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Revisiting the issue of year-round schools

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Re-introduction of year-round schooling (YRS)

The transcript of BC Minister of Education, George Abbott, on CBC's radio program *Cross-Country Check Up*, June 17, 2012, includes the following exchange:

> LORNA DUECK: Alright yes. Thanks sir for joining us on this beautiful day. Why have you decided to do away with a single, across-the-board, September to June school calendar for British Columbia?
>
> GEORGE ABBOTT: Well we... we decided that it would be far better to not have what's been termed as standard school calendar. It's been in the *School Act* for decades, generations, the notion that we need to take a long break during the summer and shorter breaks around Christmas, etc. And I think you summarized it very well, we want to eliminate impediments to school districts and indeed individual schools making a decision about going to a balanced schedule that is typically three months on, one month off, rather than having that long break in the summer. I know there is a debate about that. I think generally speaking, the literature would point to the advantages, particularly for vulnerable learners, of having a shorter break in the summer. But I know that that debate will continue, but we're going to leave it to school districts and to schools to decide that, parents to decide that, students to decide that, and hopefully they make the right one for the educational potential of the kids.

The issue of Year-Round Schools (YRS) has resurfaced in BC with the introduction of Bill 36[1]—the *School Amendment Act*, which offered enabling legislation to facilitate school board-directed calendar changes. Prior to the legislation, Anne Hunter produced a report for the Vancouver School Board, *Research Report on Balanced Calendars* (2010), which stated:

> The research in this report indicates that there are opposing views on this topic and both views must be considered when evaluating the balanced school calendar schedule. Advocates for a balanced calendar feel that many aspects of learning improve in a year-round schedule, including student attendance, attitude, and

[1] http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th4th/1st_read/gov36-1.htm

> academic achievement, and that teachers have greater job satisfaction, as well. They state that teachers, students, and parents seem to like this system. To add to these benefits, the balanced calendar can be highly effective in reducing school operating costs. Opponents to the balanced calendar argue that there is no substantial increase in academic student achievement when students are on a year-round schedule as opposed to a traditional schedule and that the research proposing the benefits of a balanced calendar is limited and inadequate. In addition, students, parents and caretakers must deal with schedule challenges and adaptation to change. Finally, cost saving claims are unsubstantiated. (p. 1)

In 2004, School District #72, Campbell River, also conducted a task-force review and found few reasons to change their calendar:

> At this time, it would appear a need for change to the calendar has not been identified, nor is there an indication that it would be readily accepted, especially when one considers the overall examination of the advantages and disadvantages. (p. 23)

Other than that, and a recent media flurry caused by the introduction of Bill 36, there has been little attention paid to the issue of YRS in BC's public education system since 1996. In other provinces, Alberta reviewed calendar alternatives in 2005 and produced reports[2] which showed that approximately 100 (5%) of 2,000 Alberta schools had modifications of some kind to their school calendars, including year-round:

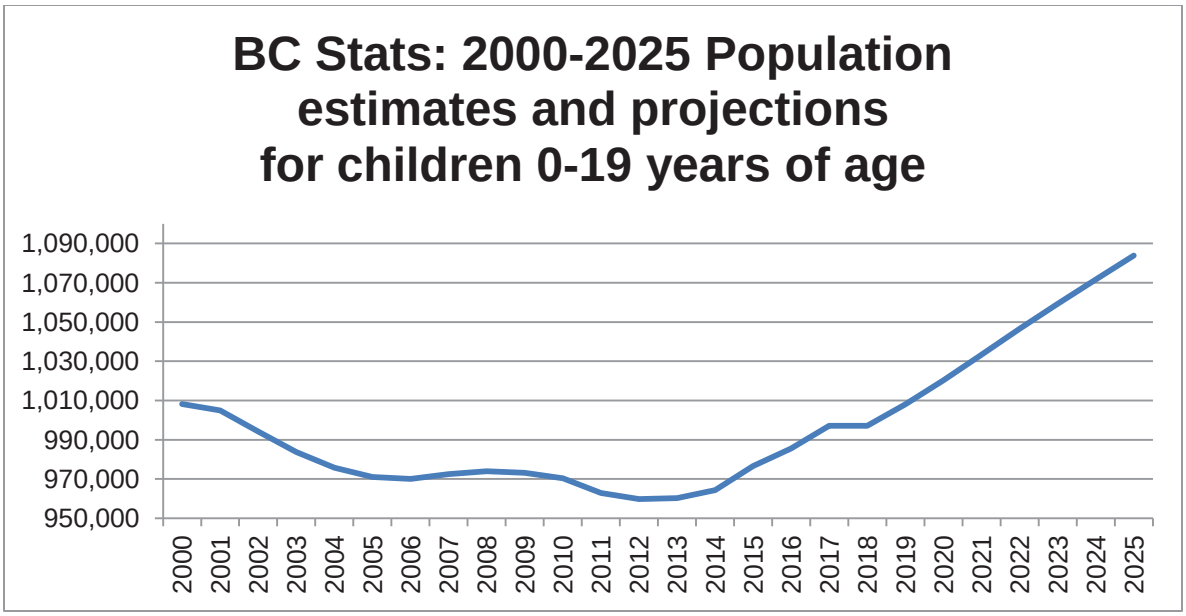
> These schools can be divided into two groups of about equal numbers: those schools serving special populations or with special programs (e.g., at-risk, youth detention, English as a Second Language, Outreach programs, online learning, 4th year high school, distance learning, schools in hospitals); and those serving regular populations. Of those serving regular populations, all but a few are elementary schools; and most are single-track with a modified calendar. (p. 3)

In Ontario, Gray and Favaro (2010) evaluated the Peel District School Board's balanced calendar pilot project, comparing two schools, one single-track year-round and the other traditional or ten-month calendar. While they noted limitations linked to the small number of schools involved, they found positive teacher perceptions and higher achievement in Grade 7 Math, but no impact in terms of achievement on grades 2 and 5.

At this stage in BC the focus appears to be on single-track schools, with the purported goal of reducing summer learning loss and increasing student learning. However, anticipated demographic changes in the BC school population suggest that it is possible that the multi-track option may return as an option in the coming years.

As the graph below illustrates, the declining student enrolment, which has been a feature in the last ten years, is about to end, and a sustained and substantial growth period in terms of student enrolment is about to begin. When student enrolment climbs rapidly, the incentive for multi-track systems becomes stronger. However, the level of growth that might trigger investigation of multi-track options is more likely in rapidly-growing suburban school districts like Surrey and Sooke, where young families are relocating to find more affordable housing.

[2] http://education.alberta.ca/media/434894/InfForschoolsAndjurisdictionsAug2005.pdf
http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/Docs_Alterschoolyearcal/finalreportv6Aug2005.pdf



Source: BCTF table created from data from BC Stats, Ministry of Labour, Citizens' Services and Open Government. Table 6. British Columbia Population by 5-year Age Group Estimated (1971–2010) and Projected (2011–2036). British Columbia Population Projections 2011–2036. September, 2011. Accessed at http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/Demography/PopulationProjections.aspx

Other ways to maximize the use of school facilities that either have been or might be utilized by BC school districts include 'shifts' for students, with some starting as early as 7:30 a.m. and others finishing after 4:00 p.m., and greater use of distance/online courses. These and other options invariably try to balance budgetary issues and problems with minimizing the potentially negative effects on students. However, early shifts are somewhat antithetical to promoting student learning. Anyone who has accessed the literature on teenagers' sleep[3] (or likely anyone who's parent to a teen) will know that 7:30 a.m. is not their optimal learning time. Data concerning student outcomes when they enrol in distance courses may also flag a problem. There are disturbing data on failure or dropout rates for many distance/online courses in the USA[4], yet they offer a cheaper option for course delivery. Both of these examples are cost-saving measures, and both have the potential of negatively impacting student learning.

