a year-round magnet school is on the year-round calendar.

[16] Robert Serow *et al.*, "Year-Round Education Program: Evaluation Report," Wake County Public School System, Raleigh, N.C., March 1992, p. 6.

[17] Bethany Prohm and Nancy Banen, "Are WCPSS Multi-Track Year-Round Schools Effective?" Wake County Public School System, Raleigh, N.C., March 1996, p. 3.

[18] The exception was at Durant Elementary, where students increased from 81 percent scoring at Levels III or IV in math to 88 percent.

[19] Bethany Prohm and Nancy Banen, note 17 above, p. 4.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 2. See Table 3 for specific school information.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Robert Serow *et al.*, note 16 above, p. 15.

[23] Bethany Prohm and Nancy Banen, note 17 above, p. 5.

[24] Cammie Hall *et al.*, "Results of Year-Round Education Research," Rockingham County Public School System, November 6, 1995, pp. 1–18.

[25] *Ibid.* at pp. 1–8.

[26] *Ibid.* at p. 11.

[27] Faye H. Frye *et al.*, "YRE—What Is the Real Truth!," report presented to the Rockingham County Board of Education and to a national conference on year-round schools. Data analysis by Ann Brady, September 1996, pp. 6–7.

[28] A **"school-within-a-school"** refers to a school that has students on both a year-round calendar and the traditional calendar.

[29] The gains in math were small. However, they were more than 8 percent greater than the percent of the year-round students scoring at Levels III and IV.

[30] Quinn Raspberry, "Year-Round Schools May Not Be the Answer," position paper, Time To Learn, Charlotte, N.C., June 1994 (revised May 1996), p .13.

[31] McGladrey & Pullen, LLP, *Wake County Public Schools Cost Comparison of Year-Round Schools Versus Traditional Schools*, Wilmington, N.C., June 6, 1996, pp. 2–3.

[32] Seminole County Schools, Fla., Division of Business and Finance, "Cost Effectiveness of a Modified School Calendar vs. The Traditional 180 Day Calendar," 1989, pp. 6–20; and report to the Wake County Board of Education by Farrell Hanzaker, former associate superintendent for administrative services, Nov. 1992, pp. 11–12.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[34] McGladrey & Pullen, LLP, note 31 above, p. 2.

[35] Neil MacFarquhar, "Trenton Schools Begin an Experiment with Year-Round Classes," *New York Times,* July 22, 1995, p. 1B.

[36] Jacquelyn Heard, "Year-Round School Could Face Some Heat," *Chicago Tribune,* July 9, 1995, p. 1.

[37] N.C. State Board of Education policy on year-round education, adopted Dec. 4, 1991.

[38] Worthen and Zsiray, note 9 above, pp. 18–19.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[41] Telephone interview with Don Patterson, Oct. 6, 1995.

[42] Lois Timnick, "Year-Round School Plan Rescinded," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1993, home edition, p. J1.

[43] Henry Chu, "School Year Vote Forces Officials to Scramble," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1993, p. B4.

[44] Seminole County School System's report on year-round costs, Sanford, Fla., May 10, 1995, p. 12.

[45] Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research, note 12 above, p. 243.

Recommendations on Year-Round Schools Policy

While the year-round calendar shows much promise in improving teacher morale and creating a better classroom atmosphere for children, that promise is yet to be translated into dramatic improvements in classroom performance. In some studies, year-round students have outperformed their peers on the traditional calendar. In others, it's traditional calendar students who have attained higher marks.

A Texas study, for example, found year-round students performed slightly better in reading and math than their peers on the traditional calendar. And at-risk students in schools serving poorer populations were found to reap even more benefits.[1] Researchers at the now-defunct North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center within the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reviewed 20 years of studies on year-round schools conducted across the nation. Their conclusion? "Overall, there appears to be a slight but not overwhelming advantage for year-round students in learning basic content."[2]

Still, results of studies across the nation have been mixed, and the results are clouded by difficulty in matching students on innate ability and demographic factors such as income and education level of parents. A Wake County study that used an "effectiveness index" to compare similar students across the school district concluded, "[Y]ear-round elementary students are performing about the same as similar students in other schools." The North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center concluded that "[m]ore and better research and evaluation

—continues

studies will be needed before the picture becomes clear enough to describe it with absolute certainty."

