

Research Brief

Year-Round School

Question: What are the considerations for high schools transitioning to a year-round scheduling model?

Summary of Findings:

In a Nutshell

Despite the numerous advantages of a year-round schedule, there are significant political hurdles to its implementation. The most successful year-round schools are those where leaders worked closely with staff and families to maximize the benefits, minimize the costs, and build support for modifying the traditional school calendar.

Extending the school year and changing the “traditional” 180-day school year are topics that provoke strong opinions and incite passionate debate. According to Carroll, the “...main goal of keeping schools open longer each day and throughout the year is to improve the delivery for academic instruction and to provide desperately needed flexibility to support families and communities.”

The current school year is a product of an earlier agrarian economy. In the 1800s, students in rural areas attended school between December and March and mid-May to August, so that they could assist with planting and harvesting. At the same time immigrant parents in urban areas worked long hours and needed a safe place for their children, so many urban schools were in session for 11 months. Today schools in Europe, Asia and South America have longer school years and a longer school day than most schools in the U.S. (Stark).

Some states have begun to lengthen the school year. In 2006 Massachusetts implemented a program called Expanded Learning Time, where 300 additional instructional hours were added to the schedules of 22 low performing schools. These schools redesigned their curricular programs, developed partnerships in the community and spent more time teaching math, literacy and science (Cruz, 2009; MASS 2020, 2009). In the 2006-2007 school year, only 5 states (New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, Mississippi and Wyoming) had no year-round schools. In most states the number of year-round schools is few but one state, California, had 1322 schools on year-round configurations (Education Bug).

The research on the benefits and drawbacks of the year-round schedules is at best, inconclusive. A traditional summer vacation can impact student learning. Students from lower socioeconomic families tend to lose between two to two and a half months of math computation skills and often lose some spelling and reading comprehension skills during that time (Ballinger; Cruz, 2009; Kelly, 2000).

Support for a year-round model is higher among those who have experience with the model and lower among those with no experience (Ballinger).

Variations of the Year-Round Schedule

As with most schedules there is no single model. Similarly every model has advantages and disadvantages. Schools implementing a year-round schedule are most successful when they work to build support among teachers, families and community.

Single-track

The entire student body attends school and has vacation at the same time. The schedule, however, is modified so that vacations are spaced out throughout the course of the year. The goal is to reduce the time when students might lose academic gains. For example, some schools meet for six weeks and then take a two-week break. There are other variations of the single-track model

Multi-track

This system is usually implemented when a school is overcrowded. The multi-track model allows school facilities to be used year-round, with little to no downtime. One portion of the student body is off, while the other portion is in school. Popular schedules include: 45/15 (45 days on and 15 days off. This is commonly used in elementary schools); 60/20 (60 days on and 20 days off); 90/30 (90 days on and 30 days off, mostly used in secondary schools) (Chaika, 2009; Education Bug; ERIC Clearinghouse; Kelly, 2000; Pennington, 2006). Another approach being considered is 50/10 (this includes four ten-week sessions with a two week break and a 4 week summer vacation) (Wat).

Advantages of a Year-Round Schedule

Teachers and principals in schools on year-round schedules report that there are several advantages to a year-round model.

- Students have a tendency to remain more interested in their classes until the end of the grading period because each period is shorter.
- The school calendar can be set up in quarters or trimesters thus fitting in more courses throughout the academic year.
- Students can make up a course, get remediation or enrichment during their vacation time through intersession classes.

- Students can more easily do internships during the “off track” time.
- It may be easier for students to find temporary jobs during their vacation time because vacation is scheduled throughout the year.
- The schedule can be established so that it is easier for students to take college courses.
- There is evidence of less academic loss during vacation.
- Because of shorter vacations there is less need to review material at the beginning of each grading period, thus there is more instructional time for new material (on average in the traditional schedule, the first four to six weeks of the semester is used to review the previous year’s curriculum).
- There may be smaller class sizes
- Counselors, vocational teachers are available to the students all year.
- Maximizes the use of school facilities.
- There is some evidence of reduced student and teacher burnout.
- Similarly, there is some evidence of improved student and teacher attendance.
- Increased student retention and achievement rates
- Fewer discipline problems
- Decreased vandalism
- If on single track, more school days can be added to the schedule
- More time for teachers to work together collegially
- Specialty and extra curricular teachers can teach across the tracks
- It may be easier for two teachers to split a contract
- Easier for teachers to plan curriculum for shorter periods of time
- Families can take vacations at less traveled times.

Disadvantages of a Year-Round Schedule

As with all scheduling models there are also disadvantages that have been identified.

