The plan permits students to accelerate through the secondary school. It can be applied to kindergarten through the twelfth grades.

Advantages--It enables the student to accelerate without broad curriculum changes. It is a voluntary plan which is often supported by parents. It may be financed with fees. It provides for both remedial and advanced work.

Disadvantages--It may cost more than a traditional summer school. The voluntary nature of the plan makes it difficult to predict cost savings on capital outlay and debt service.

Plan #2 Continuous School Year Plan

Description--The plan includes two hundred and ten days of

school attendance. The student may complete a year of school in one hundred and eighty days and begin working on the next grade during the remaining attendance period. The curriculum is divided into levels for kindergarten through eighth grade students.

Advantages--It may save one or two years of elementary attendance for the student who accelerates through the system. Students have fewer teacher changes assuming the same teacher teaches for two hundred and ten days. Students would have more time to master skills during the additional attendance period.

Disadvantages--The curriculum must be reorganized. It takes time to adopt and implement a continuous progress philosophy.

Plan #3 Four Quarter Plan (Quadrimester)

Description--The plan divides a school year of two hundred and four to two hundred and twenty days into four quadrimesters of fifty-one to fifty-five days of attendance. A student can finish three quadrimesters in one hundred and eighty days and take a fourth quadrimester for the purposes of acceleration or remediation. The plan has application for kindergarten through twelfth grades.

Advantages--It may increase the number of available classrooms. The number of teachers necessary to handle the same number of students attending on a traditional nine month calendar may be reduced. Students may finish school one year ahead of schedule. Students can take extra terms for enrichment purposes. It may help to reduce the drop out rate at the high school level.

Disadvantages--It may prove to be costly in that some students may elect to take four quadrimesters. Class periods may need to be lengthened to equalize the time in attendance if a traditional nine month calendar were in use.

Plan #4 Multiple Trails Plan

Description--Students attend school for two hundred and ten days or eleven months. Students are on a modular schedule with non-graded instruction. It applies to a program where students are assigned to various teachers and subjects in time modules. Usually a modular schedule is found in seventh through the twelfth grades.

Advantages--The plan releases classroom space, pupil time and teacher time. It is not necessary to accelerate students to save money.

Disadvantages--Curriculum revisions are necessary to accommodate the multiple time modules. Teachers need to review their teaching procedures. The non-graded instruction concept needs considerable planning and preparation time.

Plan #5 The Trimester Plan

Description--The school year is divided into three terms. A student can finish two semesters work in two trimesters if the school day is lengthened. Students can accelerate in the third trimester. Students can secure additional Carnegie units under this plan.

Advantages--It can release classroom space and teachers after one and one-third years. It can save one year of schooling. Students can take enrichment courses. It may reduce the drop out rate.

Disadvantages--The lengthened school day may be met with student and parental resistance.

Plan #6 Staggered Quarter Plan

Description--Students are divided into four equal groups. Each group attends school for nine months and vacations for three months. The starting time for each group is different. It has application for kindergarten through the twelfth grades.

Advantages--It saves on classroom space. It is not a difficult program to administer.

Disadvantages--Parents may reject the notion of their child's vacationing during the winter time.

Plan #7 12-4 Plan

Description--Students are divided into four equal groups. Each group attends school for twelve weeks and vacations for four weeks. School is closed for a week at Christmas and Easter and two weeks during the summer. Each group starts school at a different time.

Advantages--Only three-fourths of the classroom space is needed at any one time. Teachers can work forty-eight weeks. It may not require major curriculum changes because all that is

being changed is the starting and ending times for students. It does not require more days of student attendance.

Disadvantages--One group will have thirty-four to forty-three days off at Christmas time. One group does not have a four week vacation in the summer.

Plan #8 Extended K-12

Description--It involves two hundred and four to two hundred and twenty-five days of attendance. Kindergarten through sixth grade students may use the extra days to master fundamentals. Seventh through twelfth grade students are on a trimester or quadrimester plan. It has application to kindergarten through twelfth grade students.

Advantages--It may save one year of schooling. It can release teachers after one and one-third or two and one-fourth years of teaching to begin working with a new group of students. It provides elementary students with more time for learning. It keeps all students from kindergarten through the twelfth grade on the same calendar.

Disadvantages--Daily class periods may need to be lengthened. Students may elect to take remedial classes and stay in school longer instead of taking enrichment classes which would permit early completion of high school. A reduction in financial savings would occur because students are staying in school to take more remedial than enrichment classes.

