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AUTHOR McChesney, Jim
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ABSTRACT

One avenue being explored as a way to cut costs while maintaining the quality of programs and services is year-round education (YRE). In most cases, the known benefits and drawbacks of an existing component of traditional scheduling must be weighed against the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of YRE. The five articles reviewed in this brief look at the pros and cons of YRE through examples from districts and schools that have implemented it and those that have abandoned it, as well as through studies of participants' perceptions of program strengths and weaknesses. The articles include: (1) "What Twenty Years of Educational Studies Reveal About Year-Round Education" (Blaine R. Worthen and Stephen W. Zsiray, Jr.); (2) "Year-Round No More" (William D. White); (3) "Year Round Education: Breaking the Bonds of Tradition" (Kim E. Sheane, Jean Donaldson, and Louann A. Bierlein); (4) "Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform" (Patricia Gandara and Judy Fish); and (5) "Policy Considerations in Conversion to Year-Round Schools" (Gene V. Glass). (LMI)

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Year-Round Schools

Jim McChesney

At a time when voters are saying no to higher taxes and legislators are responding by cutting funding for social and educational programs, a concerted effort is being made to find ways of reducing costs while maintaining the quality of programs and services. One avenue being explored is year-round education (YRE).

As far back as the 19th century, school districts began experimenting with year-round education for a variety of reasons, including cost savings, academic improvement, and the enhancement of teacher professionalism. Although some districts have adopted and retained YRE over the years, others have abandoned or avoided it.

As with most complex social issues, ideal solutions to educational problems are rare. In most instances, the *known* benefits and drawbacks of an existing component of the educational structure—in this case, traditional scheduling—must be weighed against the *theoretical* advantages and disadvantages of alternatives, such as year-round education. Ultimately, administrators must make decisions about YRE based on both the best available information *and* on their intimate understanding of their district's characteristics, knowing that what may be right for one district may be wrong for another.

The five articles reviewed here look at the pros and cons of YRE through examples from districts and schools that have implemented it and those that have abandoned it, as well as through studies of attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses as perceived by parents, teachers, students, and administrators.

Blaine R. Worthen and *Stephen W. Zsiray, Jr.*, marshalling evidence from 20 years of experience with YRE in North Carolina, speculate about possible implications for districts considering this option.

William D. White, a former assistant superintendent in a district that implemented and then abandoned YRE, discusses the factors that were considered in the decisions to depart from, and later return to, traditional scheduling.

Kim E. Sheane, Jean Donaldson, and *Louann A. Bierlein* report on the experiences of six schools in Arizona that use YRE, and describe how the lessons learned can help other schools create successful YRE programs.

Patricia Gandara and *Judy Fish* look at YRE as more than merely a way to save money; they view it as a means of initiating major structural reform.

Gene Glass discusses policy considerations that make YRE an acceptable alternative in terms of costs, academic achievement, and community support.

Jim McChesney is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

Worthen, Blaine R., and Stephen W. Zsiray, Jr. **What Twenty Years of Educational Studies Reveal About Year-Round Education.** Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center, 1994. 32 pages. ED 373 413. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. (800) 443-3742. $7.94.

The real question concerning year-round education, asserts this report, "is whether or not the benefits to be derived from YRE are worth the opposition that typically will follow any innovation that seriously shakes the foundation of our school's structures or schedules."

And shake them is what YRE does—perhaps less than critics would claim, yet more than proponents acknowledge. Summarizing and synthesizing current research on YRE, Worthen and Zsiray look at trends at the national level and in North Carolina. They also offer definitions of YRE, describe extended-year and alternative schedules, and explore the impact of YRE on students, teachers, school administration and governance, parent attitudes, the school community, and education costs.

In each of these areas, the authors try to objectively evaluate the claims of both YRE proponents—who suggest that it increases student learning, enhances teacher professionalism, maximizes use of school buildings, and costs less than traditional schools—and opponents, who assert that it has no impact on student learning, produces stress and burnout for teachers and building administrators, seriously interferes with family vacations and other traditional summer activities, and costs much more than traditional scheduling.

Which side is painting an accurate picture?

To make a judgment, one must first define YRE. It is not, the authors point out, "one specific plan, but rather any reorganization of the school calendar into several instructional blocks, interspersed with shorter and more frequent vacation breaks than is true of the traditional calendar."

With the understanding that there are many forms of YRE, the authors advise each district to look at its own needs and resources before determining how to proceed. In summarizing their research findings, they offer some conclusions for decision makers to consider:

- In academic achievement, YRE students will do as well as or better than those learning in traditional schedules.
- YRE teachers will report greater stress but less burnout over the course of the year.
- A strong majority of parents will support a well-implemented YRE program, but only half or slightly less will support a poorly implemented program.
- Overall, single-track YRE programs will cost about the same or more than traditional programs, while multi-track programs can result in cost savings of from 2 to 8 percent—and up to 15 percent in a well-implemented program.

White, William D. **"Year-Round No More."** *The American School Board Journal* 179: 7 (July 1992): 27-30. EJ 447 169. *Available from:* University Microfilms International (UMI), Article Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346. (800) 521-0600, ext. 2786. $9.75.

White, a retired assistant superintendent for instructional services for the Jefferson County (Colorado) School District, writes about the experience of his district, which phased out YRE after 14 years.

The rationale for originally initiating a year-round schedule was to meet growing enrollment at a time when taxpayers were unwilling to pay for new schools, and Jefferson County's program became a model for other YRE programs around the nation. But in 1988 a massive new school construction program was launched and the year-round schedule was abandoned.

Reasons for returning to conventional scheduling included a desire for neighborhood schools, administrator burnout, changing board priorities, cost savings, educational benefits, and differing needs of high schools and elementary schools.

