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ABSTRACT

Prior to the 1940s, several communities in the United States had adopted year-round education (YRE). This paper presents an overview of YRE, including history, patterns of implementation, various calendars, intersession arrangements, pros and cons, and a list of areas to be addressed when considering YRE. Proponents of YRE argue that it enhances continuous learning; offers short vacations that refresh students and teachers; reduces vandalism and discipline concerns; features ongoing intersessions; allows vacations in offpeak seasons; eases overcrowding; assists low-achieving students; and provides year-round employment. Opponents argue that change is difficult; child-care arrangements must be revised; families might follow different calendars; teachers will not be home with their own children; inservice days are harder to schedule; summer vacation is shorter; buildings need air conditioning; and summer jobs are disrupted. A conclusion is that the concept of YRE should be presented as a way to create continuous learning, not as a way to restructure 9-month schooling. (Contains seven references.) (LMI)

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YRE: UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS by Don Glines

History

Most give credit to Bluffton, IN (1904) for the first year-round education (YRE) program. Some relate the concept to "summer vacation schools" in 1870, while others cite that urban schools in the U.S. in 1840 operated 240-250 days. Though few students attended that total, schools were open year-round. Contrarily, rural schools usually functioned only two to six months, the result of weather, transportation, farm, and fiscal priorities.

As documented in *Year-Round Education: History, Philosophy, Future*, the records of the early 1900s describe programs in a variety of communities, including Newark, New Jersey (1912); Minot, North Dakota (1917); Omaha, Nebraska (1924); Nashville, Tennessee (1925); and Aliquippa (1928), and Ambridge (1931), Pennsylvania. They were begun for many reasons: Newark to help immigrants learn English and enable students to accelerate; Bluffton to enhance learning and create additional classrooms; Minot to meet the needs of the "laggards;" Aliquippa and Ambridge for space; Omaha to offer continuous vocational training programs; and Nashville to improve the quality of education—all valid pieces of the puzzle.

One of the most noted calendar options was created by William Wirt, the superintendent who began the first YRE program in Bluffton. Moving to Gary, IN, he instituted the work-study-play school and the famous year-round platoon system. At its height, this extended year, extended day, curriculum oriented, space saving plan, in conjunction with the work-study-play concept was adopted by 240 communities. In Gary, from 1907-1937, the program was generally operational 50 weeks a year, 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. The book, *The Great Lockout in America's Citizenship Plants*, documents this exciting prototype.

Wirt, along with Henri Weber in Nashville; Harlan Vanderslice in Aliquippa; John Beveridge in Omaha; Bennett Jackson in Minneapolis; and Addison Poland and Warren Roe in Newark, led the pre-1940 continuous learning philosophies prevailing among the advocates. They paved the way for the "modern" or current year-round programs. For various reasons, the many early adoptions did not survive the late 1930 depression years, and the national uniformity needed during World War II. Though there were numerous efforts to renew the plans between 1946-1966, the concept was not reactivated until 1968-69-70 in communities in Missouri, Illinois, California, and Minnesota. The majority of districts adopting YRE during the 1970-1990 period were primarily interested in generating space; the education and community assets became better understood as the calendar variations spread across the nation. Approaching 2000 and beyond, the focus turned toward the inherent value of YRE.

Increasing numbers of communities realized that it was no longer sensible to utilize billions of dollars worth of facilities only three-fourths of the months of the year, one-half of the days, and one-fourth of the hours. Through creative calendar planning, space was increased by 25, 33, or 50 percent, depending upon the selected configuration. Innovative secondary schools could expand a site by 100 percent. Though enrollment was the original driving force, there was a growing acceptance of the *education, employment, and lifestyle benefits*. Eventually, half of all new programs adopted the single track format, which saved no space or money, but offered many personal and educational advantages. Additionally, modified calendars for specific regional needs became popular, as in Yosemite Park, where school vacations were scheduled during off-peak seasons in November and March.