Plan #9 The 45-15 Plan (Valley View)

- Students attend school for 180 days during each calendar year
- Students are divided into four equal groups
- Each student attends school 45 consecutive days, followed by 15 day vacation
- Three-fourths of the student body is in school at any one time
- One-fourth of the student body is on vacation all the time; a different group is on vacation each 15 days
- Space availability within the school is increased by approximately 33 1/3%

student group	15 days	15 days	15 days	15 days	15 days	15 days
A	school	school	school	vacation	school	school
B	school	school	vacation	school	school	school
C	school	vacation	school	school	school	vacation
D	vacation	school	school	school	vacation	school

- School facilities are utilized 48 weeks each year
- Typically there are the following vacations for all students at once:

Christmas.....one week

Easter.....one week

July.....two weeks

Some other extended school year plans have altered the number of school days students would attend during the calendar year.

Most of the advantages and disadvantages cited are in the realm of speculation. There is very little definitive evidence that the Extended School Year concept is as bad or as good as its publicity. Nevertheless, several general conclusions can be drawn from a review of the literature and from professional insights developed by conducting seven feasibility studies for school districts in Illinois.*

1. There is no inherent curricular advantage in an Extended School Year Program.
2. Curriculum modification becomes a necessity soon after the implementation of an Extended School Year Program.
3. There is no appreciable change in academic performance of students as measured in an Extended School Year Program.
4. There is an increase in total operational costs in an Extended School Year Program.
5. Physical facilities usage can be increased by at least one-fourth in an Extended School Year Program.

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6. The savings in capital outlay may be eroded by inflation if building needs are merely postponed for three to five years.
7. A reduction of 25% in certificated staff can result, particularly in a 45-15 Plan, if teachers work on a twelve month contract.
8. Athletic and extra-curricular activities for students will not be affected adversely if appropriate schedule modifications are made and/or parental cooperation exists.
9. Non-school sponsored leisure time, recreational, athletic, religious, scouting, and instructional programs can be hampered by an Extended School Year Program.
10. Whether or not vandalism actually increases, opportunities for student vandalism in the community increase in an Extended School Year Program.
11. Vacation-type job opportunities for students are minimized in an Extended School Year Program, particularly in a 45-15 Plan.
12. Family vacation plans can be affected adversely in an Extended School Year Program.

The preceding list of conclusions is applicable as long as the present set of assumptions which characterize schools exists. For example, as long as we continue to accept the five day per week schedule, the five clock hours of instruction per day, the teacher per class organization, and the graded 1-12 system, the conclusions will apply. A search of the literature has not revealed any study or assessment of the Extended School Year based upon a set of givens which differs significantly from the examples mentioned. In fact, the great majority of districts which have shown any interest in an Extended School Year developed the interest as a possible solution to overcrowded conditions in the schools, conditions which arose precisely because of traditional, conventional assumptions. Elaborations of the list of conclusions, therefore, do not include innovative possibilities as the major emphasis. Moreover, to avoid unnecessary repetition and to avoid belaboring the obvious, several of the conclusions listed above are either blended into the following categories or are ignored.

Curriculum Concerns

There is no curriculum magic in the organizational change brought about by the implementation of an Extended School Year. Serious efforts must be expended by the professional staff and/or by consultants so that the curriculum can be appropriate in

the new setting. The breaks in the schedule, the methods of teaching, the materials used, and the types of assignments given are factors to consider in terms of the curriculum content and expectations. Variation in approach and in content are necessary when from one-fourth to one-third of the student body is out of school at a given time. If the summer session becomes an integral part of the "regular" school year and not just a source of enrichment and/or remediation for a few students, the curriculum will be affected. Provisions will have to be made by the teacher to "fit in" a transfer student who will soon be out of school for a scheduled break of from 15 days to one quarter. Curriculum articulation between the grade school and the high school and between the high school and the college is imperative if the student who graduates prior to June is to avoid time wasting.

Individualization of instruction must be incorporated into curriculum modification and into methodology. If the reorganization of the curriculum into time segments other than the conventional is to be successful, the professional staff will have to become proficient in individualization, especially pacing. In the 45-15 Plan, for example, a teacher will have to begin a second section of a course no later than the 46th day when the first group of students starts a 15 day vacation and a new group arrives at school. On the 61st day, the first group will return to school and the second group will be in its 16th

day of instruction. Thus, the teacher will have to prepare concurrently for 6 more weeks of the first cycle of the course and for 9 weeks of the second cycle of the course for the returning group. The issue of cycling can become taxing for a teacher when the schedule provides for a new group after 3, 6, and 9 weeks. To add more complexity, individual students may need review and/or acceleration which may be provided best in a cycle to which he is not assigned.

If a teacher or a team of teachers can individualize instruction effectively, the Extended School Year can be a boon for mini-courses, teaching of themes, using programmed materials, and providing independent study opportunities. The division of the conventional school year into unconventional segments can enable a student to determine rather quickly whether a course is too difficult or too easy. Problems in learning can be spotted long before the conventional semester has been completed.