White offers examples of other districts where year-round scheduling has been successful, not only financially but academically. He cites three districts—in Oxnard, California; Cibecue, Arizona; and Sandy, Utah—where year-round scheduling has facilitated the maximum use of school buildings, minimum waste of instructional time, and improvement in test scores.

He outlines six basic tenets for ensuring the success of year-round schools:

- Preserve your neighborhood schools.
- Understand what year-round schooling means to your district.
- Assign administrators carefully.
- Beware of the appeal of new construction.
- Develop the district calendar around instruction.
- Evaluate thoroughly.

Sheane, Kim E.; Jean Donaldson; and Louann A. Bierlein. **Year Round Education: Breaking the Bonds of Tradition.** Tempe, AZ: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University, 1994. 40 pages. ED 375 518. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. (800) 443-3742. $7.94.

This report, which includes information on six schools in Arizona that use year-round scheduling, begins with an introduction to the wide variety of year-round schedules available, along with an interesting note that year-round schools are not recent phenomena. For example, in 1904, the Bluffton, Indiana, schools adopted a 12-month calendar to help improve curriculum and learning, and to provide families and students with educational options. In 1912, the Newark, New Jersey, schools saw YRE as a way to help immigrants improve their English and progress more quickly through

the educational system. Schools in Omaha, Nebraska, used YRE to offer continuous vocational training.

The report identifies a number of strategies that promote and maintain stakeholder commitment to YRE, offers constructive ideas for school and district YRE committee members, and notes three specific advantages that are evident in successful YRE programs:

- Given the shorter summer break, less time is needed following vacations for review, thereby allowing more time to cover new material.
- There are more intervention opportunities throughout the year for students requiring remedial assistance. They no longer have to experience nine months of failure before receiving assistance.
- Studies of schools on year-round calendars have shown higher test scores, lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, lower absenteeism, fewer acts of vandalism, and better student self-esteem.

The authors conclude, "Although research results are mixed, the overall benefits associated with YRE make it worth the additional efforts required to implement a successful program."

Gandara, Patricia, and Judy Fish. **Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform.** *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 16: 1 (Spring 1994): 67-85. EJ 484 359. *Available from:* University Microfilms International (UMI), Article Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346. (800) 521-0600, ext. 2786. $9.75.

As several other reports and studies have indicated, year-round schooling can result in a number of positive outcomes for districts, students, and teachers. However, many of these year-round programs have been initiated as stop-gap measures to meet overcrowding needs or other circumstances perceived as temporary.

This report looks at three schools in California that use a 60-15 year-round schedule, in which five heterogeneously assembled groups attend school for 60 days, then have a vacation or intersession for 15 days. This pattern is repeated three times during the year. All students and teachers share a common summer break of approximately four weeks, plus a winter break of two weeks and a spring break of one week.

Other elements of the California program, called the Orchard Plan Experiment, include a reorganization of categorical funding to allow for the inclusion of enrichment courses, with an emphasis on at-risk students; a reduction in class size; the accommodation of 20 percent more students at each site; an opportunity for teachers to extend the length of their contracts by 20 percent (at 20 percent higher salaries); a restructuring of curriculum; and voluntary participation on the part of schools, teachers, and families.

Gandara and Fish conclude that when year-round schooling is structured like the Orchard Plan Experiment, it could foster restructuring and increase student learning. Among their other conclusions:

- Parents and teachers are likely to find year-round programs satisfactory alternatives to traditional school calendars.
- Year-round calendars can open the door to many kinds of curriculum innovations.
- Additional intersession programs can be introduced to year-round programs if support can be found.
- Year-round programs can reduce class size.
- Teachers can (and probably should) be given the option to contract for different work schedules.
- Experimentation with changing classroom dynamics can promote more positive attitudes in the year-round classroom.

Glass, Gene V. **Policy Considerations in Conversion to Year-Round Schools.** Policy Briefs of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory, No. 92-01. Tempe, AZ: College of Education, Arizona State University, 1992. 6 pages. ED 357 476. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. (800) 443-3742. $3.97.

Glass poses several key questions: "Do year-round schools save money?" "Do year-round schools improve academic achievement?" "Do year-round schools disrupt the lives of those involved?" His overview of the pros and cons of year-round schooling comes down on the side of these alternative schedules, but with several caveats.

Concerning cost savings, Glass reports that while money is indeed saved by eliminating the need for new buildings, the costs of transition and operating expenses can increase, especially in light of the need for extended contracts for all personnel. Citing a Stanford Research Institute study, Glass

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concludes that money can be saved only by tight restrictions on alternatives, scheduling, and contracts. He also notes that state policy toward year-round scheduling can play a major role in its success or failure.

Academic achievement—and parents' and teachers' perceptions of achievement—seem to remain stable regardless of which scheduling plan is followed. Although differences in test scores among schools with different plans are insignificant, curricular innovation seems to be stimulated by year-round scheduling, which allows for a more flexible and individualized approach. Glass adds, however, that these innovations are not directly reflected in student achievement.

Disruption of the lives of those affected—students, parents, and teachers—appears to be minimal in the instances presented by Glass, who notes that in one school district with both traditional and year-round schools, both sets of parents reported being pleased with their school calendars. Some negative feedback was evident at the high school level, where students and parents complained about the difficulty of finding summer jobs, as well as lost recreation opportunities.

Glass concludes that year-round schools can work, can save money, do not interfere with learning, and can be accepted by all involved. To achieve this, however, the program:

- Must be coordinated with parents' lives and community activities;
- Should include as many district schools as possible;
- Must achieve full enrollment; and
- Must individualize the curriculum to a greater extent. □

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