BCTF Research conducted extensive research[5] into the issue of year-round schooling in the mid 1990s, when the growth in student enrolment was significant. At that time there was considerable interest in multi-track schooling, a concept designed to reduce capital costs by having schools open all year while students attended three of four or four of five tracks. However, operational costs can increase significantly, while in addition the 'community' aspect of school is significantly reduced with one cohort of students missing at all times.

The remainder of this paper will address some general issues around school calendars and review the more recent literature since the last BCTF Research review.

[3] http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep
[4] http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/09/23/audit-flags-high-dropout-rate-for-online-students/
[5] http://www.bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5616
http://www.bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5612
http://www.bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5608
http://www.bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5606

The ‘Agrarian Calendar’ myth and the terminology of the ‘balanced’ calendar

Many reviews of year-round schooling blandly assert that most North American school calendars are based on the needs of an agrarian society. Were this the case in most of Canada, schools would close in the spring (for planting) and in fall (for harvesting). Cuban (2008) argued that the calendar was actually developed to suit the needs of middle-class parents in the early part of the last century—perhaps one reason why it’s hard to shift today as many in the middle class have rarely taken kindly to major changes in scheduling, and many YRS schools in the USA are located in lower socio-economic status (SES) communities:

> There is a homespun myth, treated as fact, that the annual school calendar, with three months off for both teachers and students, is based on the rhythm of 19th-century farm life, which dictated when school was in session. Thus, planting and harvesting chores accounted for long summer breaks, an artifact of agrarian America. Not so. Actually, summer vacations grew out of early 20th century urban middle-class parents (and later lobbyists for camps and the tourist industry) pressing school boards to release children to be with their families for four to eight weeks or more. (p. 242)

Brown’s (2008) exploration of the literature for the Toronto School Board describes the concept of the agrarian calendar as ‘an urban myth’:

> There is a widespread perception that the two-month summer holiday is an inheritance from Ontario’s agricultural past. Thus, Shields and Oberg’s (2000) glossary for the ‘traditional calendar’ notes that it is “also known as the Agrarian Calendar.” Many articles state or infer the assumption that such a rural artifact from the distant past has little relevance to modern urban education. In fact, more recent research in the US by Gold (2002) and in Ontario by Weiss and Brown (2003) clearly show that the summer holiday originated as an urban educational initiative. Ontario’s elementary school system was organized in the mid-nineteenth century as a true year round schooling calendar, with a two-week summer holiday in August. Because of pressure from the cities and towns, the summer holiday was gradually extended to its current length between 1860 and 1913. There were multiple reasons for the extension, among them financial restraints in keeping schools open; high summer absenteeism; the heat of schools in the height of summer; a then-current educational theory that keeping children in school over the summer would result in lower academic achievement. (p. 1)

While the myth of the agrarian calendar may be a minor issue, it seems strange that many pro-YRS research-based analyses of year-round schooling appear content to rehash this myth, thereby casting some doubt on the extent and efficacy of their research: it’s better not to build a research-based case on a myth, whether agrarian or urban.

By using the term ‘balanced’, there is an implicit assumption that other school calendars are not balanced, somehow out of equilibrium. This supports the arguments of pro-YRS advocates in a subtle yet distinctive way. Many government-issued reports or announcements on education often use nuanced adjectives to convey a message. The BC Ministry of Education’s *Education Plan* web page[6] states that ‘under BC’s Education Plan, our system will be more ‘flexible,

[6] http://www.bcedplan.ca/theplan.php

dynamic, and adaptable to better prepare students'. 'Flexible', 'dynamic' and 'adaptable' are terms designed to sell the Plan. Who doesn't want a plan for education which reflects these qualities, unless, for instance, you are the only party required to be flexible? But the simple fact is that the value-laden terms used by proponents of any concept do not ensure the concept reflects those qualities—merely that they say they do, or that one party defines the meaning of words such as flexible, dynamic, and adaptable. In this case, 'balanced' is implicitly preferable to 'unbalanced', and so it may be less pejorative to use the terms '10-month calendar' and 'year-round calendar', both neutral and both accurately descriptive.

