

ERIC Manuscript Submission:
Year-Round versus Traditional Schools
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Abstract

This document serves as a literature review for the practicality and cost effectiveness of traditional versus year-round school systems. The differences in year-round and traditional schools are many, as the debate lingers on which type is best for students' learning. Generally conclusive, the literature indicates that year-round schools' benefits far outweigh those in traditional calendar schools. It was found that students scored higher on yearly state exams that were enrolled in year-round schools and their achievement levels were better than their counterparts. The expenditure of operating the year-round school was deemed to be beneficial to the students and faculty and not much more than it costs to operate on a traditional system. Teacher motivation and satisfaction was immensely higher in year-round schools. The normal schedule allows for a break in between eight weeks of class, this gives ample time for teachers and students to rest and get ready to begin again. The turnover rates among teachers are much lower in year-round schools as well. Far and above the year-round school system surpasses it's inferior, the traditional calendar school.

Keywords: year-round, traditional, remedial areas, operational costs, student achievement, and teacher motivation, single and multi-tracks

The following research attempts to assess the question: Do students learn more and effectively in year-round schools or traditional calendar schools? The benefits of year-round and traditional schools have long been debated. More schools turn to year-round schools for many reasons. Interest in implementing year-round schools can be attributed to three touted advantages of a year-round calendar; increased student achievement; greater satisfaction among parents, teachers, and students, and; cost savings, (McMillen, 2001). Data collected across the country has proven that year-round schools are the best way for children to get the most of their education providing better scores and learning habits than those of traditional schools. Traditional schools offer the most time off but it is apparent in the grades of children and attitudes of teachers. Teachers must use developmental skills in order to teach year-round students differently than tradition ones. More time off between semesters means more time reviewing and getting remedial students back into the swing of school. Leadership methods differ greatly between these two types of schools. The best way to teach and to learn is to use a year-round calendar system that benefits students' achievements and teachers' motivation. Surprisingly, the traditional school does not have much to offer compared to year-round schools; year-round schools' result in higher test scores, students' success, and teachers' low turnover rates.

Key Terms

The key terms used in the research literature are vernacular from the administration side of school board administration, describing the costs and overhead expenses in maintain a school as well as more commonly known terms in relating school quality. The types of terms to be used are: operational costs, achievement, student/teacher motivation, and assessments. This research analysis reviews the statistical studies used to assess the differences or lack thereof in year-round

versus traditional schools. Some terms used describe the types of statistical tests used, surveys conducted, and conclusion/results from the study. The terms are somewhat specific, such as single-track, referring to the shortest in-school semester length and multi-track referring to each single track that makes up the entire year-round school year.

Introduction

Some argue that year-round schools are especially valuable for language minority students, in allowing them to maintain their exposure to English more consistently over the year or for remedial student in lessening the problem of summer learning loss, (Orellana, 1998).

Researchers and educators have long known that the traditional school calendar doesn't correlate with children's learning patterns. The long summer break is a hardship, and it interferes with retention of material, particularly for younger children and for students whose families cannot afford summer enrichment activities (Metzker 2002). The majority of the research concurred that year-round schools promote better study habits and improved test scores while traditional schools were stagnant. Overall findings in California public schools indicated that student in the year-round school had higher scores in math, reading and science than those in schools with traditional calendars (Dossett 2000). Of the two studies both stated that there were limitations to the research and by conducting a longer study over time, more and thorough results could be produced. Over the last 20 years, many districts and schools have begun to explore year-round education or a modified calendar in response to student under-achievement in low performing schools (Haser, 2005). As the year-round calendar system is being used more and more, it's been proven to progress student's scores and attains teacher motivation. A contrary opinion was offered by (Rakoff , 1999), Experts agree that it is of little value to add days to the calendar without a concrete plan for using the time to enhance instruction. Viewed this way, the calendar

becomes a variable educators can tailor to the exacting needs of their own students. However, research has shown the effectiveness of year-round schools when teachers and administrative faculty plan wisely and use time sensibly for helping students attain their goals. When teachers have a connection with students that compliment their learning styles, instructors can apply changeable learning strategies that can be altered to benefit students.