They include:

- Brothers and sisters as well as children of teachers could all be on different schedules
- The research on academic gains is inconclusive
- Intersession programs could be under enrolled and might be cancelled
- Buildings may not have adequate air conditioning for year-round comfort
- Facilities may not be appropriately cleaned and/or maintained because they are never empty
- Teachers may have to move into a new classroom at the beginning of each grading period, thus not having their own space
- If on a multi-track schedule, some school activities will need to be done more than once (i.e. open house, school pictures)
(Ballinger; Carroll; Chaika, 2009; Cruz, 2009; ERIC Clearinghouse; Kelly, 2000; NAYRE; Pennington, 2006; Wat; Year-round schooling).

Deciding to Go Year-Round

As with many reforms, the decision to launch a year-round program is a political decision. Suggesting a year-round model will raise substantial concern among families about traditional family vacations, opportunities for summer work, and alignment with other societal calendars (church, sports, recreation). Local and state businesses that rely on summer travel are powerful interests. Currently in some states, school may not begin until after Labor Day to protect the leisure travel industry.

The resistance almost always emerges from employees as well. There is concern that their children may attend schools with a different schedule, that one parent's vacation will not align with the other parent, or that they entered the teaching profession because of the opportunity to spend extended time during the summer with their children or working in a related field.

Thus most schools that adopt a year-round program offer choice to students and their families. They often have a phased implementation and they implement the program with many of the enhancements (enrichment, remediation, access to college courses) already in place.

Resources:

- Ballinger, C. (n.d.). Common Year Round Education questions. Retrieved online <http://www.nayre.org/Six%20Questions.html>
These are responses to several questions about year-round education that address calendar and the positives of this structure.
- Carroll, M. A. (n.d.). Year-round schooling can cure much of what ails us. Retrieved online <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/arch/04-97/047opin.htm>
This is an overview about the Chicago Schools and why year-round schools are important. It has a special section on high schools in this configuration.
- Chaika, G. (2009). Is year-round schooling the answer? Retrieved online http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin137.shtml
This brief article cites some pros and cons of single and multi-track year-round schedules.
- Cooper, H. (2003). Summer learning loss: The problem and some solutions. Retrieved online <http://www.ceclf.edu.on.ca/ceclfce/desuet/pdf/1-6/calendrier/cooper03.pdf>
This piece provides a brief synopsis of summer learning loss and three possible solutions.
- Cruz, G. (2009, July). Summer school: What? No more vacations? Retrieved online <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1910973,00.html>
This article from Time Magazine provides a basic description of the Expanded Learning Time Program in MA.

- Education Bug. (n.d.). Year round school statistics. Retrieved online <http://www.educationbug.org/a/year-round-school-statistics.html>
A brief overview of schools in the United States that are on year-round schedules is provided in this piece.
- ERIC clearinghouse. (n.d.). Teaching in year-round schools. Retrieved online <http://www.kidsource.com/education/teach.year.round.html>
This document describes the pluses and minuses for teachers who work in a year-round setting.
- Holland, S. (2009). Despite push, year-round schools get mixed grades. Retrieved online <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/09/04/us.year.round.schools/index.html>
An overview of reasons why students need more time in school is described in this piece.
- Kelly, M. (2000). Year round education. Retrieved online <http://712educators.about.com/cs/reformtime/a/yearrounded.htm>
Pros and cons of year-round schedules are listed in this article.
- MASS 2020. (2009). Expanded learning time initiative. Retrieved online <http://www.mass2020.org/node/3>
This is a brief description of the expanded learning time initiative in MA. It has active links to resources and research results.
- NAYRE. National Association for Year-Round Education. Retrieved online from <http://www.nayre.org/>
This is the home site for the National Association for Year-Round Education. It has active links to articles, research and resource information.
- NAYRE. Calendars. Retrieved online http://www.nayre.org/calendar_comparison.htm
Two different calendars, a traditional and balanced calendar, are graphically represented.
- NAYRE. (n.d.). Improving academies (intersession) performance. Retrieved online http://www.nayre.org/white_paper_1.htm
A list of considerations for developing and maintaining intersession programs are given in this piece.
- Pennington, H. C. (2006, October 31). Expanding learning time in high school. Retrieved online http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/10/learning_time.html
The purposes of expanding learning time at the high school level are described in this article.
- Stark, R. (n.d.). History of summer vacation. Retrieved online <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/schoolyear1.html>
A brief and interesting overview of reasons for the long summer vacation is provided in this article.

- Wat, J. (n.d.). Extended year-round schooling, expanding success. Retrieved online http://www.nayre.org/jeanette_wat.htm
This article is written for high schools looking at going on year-round schedule.
- Year-round schooling. (n.d.). Retrieved online <http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/year-round-schooling/>
A succinct article about the lack of firm data to either support or not support year-round schools is provided in this piece.
- YRE schools on the web. Retrieved online from <http://nayre.org/YRE%20Schools%20on%20the%20Web.html>
This is a list of year-round schools from around the U.S.

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