Similarly, 'agrarian' is used dismissively. In a modern, urban, globalized, and multicultural world, the term 'agrarian' suggests a bygone age and simple lifestyles, both inappropriate for the modern world and for schools. While there are good arguments for reconsideration of time, access, schedules, in and out-of-school learning, simply referencing what exists in thousands of schools as antiquated and agrarian in order to promote a specific concept is not one of them.

The 'single school' issue

In BC there are several examples of year-round schools such as Kanaka Creek Elementary in Maple Ridge and Spul'u'kwuks Elementary in Richmond, both of which appear to be well-liked by families, teachers, and students. When a single school in a district opts for an innovation such as single-track year-round schooling, it attracts those families and teachers for whom the calendar works well. Those for whom it may be less appealing can and do choose other options. Choice in this case appears useful—those opting in to year-round schooling are likely already invested in the concept, finding it a match to work or lifestyle preferences. So arguments that teacher burnout is less in a single-track school may have merit but may also be somewhat obvious—a teacher who wants to work within the frame of the YRS calendar will likely be happier with the pattern and rhythm of the school year she or he has chosen. But were the concept to be applied more widely, perhaps across a whole school district, then many for whom the current calendar is preferred may be less happy with the shift.

In most cases, districts that have some YRS generally have small numbers of schools on the calendar. Nevertheless, much of the research bases analysis on a more generalized approach which assumes systemic adaptation, and rarely suggests YRS as one option for a small percentage of a district's students. If single-track YRS appears an attractive option for a minority of parents and teachers, has the available access to single-track schools satisfied the level of interest that currently exists? There appears no pent-up or even visible demand for YRS from parents or teachers, and in one BC school district (Mission) the idea was tried but failed to attract sufficient numbers of students to make it viable.

Perhaps enabling the option of a single-track school in a district is a good option to allow those who want to access such a calendar to do so while not forcing a large-scale change by mandating a whole-district shift to a year-round calendar.

The 'single solution' approach

Changing the school calendar is not much of a solution for the many issues facing the BC public school system, yet it periodically emerges as a serious contender for attention. Even if the very modest claims of its proponents are accepted, it's something of a mystery why YRS gets such a serious hearing. Perhaps because if adopted, it will fundamentally change the rhythm of life for many families and teachers by ending long summer breaks and replacing them with shorter and more frequent breaks during the school year. Yet there is no interest in private schools for year-

round schools, perhaps because they are largely middle-class and there is some evidence of middle-class resistance to YRS.

So what kind of reforms do some of the leading educational-change experts consider necessary to improve educational systems? Michael Fullan spoke to BC school superintendents on his perspectives on whole system reform in September, 2011. Fullan argues:

> Let me state the criteria that a right driver must meet in order have deep impact on students and teachers. Does the driver sooner or later:
>
> i) foster intrinsic motivation of teachers, and of students;
> ii) engage them in continuous improvement of teaching and learning;
> iii) inspire collective or team work; and
> iv) affect 'all' teachers and schools—100%? (p. 3)

If implemented system-wide, YRS has little connection with the first three of these four criteria, and its impact on the fourth—affecting all teachers and schools—while apparent is not necessarily positive. Exploration of the general education change literature shows that YRS is simply not on the map as a factor impacting change. And that literature also clearly shows that positive educational change is never reliant on any single issue or approach. Educational systems are complex. Changing them is complex, requiring multiple approaches (Levin, 2008) and widespread collaboration (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). The difficulty with YRS as a proposal (other than that no serious educational change literature has it as a focus) is that it often appears without any contextual 'fit' in which the YRS proposal is one of a series of approaches. The assumption, and in most cases the claim, is that implementing YRS has positive effects as a stand-alone initiative, a position counter to what we know from the literature on educational innovation and change.