In most forms of the Extended School Year, a teacher will have to learn something about the persons taught rather quickly. If there is any merit to the present emphasis on humanization in education, there is a value in the forced need to know the students as people so that proper curricular and methodological adjustments can be made.

The implications for in-service of the staff are apparent. Anything as pervasive as the Extended School Year will require role changes for staff and for students. The nature of the new

organization when implemented effectively by the staff can provide the in-service for the students, although it may be wise to have orientation sessions for the students prior to embarking formally on some type of Extended School Year. The staff, however, will have to spend time learning what and how to organize in terms of curriculum, method, use of materials, and evaluation.

Although the need to alter curriculum is more pronounced in an Extended School Year Program than in a conventional school organization, the advantages of curriculum improvement are not unique to an Extended School Year. The Extended School Year Program brings the issue of curriculum change into sharp focus, but there are many beneficial curricular modifications which can be implemented in a conventional organization.

Achievement Levels

Despite some claims for significant achievement gains by students in an Extended School Year Program, there is no valid research substantiation of this point. Since few schools have adopted an Extended School Year program for purposes of curriculum and instruction, it is not surprising that there is a lack of research dealing with cause and effect of the organization of the school year upon academic achievement.

These comments relate to achievement as measured by standardized tests. The intangibles of attitude, enrichment, and

variation, for example, on student achievement cannot be measured. Every innovation can create an aura of excitement which can motivate staff and students to work harder and better. The results can be improved measurable achievement, but one can only guess at the real impact of the abstract factors. Perhaps future research will prove to be more precise than the results to date.

Financial Factors

The major reason that the majority of school districts have moved to some type of an Extended School Year is overcrowded conditions in the schools. By using the school buildings for twelve months rather than nine, the utilization obviously increases drastically. For example, three buildings used for twelve months each can serve the same number of students as four buildings used for nine months each. Unfortunately, the rampant inflation in construction costs, as in all things, must be considered. If construction costs increase from 20% to 30% per year, within a few years, the total cost of a school building may be greater than the capital outlay savings provided by an Extended School Year program. If the cost of sites is added to the cost of construction, the erosion of savings may be effected within three years. Land costs are sky rocketing. If increased facilities usage can be increased to avoid purchasing a site, several years

hence may find a school district unable to purchase land at a reasonable price even when it is available. Thus, the big dollar savings which result from postponing capital outlay may be only temporary in a growing district.

In addition to the effects of inflation, the matter of operating costs must be considered. It can be stated with certainty that an Extended School Year program results in increased operating costs. Utilities and maintenance costs increase over the year. Whether teachers teach the full twelve months or whether additional staff members are added according to the organizational cycles, salaries increase. If administrators are not on a twelve month basis, their salaries increase or else additional administrators are employed. These and other operating costs in some districts may be less of an immediate strain on the budget than capital outlay, but the increase cannot be denied. The range of the increase for operating costs is too broad to predict because of the many variables involved, but, to repeat, the increase is a certainty.

Community Factors

Many districts have been reluctant to give serious consideration to an Extended School Year program until some assessment of community interest as well as opportunities for community involvement have been determined. Granting the necessity of community acceptance of a twelve month school year, it is folly to survey

community attitudes unless those surveyed have some knowledge about the topic. An Extended School Year program is the most pervasive of all school efforts. Its effects upon families are real and critical. Research and experience with less traumatic changes in the school (for example, team teaching, individualization and modification of report cards) have shown that any change has emotional implications for those affected by it. Thus, to attempt a survey of community acceptance of a major change prior to a major informational program is not worth the effort. Unless the public surveyed knows a great deal about the Extended School Year, it matters little whether the survey results are favorable or unfavorable. The time to survey the community is after the school officials have provided information to the public and have held public meetings. The assessment of support or rejection of the idea must be after the public has had a chance to assimilate and to digest the relevant issues. Politicians who win elections know the importance of informing the public. Superintendents and school board members who conduct campaigns for bond issues and for tax referenda know the importance of informing the public. The degree of honesty utilized in these types of campaigns may vary in the partisan political arena compared to the non-partisan, educationally oriented political arena. The decision of honest information is a value judgment; the decision to inform the public is a necessity.

A recommended strategy which has proven successful, partly

due to its simplicity, is to involve certain key community residents before, during, and after the informational campaign. These community contacts can provide valuable direction and insights for the school officials. They can serve as sounding boards for ideas, problems, and strategies prior to a wide public exposure. They can also help in squelching rumors before crises develop. From among these in-group community residents as many as are needed can help to influence affirmative responses from the community at large.

Whether or not this suggested approach to involving the community is acceptable is a matter for discussion in any given situation. It is offered as an uncomplicated, workable strategy as well as an example of the need to avoid a premature community reaction to the Extended School Year concept.

