

worse off on a year-round calendar than the conventional one.

"Kids are not going to be harmed by the calendar," Ballinger says. Logic and common sense, he says, practically dictate that year-round should net positive results. "Educators cannot justify 10 to 12 weeks away from formal instruction," he says. "There is summer learning loss. Our objective is to help kids learn more. The public is demanding better results."

For Ballinger and other proponents of year-round education, the summers-off calendar is an archaic vestige of a long-past agrarian culture in which children were needed for work on the family farm in the summer. "The traditional calendar has no educational validity," he says. In fact, he says, research into the way children learn and retain what they've learned would tend to support the "validity" of the year-round structure.

"Those who deal with brain research tell us that intersession (the typical three-week break) is a wonderful time for students to apply what they've learned. It's reinforcement, and that's the way we remember, according to those who know about memory."

The National Association for Year-Round Education produces reams of information that educators around the country use to bolster their proposals to add year-round programs. And for that reason, skeptics say any research commissioned or cited by the group is necessarily biased. But some of the group's latest research, say Ballinger and his associates, is some of the strongest proof yet that year-round is living up to its promise of improved student performance.

For example, a 1994 review of 19 studies in six states (North Carolina was not among them) found that in many cases, year-round students outperformed their traditional peers on standardized tests.⁵ The review produced 58 opportunities for comparisons of performance among students in year-round and traditional-calendar schools. Of those 58 comparisons, 48 (83 percent) were rated a plus for year-round schools, while three of the 58 were rated a minus, and seven of 58 got a mixed result.

One of those studies, which focused on students at 10 schools in a metropolitan Texas district, found students scored higher in reading and math if they were in a year-round program. The researchers, from Texas A&M University, concluded that all-year schooling gave the biggest boost to at-risk students, particularly at schools where enrollments reflected lower socio-economic levels.⁶

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS

An Opportunity to Lengthen the School Year?

At a year-round elementary school in Greensboro, the Brooks Global Studies Magnet, students are expected to attend 210 days of class—an additional six weeks of schooling compared to the traditional calendar. But Brooks Elementary is the exception rather than the rule. While the term "year-round school" suggests that students attend more days of school than under the traditional calendar, most students don't.

For the typical student performing at or above expected grade level in the typical North Carolina year-round school, classroom time totals the same 180 days as the traditional calendar. It's just arranged differently. That's why some educational researchers say it's no surprise that the year-round calendar doesn't produce dramatic leaps in learning over the traditional calendar.

Still, school officials who advocate for the year-round calendar note that it *does* provide the opportunity for more classroom time for some students—those who are behind on their studies after the typical 45-day session under the year-round calendar. These students are given the opportunity to attend a remediation program during the break between sessions—a three- to five-week period known as the intersession. Typically, these remediation programs last about five days. With the school year divided into four 45-day sessions, that means four opportunities for remediation—or up to 20 additional days in the classroom for some students.

For administrators like Newton-Conover City Schools Superintendent Everette Simmons, the opportunity to increase the length of the school year is what made the year-round calendar worth trying. "Intersession is the key," says Simmons, who heads the only school district in the state

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"In spite of the fact that students come to school disadvantaged, it appears that the year-round education program can increase the academic performance of at-risk learners as well as that of the whole student population," the study concluded.⁷ Here are highlights from some of that research:

- For all students, regardless of income level or school, those in the year-round program scored 5 points higher on a test in both reading and math than those in traditional programs.
- At-risk students in year-round programs scored 10 points higher on a test in reading than did their peers in nine-month schools. Differences in math scores were found to be insignificant.
- The most dramatic results, in both reading and

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where year-round schools are mandated for all students. "If you don't do anything with it, there's not any reason to continue with the year-round calendar."

Why is more time in school important? At 180 days, the school year in the United States is shorter than that of almost all its economic rivals on the world stage. Japanese schoolchildren, for example, spend an average of 243 days a year in school (See Table 2, p. 9). Groups such as the Public School Forum of North Carolina have advocated for gradual implementation of a longer school year, noting the positive correlation between time spent in school and performance in such areas as science and math.¹ A longer calendar also is viewed as a way to increase teacher pay and enhance the status of the teaching profession.² Public School Forum Executive Director John Dornan says if the intersession periods are used aggressively, the year-round calendar can provide "a *de facto* extended school year."