The 'poverty' issue

Year-round schooling is frequently promoted as being of particular benefit to low-income students and families. von Hippel (2007) stated:

> Summer learning is particularly slow for poor children with less-educated parents (Heyns 1978; Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004). In fact, it is mainly during the summers between academic years that poor children lose ground to their middle-class peers (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2001; Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004). Although poor children are already behind on the first day of kindergarten, during the school year they nearly hold their own by learning almost as fast, on average, as their more affluent peers (Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004). It is summer vacation that sets poor children further and further back (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2001).

Alexander, Olson, and Entwisle (2007), while endorsing the 'summer learning loss', also referenced David Berliner, who argued that it would be more productive to address issues of poverty rather than apply the band-aid of YRS:

> Surely the point made by David Berliner (2006) in his Invited Presidential Speech at the 2005 American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting is correct: to moderate the achievement gap, the most compelling need is to reduce family and youth poverty. (p. 176)

It has been widely reported (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010) that countries with less inequality and lower poverty improve not only educational outcomes but outcomes in a whole range of areas such as health.

Ravani (2010) documented Finnish evidence linking greater equality and lower poverty to improved educational outcomes:

> The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture insists school performance is linked to a close attention to social equity issues. The Finnish childhood poverty rate is one of the lowest in the industrialized world. Universal health and dental care, paid parental leave, and seamless social services are a given. (Ravani, 2010)

So if a society could address issues of poverty, and reduce it, the payback is huge in terms of better educational and health outcomes, reduced expenditure in social services, and lower levels of incarceration. Meanwhile, if we develop YRS, we (possibly) reduce summer learning loss for some low SES students while the rest of their lives continue in poverty. A counter-argument to this argument is that poverty is beyond the reach of school districts to change, so they might well take aim at something that can be addressed. However, this convenient counter essentially leaves the issue of poverty untouched while yet another band-aid is applied. Why are there so many initiatives to ameliorate the effects of poverty rather than addressing the issue of poverty?

Student learning and achievement

There has been a significant quantity of research into considering the educational benefits of year-round schools:

> One might assume that given the summer learning gap, research on year-round schooling would definitively document strong knowledge gains. After all, if the gap shows up after the summer holidays, would not reducing or eliminating the summer holidays through year-round schooling eliminate the gap? However, this is not the case. McMillen (2001) examined two years of reading and mathematics achievement data from over 345,000 North Carolina students in Grades 3–8. He found that achievement in year-round schools was no different from regular schools and that "the merits of year-round education might best be judged on factors other than achievement." Perhaps the most rigorous meta-analysis was the 2000 review by Cooper et al. Cooper concluded, "The quality of evidence available on modified school calendars made it difficult to draw any reliable conclusions." Moreover, the evidence from the meta-analysis "revealed ambiguous results"—the effect favoured modified school calendars but the size, while significant, was small (Cooper et al., 2000; Cooper, 2003). Cooper did note that achievement for economically disadvantaged students was greater than the overall results. However, von Hippel (2007) describes the average effect size of the Cooper et al. meta-analysis as 'trivial' and the effect for disadvantaged students as 'a bit larger'—hardly a rousing endorsement. (Brown, 2008, p. 3)

In addition to Brown's reference, McMillen (2001) also stated:

> Results indicated that results in year-round schools were no higher than in traditional calendar schools and that differential effects for certain student sub-groups, although statistically significant in some cases, were not of practical significance. (p. 67)

While many of the studies show minimal benefits, an additional complicating factor is the consistent criticism of the quality of the research, as outlined by Johnson and Spradlin (2007) who also referenced Cooper's (2003) study:

> Given that a primary justification for YRE programs is the improvement on student achievement, it does not seem promising that these programs only demonstrate modest results. A more recent review of studies conducted by Cooper et al. (2003) echoes similar concerns with regard to research on YRE programs mentioned previously. They maintain that no truly trustworthy studies have been done on modified school calendars that can serve as the basis for sound policy decisions. Furthermore, serious methodological flaws hinder definitive conclusions from such research. (p. 5)

Their quote of Cooper stated:

> Matching and statistical control can never completely eliminate concerns about differential selection into treatment groups. The most obvious concern is that groups may be under matched. If important differences between groups are omitted from the matching characteristics, rival hypotheses remain plausible to explain effects otherwise attributable to calendar differences. (p. 5)

It is possible to find research which claims some improvements in student achievement attributed to year-round schools. It is also possible to find research which finds no difference in student achievement. Cook (2005) summarized the quality of the research findings and the debate on YRS in his appropriately-titled 'School Wars':

> Proponents of modified and year-round calendars say longer summer vacations can take a toll on learning, especially among economically disadvantaged and minority children. Opponents say the benefits of changing the calendar are modest at best and not cost-effective for schools or families. Unbiased research on either claim has been difficult to come by. "The research available now is very poor in terms of quality, and neither side has been proven correct," says Harris Cooper, lead author of a 2003 study that looked at whether modified calendars improve student achievement. "When you look at the actual effect modified calendars have had, it's quite modest overall on academic achievement. But it's clearly the case that there is a segment of the population whose needs are being met by the reconfiguration of time." (p. 25)

Winter (2005) bases a case in support of what she prefers to term the 'modified' school year (MSY) based on the data she collected from teachers working in such a calendar, yet she also states:

> Most studies reviewed here tend to identify the advantages of MSY but with some cautions about the rigour of the studies involved in some of the claims, and with calls for further in-depth objective research into the educational benefits for all students. In relation to the second question, there is little available information specifically related to any potential benefits for the early years.

Winter's article is thoughtful and balanced in that both sides of the literature are acknowledged and seriously considered. In her study of two Ontario schools, both had a regular and a modified calendar accessible to students in each school. With 19 positive findings and 7 negative, Winter's conclusion is in favour of the modified calendar, with particular attention paid to its impact on and utility for children in their early years in school. Winter's study follows something of a

pattern: where there is a single or a small number of year-round schools there appears to be considerable satisfaction within those school communities, in part because the calendar attracts those for whom the calendar works.

McCombs et al.'s RAND Corporation report (2011) focused on providing more summer programs than year-round schools but also considered the issue of summer learning loss:

> Research indicates that summer vacation may have detrimental learning effects for many students. On average, all students lose skills, particularly in mathematics. However, summer learning loss disproportionately affects low-income students, particularly in reading. While their higher-income peers, on average, post gains in reading, low-income students show losses at the end of the summer. Most disturbing is that it appears that summer learning loss is cumulative and that, over time, these periods of differential learning rates between low-income and higher-income students contribute substantially to the achievement gap. It may be that efforts to close the achievement gap during the school year alone will be unsuccessful. Given the established connection between academic learning time and achievement and the findings regarding summer learning loss—which is particularly acute for low-income students—it is reasonable to assume that a structured program of summer instruction could help mitigate this loss. It might even produce gains. (p. 25)

Similarly, a Canadian Council on Learning (2008) report outlined a number of Canadian summer programs intended in part to address the issue of summer learning loss.