Findings

The September to June calendar year is viewed as antiquated , given that the economy is no longer based on agriculture and that children are no longer essential for planting and harvesting farms, (Orellana, 1998). With this in mind many rural schools are turning to year-round schools as well. They have proven to be cost effective, help retain teachers, and boast greater student achievement. Benefits of year-round schools are not just for students, but teachers as well. Three schools, with very different characteristics, undertook to extend their school year to approximately 223 days (from the previous 180 days), reorganize funding to provide more days of schooling for many students, and increase the length of the work year, and consequently the salaries, of teachers. All three schools were able to demonstrate increases in academic achievement, a high level of parent and teacher satisfaction, and a cost-effective use of existing school facilities, (Gandara, 1994). Traditional calendar schools offer a set time for teachers to work, and therefore no opportunity to earn more money, however, the year-round calendar systems offers contracts for single and multi-track calendars. Single track teachers would have the opportunity to teach for less time than a traditional calendar teacher, which adds flexibility to an instructor's schedule and personal life. Multi-track teachers will teach all semesters of a year-round school and thereby increasing their pay up to one third that of traditional calendar teachers.

Year-round education provides the balance calendar opportunities for year-round professional development that will impact student learning through continued learning by teachers and staff (Speck, 2002). Teacher opportunities are greater, provide a better working environment, and promote more cohesive teacher-student cohesiveness in the year-round system. Year-round schools are an educational trend shaping our country, as more school systems turn to this style of teaching. Significant research demonstrates that smaller-class benefits not only include enhanced academic performance but improved student behavior and teacher morale (Stevenson 2007). When teacher morale is increased, their quality of instruction increases which benefits students. More contented teachers are a high-quality affect on students and promote a better learning environment. It is conclusive among these research articles that year-round schools give greater opportunities and flexibility to teachers while also creating a more pleasant work environment and less turnover rate among teachers.

Year-Round System Feasibility

As compulsory education evolved in the United States, so did the conventional school calendar of nine months in school followed by a three-month summer vacation, during which many children helped with harvesting crops. But now that it is common for both parents to work outside the home year-round, public opinion increasingly supports a longer school year (Rakoff 1999). However the costs of operating a traditional school is much less than that of a year-round school, with more building and facility overhead, administration costs, and teacher salaries. The study reportedly found that the year-round school has apparently slowed the rising per pupil cost that generally accompanies school operation from year to year. There have not been as many studies on cost efficiency between the two school types as there have been in students' scores, achievement, and teacher motivation. As the feasibility for a year-round education program is

being considered, it is important that a careful evaluation be made of the cost, a school's ability to maintain quality educational programs, and the impact that YRE plan may have on the operational/support services of the school district, (Trewartha 2007). It is considered a general consensus that year-round school programs are more expensive simply because the school year lasts longer. More money is needed to pay teachers, faculty, admin staff, and building costs. Year-round schools are much more expensive to maintain, especially in difficult economic times, state budgets have cut education spending dramatically.

Although year-round school render better effects on students and teachers, the most cost effective way is traditional school calendar system, unless it's part of a wealthy suburb that doesn't rely heavily on private donations or state funds. Modified calendars were associated with higher achievement for economically disadvantaged students. Students, parents, and staffs who participated in modified calendar programs were positive about their experiences, (Cooper, 2003). While students learn more and have higher test scores from a longer school year, the costs to operate the school are not feasible for all school districts. Many year-round schools are implemented in low-socioeconomic areas to combat the low student achievement and have a deep impact on the school's financial situation, rendering it not practical for all areas. In addition, when a school system switches to year-round system, a learning curve is expected and even a type of culture shock. Any school anticipating a change to year-round operation would obviously need to involve students, parents, and teachers in the decision making process, (Holt, 1973).