Implementation

In most districts, there is that 30-40-30 division of opinion when YRE is first broached. A minimum of 30 percent of the families will volunteer for a year-round calendar, 40 will be uncertain, and 30 will be opposed. Seventy percent is normally the maximum number of volunteers during the first and second years, though a few have reached 90; the average usually falls between 45-55 percent. Of the 30 most always opposed, 10-15 percent will be highly emotional, and vocal against the plan. Some of the middle 40 will join the opponents when they are uncertain regarding how the proposal will affect them. The resulting early discussions of YRE leave a *minority* opposed, a *minority* uncertain, and a *minority* in favor. These figures can lead to conflict and win/lose schisms between voluntary and mandatory YRE proponents, and those who oppose any YRE adoption. Such splits in communities are unnecessary and contrary to the productive energy of the district, but divisions occur where people do not comprehend the philosophy and purposes of YRE.

In implementing the year-round concept within voluntary conditions, a number of organizational patterns have developed throughout the nation. They all work; one is not better than another. Four have emerged as the most popular and all are preferable to mandating, except in cases of extreme overcrowding. The first is the school-within-a-school plan. A number of sites offer both the nine-month and year-round options within the same building. The second pattern is to pair geographically near schools, so that families have the choice of a neighborhood nine-month or year-round calendar. A third method is to create the "neighborhood cluster" where one of three or four buildings offers the option of a continuous learning design. A fourth effective approach is to develop a structure that can accommodate either a nine-month or continuous year option within the same calendar, such as is possible in the Flexible All-Year Plans. Until air-conditioning is available, schools can operate on summer hours—7:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; the rooms are usually comfortable until noon. In winter they can revert to 9 am to 3 pm.

Calendars

There are approximately 30 calendars, as documented in YRE Calendar and Enrollment Plans. One-third of them are briefly outlined. The percentages cited are for multi-track adoptions. Single track does not increase space, but provides 12 month learning opportunities.

Concept 6: This is a 163-day calendar (or 180 with overlap days), divided into six terms of approximately 41 days each. Students in three groups (A, B, C) attend two consecutive blocks, or 16 weeks, followed by eight weeks of vacation. As this is a three-track calendar, when A and B are in school, C is on vacation. *Increase in capacity: 50 percent.*

Modified Concept 6: The same calendar as Concept 6, except the units are divided into four weeks. Thus a student attends eight weeks, followed by four weeks of vacation. *Increase in capacity: 50 percent.*

60-20: A four-track (A, B, C, D groups) calendar where students attend three 60-day instructional periods, each followed by 20-day vacations. *Increase in capacity: 33 percent.*

45-15: The same four-track as the 60-20, except students attend four 45-day blocks, interspersed with four 15 day vacations. *Increase in capacity: 33 percent.*

90-30: A similar four-track plan as the 60-20 and 45-15, except students attend 90 days followed by a 30 day vacation. *Increase in capacity: 33 percent.*

60-15: A five track plan, students attend 60 days followed by 15 days off track. This also can provide a common three-week vacation for all students and staff. *Increase in capacity: 25 percent.*

Flexible or Personalized: The former requires placing curriculum in smaller unit packages; the latter requires individualizing the curriculum. These can be used in any school, but are particularly suited to charter, alternative, and magnet schools. They can save space by individually tailored vacations; approximately the same percent is always off-site. *Increase in capacity:* variable, 20 to 100 percent.

Four Quarter: A four-track system, the curriculum is divided into four 12-week blocks with students attending three of the four. It can be mandated, or the summer quarter can be voluntary. *Increase in capacity:* 33 percent.

Quinmester: This is a five-track system. The curriculum is divided into five nine-week blocks of time. Students attend four of the five quins. *Increase in capacity:* 25 percent.

Concept 8: The curriculum is placed into eight six-week blocks of time. Students attend any six of the eight to complete their 36 weeks, thereby providing two six-week vacation periods. *Increase in capacity:* 33 percent.

Orchard: A five-track, 60-15 calendar is featured. Rather than rotate classes of 30 students and their teachers together, 20 percent of each classroom goes on a three-week vacation. A teacher may have 35 students assigned, but only 28 at one time—five groups of seven (A, B, C, D, E in each classroom). The teacher retains his or her own room, teaches 225 days, receives commensurate pay, and still has eight weeks of vacation days. The students rotate in groups of seven. *Increase in capacity:* 25 percent.