The significance of the preceding comments can be evaluated in terms of the typical concerns voiced by community residents relative to an Extended School Year. Questions about vacations for the family and the impact upon "outside" activities (scouting, Bible schools, camping, dancing classes, Little League, etc.) are among the most commonly expressed queries of parents. Some ask about the curriculum, but most raise questions about effects upon family life. With a cooperative effort among the school, the community agencies, and the family, many issues can be settled prior to becoming problems. The difficulty, however, is primarily one of misunderstanding what an Extended School Year means. In spite of explanations to the contrary, many parents and students -

and some teachers - believe that each plan requires twelve months of school attendance for everyone. In fact, the early references to this concept in the professional literature were entitled the Twelve Month School Year. The listing of some of the more popular versions of the Extended School Year (see pp. 1-6) can serve to overcome the reference to the Twelve Month notion, but the notion persists. When there is an awareness of using the school buildings for twelve months with only nine months of attendance required for any individual student, the questions concerning who will be in school during the summer loom large. Many emotional reactions within the community can be predicted even when careful plans are made by responsible school and community officials. When these plans are not explained clearly, or when these plans do not exist, an Extended School Year program will meet with great resistance.

To elaborate further about community factors, fears of vandalism and job difficulties may outweigh any alleged advantages of an Extended School Year program. In some communities, it would be foolhardy to organize a school year so that one-fourth of the student body will be on vacation at any given time. If a student has a 15 day vacation four times per year, he may not be able to get a steady part time job. Many employers will not hire someone for 15 days, replace him with someone else for 15 days, replace the second person after 15 days, and replace the third person after 15 days by re-employing the first person for 15 days. With no job and perhaps no recreational program available, the vaca-

tioning students may find things to do which displease the school officials, community residents, and their parents. Visiting the school and providing nuisance value to the teachers can be the main activity for the 15 day vacation.

General Conclusion

The preceding elaborations are presented as concerns or needs under each heading listed. Certainly, the points made can be applied in some way to a conventional school organization. They take on added significance in an Extended School Year program because anything new is subject to more critical scrutiny than that which is old and familiar. Thus, although not unique in all respects to an Extended School Year plan, the comments are offered as aspects of evaluation in that they can make or break any Extended School Year program.

PITFALLS

Implicit in all that has preceded is the need to plan carefully prior to the implementation of any version of the Extended School Year program. Often, those who are keenly interested in these programs assume that everyone has the same level of awareness as they have. When plans are built on this false assumption, problems are bound to occur. The emotional reactions which the Extended School Year concept evokes are difficult enough to overcome in spite of careful planning. The reactions can be devastating if the planning does not include a major informational

program for the community residents.

Typical questions which are asked by community residents can give clues concerning what to include in the informational program:

1. Will my child have to attend school for 12 months?
2. Will teachers teach for 12 months?
3. Will the buildings be air-conditioned?
4. Will I have to provide transportation for my child?
5. Will my child be happy in a new program?
6. Will extra-curricular activities be curtailed?
7. Will there be extra homework assigned?
8. Will my child have to be re-taught after each vacation period?
9. Will our family vacations be affected?
10. Will the program cost more than the present program?
11. Will my child's achievement be improved?

Even when questions such as these are answered to the satisfaction of school officials, experience with feasibility studies has revealed that lingering doubts appear at least for a brief period. Generally, unless the school-community relations are at a very low point and unless the school administration is exceptionally inept, the students and the parents learn to accept the Extended School Year program. Some learn to like it more than the conventional organization. Teachers, too, often learn to accept the Extended School Year after they have had some experience with it.

With emphasis on effective school-community relations and on effective in-service programs for the professional staff, the following statements of pitfalls become significant.

1. Lack of community awareness
2. Lack of curriculum modification
3. Lack of individualization opportunities
4. Lack of appropriate scheduling of curricular and extra-curricular activities
5. Lack of articulation with other schools and with community agencies
6. Lack of long range planning
7. Lack of administrative support
8. Lack of School Board support
9. Lack of patience by all concerned

If more specificity is desired, the list can be elongated and elaborated. The general pitfalls cited are sufficient, however, to alert everyone to be cautious about jumping headlong into a change as major as an Extended School Year.

Summary

At this time, conclusive evidence concerning the validity of the Extended School Year concept does not exist. For the present, advocates as well as critics of the concept will have to rely upon professional judgment and emotional biases to promote their cause. Assuming that there is no problem of incompetence on the leadership level, the key concern is attitude.

By reorganizing staff, curriculum, materials, and finances, an Extended School Year program can be successful. If the attitude of decision makers in or out of the school is against such a change, the program will not be successful. Since there is so little agreement about how a person learns and about the purposes of education, and since there is so much current emphasis on the affective domain, perhaps the lack of proof of merit or demerit is a plus point in our Age of the Aquarius.