Carol Carroll, curriculum specialist for grades kindergarten through eight for the Mooresville Graded School District, says she got a taste of the importance of a longer school year when school officials were asked to participate in an effort to lure a Japanese manufacturer to the town. Town leaders took a three-day crash course in Japanese culture, in which they learned of the longer Japanese school year and of the

math, were found among at-risk students at schools serving poorer populations.⁸

Yet, despite the widespread existence of year-round schools in several forms, there does not appear to be any conclusive research one way or the other on academic achievement. The North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center, formerly part of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill but now defunct, examined 20 years of research from around the country in trying to arbitrate the often conflicting views about year-round education held by its proponents and foes. Here's what the center had to say, after reviewing 32 different studies completed between 1977 and 1992:

value the Japanese place on education in general. The experience played into Carroll's thinking when the school district began to design its own year-round program—a program which offers up to 220 days of instruction.

Aside from remediation, year-round schools typically offer enrichment—short courses outside the classroom setting designed to broaden a child's experience. One popular course in Mooresville, Carroll says, is a Native American encampment in which students learn about foods, dance, and other aspects of the culture. At its peak, up to 38 percent of students have participated in enrichment sessions. So for some students, a three-week break could actually consist of one week of remediation, one week of enrichment, and a week at the grandparents.

But it would take participation in every enrichment and remediation session for a student in Mooresville to begin to approach the 210 days of learning in the regular curriculum at Greensboro's Brooks. And Principal Tony Meachum believes Brooks students are reaping the benefit of a true extended year in terms of achievement. This has been documented in the form of a matched-pairs study that teamed kindergartners at Brooks with those on the traditional calendar. The study documented dramatic learning gains in reading and general knowledge, and children from low- and middle socioeconomic-status households had strong gains in math as well.³ Meachum hopes to track the students through college to make sure the gains stick.

"The preponderance of evidence suggests that year-round students' performance on measures of academic learning is about the same in most studies as their performance while on traditional schedules, while some year-round programs were found to yield significantly higher student achievement scores. Overall, there appears to be a slight but not overwhelming advantage for year-round students in learning basic content."⁹

Still, the center's generally favorable report stops short of a full-blown endorsement. "More and better research and evaluation studies will be needed before the picture becomes clear enough to describe it with absolute certainty," the report's authors say.¹⁰

And Meachum believes there are other advantages to the extended-year calendar besides student achievement. Teachers get the benefit of a true 12-month salary—not a 10-month salary in 12 installments. Parents get the benefit of a school that provides strong academics while meshing more effectively with the schedules of the two-worker household.

As a result, parents are clamoring to enroll their children. Brooks Global Studies Magnet currently has a student body of 451 and a waiting list of 700, says Meachum. "The only thing preventing us at this time from replicating this someplace else in the county is the cost," says Meachum. The extra 30 days means it costs an additional \$300,000 a year to operate the school compared to a 180-day calendar, he says. The multi-year evaluation is intended to assure that the Brooks experiment is worth the extra cost.

Brooks clearly qualifies as an extended-year school, but what about the more typical year-round school, which offers optional extra time through enrichment and remediation? Does this opportunity for additional learning time translate into an extended school year? Yes and no. While students *can* go to school longer under the year-round calendar, they also can attend summer school under the traditional calendar. And enrichment classes, while perhaps beneficial, are not the same as additional formal classroom time. Moreover, some schools have dropped enrichment due to

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Similarly, a 1991 review of studies conducted by the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) at University of California, Riverside School of Education found that evidence on year-round schools' financial, educational and social impacts is "inconclusive." CERC found current studies to be "problematic, incomplete, and methodologically unsound."¹¹ And a 1990 survey of year-round schooling by Phi Delta Kappa, an honorary education fraternity, concluded, "Despite claims that long summer vacations lead to lessened academic achievement, year-round schools are not associated with great leaps in academic achievement." It also states, "If a district is looking to show major increases in standardized tests, year-round schools are not the answer."¹²