Intersessions

Interwoven with these plans are the intersessions—the vacation periods for students and the year-round equivalent of summer school, but with a totally different perspective. They are considered a continuous part of the learning process, not isolated summer courses. The majority of students return for two or three enrollments. Traditional, remedial, and enrichment opportunities are offered; more exciting are the creative, innovative curriculum options. Many are off-campus, community-centered alternatives, such as drama at the local theater, psychology at the mental health ward of the hospital, tent living and environmental studies in the mountains, oceanography at the sea coast, or pesticide studies on a farm. Park and recreation activities, most sports, learning vacations, year-round Bible schools, and community agency functions are available, too.

For/Against

There are many “lists” of pros and cons. These will vary within the communities. The “problems” are not with the year-round program, but how the calendar affects individual lifestyles and learning preferences. A few are cited here:

For: enhances continuous learning; short vacations refresh students and teachers; reduced vandalism and discipline concerns; provides for ongoing intersessions; allows vacations in off-peak seasons; eases overcrowding; assists low achieving students; provides year-round employment.

Against: change is difficult; child care arrangements must be revised; families can be on different calendars; teachers will not be home with their own children; inservice days are harder to schedule; summer vacation is shorter; buildings need air conditioning; disrupts summer jobs; scheduling and communication are more difficult.

Feasibility

There are 25-30 areas that must be addressed when considering YRE. A few are provided here as illustrations.

a) analyze future enrollments; b) consider ethnic balances; c) select from among 30 calendars; d) determine how to offer choices; e) assess impact on transportation; f) review the

research; g) plan new maintenance schedules; h) decide on food service; i) plan child care assistance; j) examine potential budget impacts; k) consider facilities modifications; l) restructure certified and classified contracts; m) involve parks and recreation, police, Bible schools, YM/YWCA's, Scouts; n) meet with business leaders (change back to school sales dates) and plan year-round student employment; o) consider need for an Appeals Board; p) design exciting intersessions; q) plan for special needs programs; r) study effect on all levels, K-12; s) consult with site councils or other parent groups; t) involve students in understanding and planning the program.

Examine "everything" related to the students, staff, families, communities, quality of life and learning. Correctly implemented, YRE is an asset; incorrectly designed, YRE is a major liability. Studying and planning for longer than 6 to 18 months wears out the topic, frustrates the committees, and lessens the potential value of the program. Where it makes sense, do it now; where it does not, then move on to other agendas.

Rationale

Advocates believe that year-round education is related to the quality of life, going beyond year-round school (YRS), which is only a mechanical scheduling system designed to house more students. YRE may help many people individually, and society in general, by providing calendar, curriculum, and family options which more closely fit the changing lifestyles, work patterns, and community involvements for large segments of the population. Opportunities for continuous lifelong learning are becoming an essential characteristic as the world edges into the next century.

Flexible, and especially optional, twelve month patterns can be tailored to fit the personal needs and preferences of each family unit by permitting vacation and other non-school activities to be planned throughout the year. Such a desirable goal is no longer theoretical, but practical, efficient, effective, and even politically palatable, when properly understood and implemented. YRE increases the resources available to society in the categories of human, physical, and fiscal: the human aspect is especially enhanced if only 66-80 percent of the students are in the school buildings at one time, thereby leaving a potential pool of 20-34 percent of the youth throughout the year for volunteer services or other off-site experiences or leisure. The physical aspect of multiple track programs allows districts to consider fewer facilities or create additional space for curriculum expansion. It does not make sense for community learning centers to stand empty for three months. The fiscal aspect can avoid unnecessary new construction; millions of dollars can be saved in expanding enrollment areas. Long-term maintenance costs, and ongoing insurance and utilities fees can be reduced. In declining districts, older buildings may be closed sooner, preventing costly repairs and returning the structure and land to the community for new uses.

Philosophy

Volunteers for YRE understand and want to create exciting programs based on eight philosophical advantages:

1. **Continuous Learning:** The concept that schools, like hospitals, are helping institutions and should never close, is gaining acceptance. Students should be able to learn in any of the 12 months; they should not find a "closed" sign on the door in July. With creative use of intersessions, and rotating groups of students, there are always teachers available to help youth learn.
2. **Employment Realities:** Construction workers, moving van drivers, farmers, baseball players, summer tourist

operators, park rangers, those low on union seniority lists, and certain business employees, among others, cannot take summer vacations. Districts are learning that these parents appreciate non-summer periods to create time with their children.