Another study (Helf, Konrad, and Algozzine, 2008) reviewed much of the literature on summer learning loss and quoted Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay and Greathouse's (1996) review and meta-analysis of other studies focusing on summer learning loss:

> Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay and Greathouse (1996) conducted a narrative and meta-analytic review of 39 studies to examine the effects of summer vacation on student achievement. In general, the loss between successive school years was equivalent to about 1 month, and effects were greater for maths than for reading. Summer vacation was most detrimental to maths computation and spelling. In addition, students from middle-class backgrounds made gains in reading over summer vacation, whereas students from low socioeconomic backgrounds showed losses in reading. Specifically, summer vacations produced an annual reading achievement gap of approximately 3 months between students from middle and lower-income families. Reading achievement of children from families with higher socioeconomic status did not decline, whereas the reading achievement of children from families with lower socioeconomic status regressed over the summer. (p. 421)

Helf et al.'s overall conclusion from the literature was that:

> although there appears to be convincing evidence that summer vacation has detrimental effects on maths and spelling performance, the findings for reading are less conclusive. (p. 421)

Their research aimed to collect evidence to gauge whether reading loss occurred over the summer break. They found no evidence of reading loss:

> There was no evidence of setback across a 10-week summer vacation for this sample of children, most of whom were struggling readers... The addition to knowledge grounded in our work is that young children from disadvantaged environments do not show a drop in early literacy skills over a long summer vacation... In the current study, we found that students did not regress over the summer; in fact, their performances improved in four different areas of early reading skills. (p. 426–427)

Huebner (2010) considered summer learning loss research and argued:

> Unfortunately, research is inconclusive on whether year-round schooling is an effective solution to this problem. Two major meta-analyses of studies on year-round schooling have shown that the findings are mixed and that many studies suffer from weak research designs or methodology. (p. 83)

Graves (2011) found negative impacts on student learning in year-round schools in California, in both multi-track and single-track systems (somewhat less in single-track, but still negative) and argued that damage to students' learning may be cumulative over time:

> Since previous studies have found student achievement gaps to persist over many years (Alexander et al., 2007), there is potential for the negative impacts of both single-track and multi-track year-round calendars found here to have lasting consequences for disadvantaged and minority students. Additionally, while Graves (2010) finds negative mean effects of multi-track year-round calendars, as previously mentioned, some schools may still implement such calendars for cost saving reasons. The disproportionate drop in academic performance resulting for disadvantaged and minority students found here presents an additional cost to implementation of year-round calendars to be considered in the school calendar decision. (p. 1296)

Graves's study is diametrically opposite to those studies claiming improved learning outcomes in year-round schools, and in something of a challenge, reverses the summer learning loss argument by making a case for the cumulative effects of negative impacts caused by year-round schools.

The most common research finding is one of ambivalence, with reduced summer learning loss found in some cases, and often a lack of any real proof one way or the other. Desoff (2011) perhaps epitomizes this ambivalence in stating:

> Administrators in some districts that have adopted year-round schedules add that although anecdotal observations from teachers and parents prove that it works, they have no data showing it makes a difference in students' achievement. "We are not seeing our year-round schools outperforming those on traditional calendars," declares Michael Evans, chief communications officer in the Wake County (NC) Public School System. (p. 40)

Conclusion

A small number of single-track year-round schools have existed in several elementary schools for some years in BC, offering an alternative for those families who prefer the schedule, and for teachers who want to work in them. While there appears little evidence that students in these schools learn or achieve more than students in other schools, they may meet some community needs. On the other hand, one BC school district (Mission) attempted to offer a year-round option and found minimal interest in its community, while another (Campbell River) explored the option and rejected it.

New legislation (Bill 36[7]) appears to encourage a greater focus on calendar alternatives, likely as one part of 'enabling' legislation in support of the government's personalized learning directions. However, the option of changing school calendars has existed for many years in BC, and few school districts have found such options to be of any great interest. For those districts which have pursued the idea, one or two schools in the districts reflect the scope of year-round offerings. This suggests that existing interest and demand may have been met, as there appears little pressure to extend year-round options in those districts.