Table 2.
Number of School Days
Per Year in U.S. and
Selected Other Nations

Nation	School Days Per Year
Japan	243
South Korea	220
Soviet Union	211
Netherlands	200
Scotland	200
Thailand	200
Hong Kong	195
England/Wales	192
Hungary	192
France	185
Ireland	184
Spain	180
Sweden	180
United States	180

Sources: The information for this table is taken from *We Must Chart a New Course for Schools. At Stake Is Nothing Less Than the Future of Our State*, Study Group IV, North Carolina School Reform at a Crossroads, Public School Forum of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C., 1992, p. 24.

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declining participation, and some middle schools on the year-round calendar never offered it at all.

Still, year-round school practitioners say they typically *are* able to bring more days of school to more students than under the traditional calendar. And they pay for these extra days using funds already available for summer school for remediation sessions and a modest per-student fee for enrichment. This, says one Wake County year-round elementary school principal, may be the closest North Carolina will come to an extended calendar in the near future. "I'm not sure North Carolina wants an extended calendar—to pay for the extra days," says Caroline Massengill, principal at Effie Green Elementary School in Raleigh. "In fact, I'm not sure we want to pay for what we've got now."

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTES

¹ Study Group IV, *We Must Chart a New Course for Our Schools. At Stake Is Nothing Less Than the Future of Our State*, The Public School Forum of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C., 1992, pp. 23–24.

² *Ibid.*

³ The study by Julie Frazier of Loyola University in Chicago matched 79 students from traditional-calendar magnet schools with 88 students at Brooks Global Extended Year Magnet on 18 different variables, including IQ, school entrance age, gender, race, preschool experience, home literacy environment, parents' education, and parents' occupational status. Students were evaluated over a two-year period to determine whether learning gains could be determined for either group during kindergarten, summer, or first grade. On the whole, the extended-year students outperformed the traditional calendar students in reading and general knowledge. No difference was found between students on the two calendars on a measure of vocabulary. Students from low socio-economic households were found to have particularly strong gains in reading and math. Source: Julie Frazier, "Effects of Extended-Year Schooling on the Achievement of Low Socioeconomic Students in Elementary School," consultant's report, pp. 1–3, 1994.

North Carolina Studies Show Inconclusive Results

In North Carolina, where year-round schools are growing, a few studies on achievement have been conducted. As is the case nationally, conclusive proof of achievement has not been found.

A 1993 evaluation synthesis conducted by Wake County Public School System researchers in Raleigh, N.C., examined 27 studies of year-round programs across the country. On achievement they concluded, "Overall, YRS [year-round schooling] seems to have no adverse effects on academic achievement for most students. The majority of studies we examined reported either positive effects or no effects on achievement."¹³

The evaluation cites the difficulty in comparing the traditional and year-round calendars. It also says, "The lack of longitudinal studies is a . . . major problem with existing literature . . . [A]chievement trends in the first year of YRS may reflect administrative difficulties in starting a new program." And, "[i]nitial achievement gains may be due to the novelty of the schedule and may decrease after the novelty wears off."¹⁴ In an interview, Karen Banks, associate superintendent for evaluation and research for the Wake County Public Schools, stressed the need to examine the impact of the program over time, to determine to what extent any achievement increases may be attributed to the year-round calendar.

The Wake County School System has reviewed its own year-round schools twice since the program's inception in the form of multi-track magnet schools.¹⁵ The first study, examining the first two years of implementation in one school, used race, sex, and free/reduced/paid lunch status to create target groups in year-round and traditional schools to be compared. It concluded that the participation in year-round education was not associated with any significant difference in CAT (California Achievement Test) test scores, which were given at the end of each year, in reading, math, or overall score.¹⁶

The second study covered three school years, from 1992–1993 through 1994–1995, so student groups could be tracked from third to fifth grade at all Wake County elementary schools. The study compared the percentage of students in three year-round programs with the Wake County elementary school average percentage of students that scored at Levels III or IV on End-of-Grade (EOG) tests. EOG tests, given at the conclusion of the school year, are used to measure the progress of student academic