3. **Lifestyle Diversities:** Many states have wonderful weather in September, October, April, May. Combining employment and lifestyle preferences often creates a majority who do not want schools closed June, July, and August, or who want time off in snow season.
4. **Curriculum Facilities:** Some districts that are full, but not overcrowded, use YRE to create "elbow room." An elementary school built for 900 can be reduced in on-site enrollment to 675 by a four-track calendar thus freeing eight rooms to use for drama, art, computers, library, or other special enhancements. A secondary school of 1,600 can be reduced to 1,200, lessening crowds in the halls, library, lockers, gyms, special facilities, and cafeteria.
5. **Improvement Catalysts:** Schools use YRE as a catalyst for restructuring. When adopting a continuous calendar, staff can consider Organization changes—nongrading; Curriculum options—individualization; Facilities—remodeling for elementary science; and Philosophy—more attention to the affective domain. When properly implemented, year-round should improve the school by opening the windows for change and innovation.
6. **Community Enhancements:** YRE enhances communities through the adoption of twelve-month swimming lessons, park and recreation programs, and Bible schools; ongoing volunteers for health and social agencies; and continuous help for limited-English-speaking and special education youth. There is potential for reducing the dropout rate and increasing opportunities for all.
7. **People Considerations:** The affluent can be concerned with skiing, vacations to Europe, and private camp experiences. But one of seven anglo, four of nine black, and three of eight hispanic youth live in poverty. Forty million Americans are desperate, and many are homeless or extremely transient year-round; 39 percent are young people. YRE offers a "continuous home/role model" for part of most days every month, with breakfast, lunch, and snacks for a significant number of children in poverty.
8. **Personal Choices:** Ideally year-round should be a win-win decision; both YR and nine month learning should be offered as options. It should not be mandated unless essential, but it should not be denied those who benefit. If 49 percent want YRE, that is beautiful; if 51 percent can be helped by the September through June calendar, that is beautiful, too. It should not be win-lose.

Future

To speed the transition toward year-round education, the concept should be implemented not to "restructure nine month schooling," but to "create continuous learning." YRE can be the catalyst to rethink philosophy, curriculum, delivery systems, facilities, organizations, vacations, community services, and volunteering—everything pertaining to the enhancement of learning. Districts often assume local politics will make major changes impossible. They claim budget deficits prevent improvements, even though experimental programs have proven that most reforms cause no additional ongoing costs. Examinations of dropout rates, low test scores, discipline concerns, accumulation of C, D, and F grades given on progress reports, and boredom among the majority of gifted youth confirm that the traditional nine-month schools, or year-round programs that only save space, are not the answer. How excited are the B and C students?

As documented in *Creating Educational Futures: Continuous Mankato Wilson Alternatives*, one transition model is that developed at the Wilson Campus School, Mankato State University, Minnesota. The Wilson calendar was called the "Personalized Continuous Year." School was open 240 days; students could attend any 170 days, plus voluntary intersessions, and vacation as they wished. The curriculum and instruction were completely personalized and individualized on a continuous progress basis. *This pre-K through college format was nongraded*; goal sheets replaced the traditional A-B-C-D-F grades, class ranks, ability groupings, Carnegie Units and transcript systems. It worked for both "gifted" and "probationary" youth and "dropouts."

Beyond Wilson was the proposal for the Minnesota Experimental City where everyone was to be a learner, everyone a teacher. Formal learning was to finally become a lifelong pursuit. The city was to be the living/learning laboratory—a community of 250,000 people with no schools—no 90-30 or 60-20, or even Personalized Year Calendar. The Wilson program was an adaptation of an existing schoolhouse to the concepts of the Minnesota Experimental City.

Year-round education needs research and development volunteers—groups of individuals who will create “design” and “concept” automobiles—those that are built and driven by a few two to ten years before being disseminated to the public. There are communities with parents who are willing to be the educational astronauts—who are willing to launch in the Endeavor, while the great majority remain in earthbound airplanes. YRE should become an accepted part of post-America 2000. In the coming years, educators should be able to create year-round, continuous MXC style patterns more appropriate for the emerging future.

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