Reproductionist theorists have argued that schooling plays an important role in reproducing and even exacerbating existing disparities. But seasonal comparison research has shown that gaps in reading and math skills grow primarily during summer vacation, suggesting

that non-school factors (e.g., family and neighborhood) are the main source of inequality, (Douglas, 2004). In terms of students' education level, there has been great debate over which school type renders the best results among students. Schools on balanced calendars (single track year-round) outperformed gains recorded for traditional calendar schools at all levels (Stenvall 2001). Additional qualitative findings were: within year-round schools' teachers progressed more quickly through the textbooks and overall, as did their students and moved at a faster pace. Another advantage for teachers is that less review time is necessary at the beginning of each instructional block, as research has demonstrated that the shorter vacation periods reduce summer learning loss, (Kneese 2000).

As more students are being enrolled in year-round education programs, research facts are more easily investigated and more data is being collected to fully understand all sides of the year-round versus traditional school debate. McChesney, (1996) offers the following reasons for year-round schools implementation, 'Given the shorter summer break, less time is needed to follow for review, there are more opportunities for intervention throughout the year-round calendar year for students requiring remedial assistance, and studies of schools on year-round calendars have shown higher test scores, lower drop-out rates, higher graduation rates, lower absenteeism, fewer acts of vandalism, and better student self-esteem.' As a theme among research articles it is understood that the benefits for students of year-round schools far outweigh those of the traditional calendar system. In the cacophony of ideas for school reform, calendar innovation is a variable school board and district executives can uniquely tailor to meet local needs as they seek ways to raise student achievement, (Metzker 2002). With higher test scores and graduation rates and lower drop-out rates, the year-round education system is conceivably a good system to use everywhere in the US, especially in low and under-achieving areas. The main

idea is to educate children in the most effective way to maximize their instructional output; the best outcome for this is the year-round school system.

Conclusion

The results of the research were significantly in favor of year-round schools, with traditional schools having little to offer in comparison. The studies rendered significantly higher test scores, higher student achievement, boosted teacher morale, and were not extremely expensive to run schools for the extra time compared to traditional schools. A more recent study of cost effectiveness would help to positively identify the exact operational costs in a modern school system. As these studies involve many students, faculty, funding, and coordination among them it is difficult to have the most up to date data in all areas. A lengthier study would entail the true measurements of improvements or stagnancy among either school. More studies could be completed in different geographic and socio-economic areas as well to give a better indication of if which type of system works best for all students in all backgrounds. The studies concluded more issues need to be taken into consideration like teacher and parent roles. Teachers need to learn how to encourage and motivate students when changing to a new year-round program; as well as the new evaluation methods to be used and timelines to guide instructors for pacing. In many cases the year-round schools implemented are in low economic areas, and the parenting roles are often neglected more in these areas and relatives are not well equipped to help students with class work. Year-round schools seem to be a great fit for these types of areas, notwithstanding the lack of parental guidance these students have.

Additional research could also be done on teacher planning to assess the trials involved with switching curriculum from traditional to year-round schools. Little research has been done

to accurately gain knowledge of what works and what does not in reference to implementing a year-round calendar education. If teachers are not well trained and prepared for an greatly varied education position, the outcome on student's education could suffer. Although year-round schools seem to be effective and efficient for students, without proper implementing and planning on the part of instructors the program would not be as successful.

Another aspect that could be further studied is the occasion of a large population of low socioeconomic students, non-English speaking students, and or children with disabilities. What are the effects of school reform initiatives on students of color, especially those with disabilities who attend urban public schools? Often times when questions related to a particular school-wide reform arise, such as inclusive schooling, administrative decisions that could negatively affect a school's overall capacity to include students with significant disabilities are required. No significant amount of research has been performed on this topic so no early conclusions should be made, (Keyes 2002).

The conclusion of this research study is overwhelmingly in favor of year-round schools over the traditional calendar year systems. The data portray year-round schools as the counter to many of the traditional schools downfall. Within this study, year-round schools produced better scores on state exams, grade point averages, student attitude and achievement, teacher morale, and education efficiency. As more school districts are turning to year-round systems to respond to the traditional calendar school's deficiencies, it is imperative the program is well funded and well planned to maximize the positive effects that are expected, implicated among research and the staff and students. Many schools are turning from traditional calendars to year-round calendar systems for the betterment of the student's education and more teacher stability.

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