In the coming years, with student enrolment likely to grow across the province, the demand for multi-track year-round schools might emerge as a focus of interest, especially in school districts where growth is already high, such as Surrey and Sooke. Of the two YRS options, multi-track schools are more problematic as they are primarily introduced to save capital costs but offer little in terms of either improving achievement or building community in schools.

There are many alternatives to year-round schools which have been considered by a number of districts. These include shift systems (to accommodate more students in the same facility), or distance courses. Summer schools may also have filled some of the gaps identified in terms of summer learning loss.

At best, the research evidence to support year-round schools is mixed. There is certainly evidence that in some cases summer learning loss has been reduced, yet in other cases no differences have been found. When the obvious year-round schooling advocacy articles are removed from consideration, most of the literature is ambivalent about the benefits of year-round schooling. Because so many districts in Canada and the USA have relatively few schools on year-round schedules (compared to the numbers of schools on ten-month calendars), it becomes difficult to generalize on comparisons—if there is only one year-round school in a district, the likelihood of that school attracting families and teachers empathetic to the concept is strong, and so perceptions and possibly achievement differences may be positive. In support of this, Webb et al.'s (2009) paper on teacher wellness in Spul'u'kwuks Elementary, a Richmond (BC) year-round school, found generally positive teacher perceptions of the year-round calendar:

> Teachers at Spul'u'kwuks characterized their wellness as personal and professional. Our data concluded that a balanced calendar had a positive affect (sic) on teacher wellness. Results showed that teachers' personal wellness scored slightly higher than their professional wellness; however, throughout our study there was considerable evidence that some personal wellness factors most likely had an affect (sic) on professional wellness, and vice-versa. (p. 37)

But were YRS to be expanded, the likelihood is greater that more families and teachers will not 'buy in' to the concept, and this would likely negatively impact perceptions.

[7] http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th4th/1st_read/gov36-1.htm

Similarly, single-solution approaches to educational change are rarely effective. Shifting a school system from calendar A to calendar B has no visibility in the recognized educational change literature. Neither is there any credibility in that literature for single-issue changes, where in this case hopes for improving student outcomes rest on implementing year-round schools. What we do know is that educational systems are complex and to change them requires multiple concurrent initiatives, motivation, and collaborations if such changes are to be successful. The introduction of year-round schooling to date hardly fits with any of the criteria for positive educational change. It's somewhat marginal to most educational change discussions and might at this time be regarded as a distraction from the more substantive issues currently facing school districts in BC.

Many governments' continued refusal to address issues of poverty while seeking educational changes to ameliorate poverty might also be questioned. Some societies have improved student outcomes by reducing poverty and increasing equity. Finland's focus on equity is explicit and their actions purposeful, and the evidence suggests that their focus on poverty reduction and increased equity brings huge benefits in educational outcomes and in other areas. Where poverty is an issue, then the best educational outcomes will be achieved by addressing poverty. Perhaps it's time we did.

Not a great deal has changed with the literature since the BCTF last explored this issue in the mid-90s. Across Canada there has been some interest but no large-scale implementation of YRS, again supporting the theory that having a few YRS single-track options may satisfy the existing demand and create options while barely impacting mainstream systems. It's also noticeable that single-track YRS appear very much an elementary phenomenon in BC and other provinces.

Emerging philosophies and changes to school systems may make this kind of discussion obsolete within a few years. If forms of schooling change, or if de-schooling occurs, then school calendars may become memories of the past. Because schools have existed for centuries does not mean they always will. Or they may change so radically that calendars become an irrelevance—if, for instance, a whole school resembles a learning commons, with unscheduled access and use, and with external access to curriculum and programs, then schedules and calendars will be merely an archaic memory. However, the current reality is that most children attend school and most schools have some form of calendar. Parents want their children in safe, caring, and learning spaces, which implies that some structures of building and time need to be present now and in the foreseeable future. Yet while the calendar debate currently tends to consider dichotomous options—year-round or ten-month—the future may change the nature of learning and the role of schools so that this debate on calendar options may be short-lived.

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