Therefore, the ground is not entirely firm under the feet of those who would adopt a year-round calendar in hopes of improving academic achievement. In fact, a 1990 survey of year-round schooling by Phi Delta Kappa, an honorary education fraternity, reaches this firm conclusion: "If a district is looking to show major increases in standardized tests, year-round schools are not the answer."[3]

Neither is the record entirely clear for school officials who want to adopt a multi-track year-round schedule to serve more students in the same amount of space and realize cost savings on school construction. The Phi Delta Kappa study found, "Cost savings which result from the avoidance of new construction are reduced by higher operating and maintenance costs.... A district should not consider implementing year-round school simply to save money." A study of Wake County multi-track schools by the accounting firm McGladrey & Pullen of Wilmington, N.C., found average annual operating costs of $3,849 per student for year-round elementary schools and $3,819 for traditional calendar students. When capital costs were factored in, the year-round elementary schools were found to be moderately cheaper, at $4,664 per student compared to $4,811 for traditional schools.[4]

One piece of the evidence on year-round schools is clear, however. Year-round schedules adopted without giving parents the option of sticking to the traditional model create so much friction among disgruntled parents and teachers that opponents can scuttle the entire program. Support from parents for a shift to the year-round calendar has ranged as high as 60 percent at an elementary school in the mountain town of Canton and 80 percent in the university community of Chapel Hill-Carrboro. Evidence also is strong that parents who choose to send their children to year-round schools are satisfied with that choice. In Wake County, parents who sent their children to multi-track year-round magnet schools were more likely to agree that "My child's school provides a high-quality educational program" than were parents on the traditional calendar. In Rockingham County, overwhelming majorities of parents strongly agreed or tended to agree that "my child learns more in the year-round program."

Yet administrators at Blowing Rock Elementary School found that a committed and vocal minority could derail a year-round experiment that was highly popular with many parents and teachers. And a move to *mandatory* year-round schools in Newton-Conover spurred at least one school board member to run for election and win on an anti-year-round schools platform. Two members of the six-member board count themselves as foes of the calendar, while four members continue to support it. The Catawba County Board of Education elected *not* to shift to a mandatory year-round calendar because the contemplated shift was beginning to divide the community.

Therefore, it behooves public education officials who are considering the year-round model to: clearly define their objectives in moving to the year-round calendar; communicate those objectives clearly to the public; and preserve parental choice. To make the right choice, parents could benefit from more information. So could school officials wrestling with whether to convert to a different calendar. That's where the state could provide an important public service—by providing school officials and parents with comparative information to help them make choices.

To preserve informed parental choice and to increase the amount of information available to choose wisely in deciding whether to switch to a year-round calendar for local public schools, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research makes the following recommendations:

(1) Local school boards should keep the year-round calendar *optional* for parents, teachers, and students where possible when implementing a new school calendar. There are many ways to preserve choice while making the shift to a restructured school year. The best choice seems to be the magnet-style approach in which an entire school is converted to a year-round calendar, and students who prefer this

type of calendar apply to attend. While magnet schools often feature beefed up curricula to attract students, Wake County schools are attracting students solely on the basis of the calendar.

Another option is the "school-within-a-school" approach in which two calendars are used at the same school. This approach can create friction between the two calendars—particularly if too many students choose one or the other calendar and class sizes get out of balance. But the school-within-a-school approach does provide choice, and it avoids some of the controversy of the mandated approach. School systems which determine they *must* move fully to the year-round calendar may wish to stem the all-but-certain controversy that will ensue by lengthening the summer break slightly or negotiating open transfers with neighboring school systems to ease the concerns of those who support the traditional calendar.

(2) Because North Carolina is moving rapidly toward more year-round schools and has the third highest number in the nation, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education should publish comparative data on student achievement in year-round schools versus similar traditional schools, thus allowing parents to make an informed choice regarding how students perform on these two types of calendars. The state already collects and reports school system data on student performance in reading and math in grades 3–8 and writing in grades 4 and 7. At the high school level, student scores are published by school system on proficiency tests in core courses such as Algebra I, Biology, Economics/Legal/Political Systems, English I, and U.S. History, as well as average scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Indicators such as dropout rates, attendance, and percentage of poor students also are reported.

The state plans to publish such data *by school* for the 1997–98 school year, which will provide a major resource for parents seeking information about academic performance at their children's schools. But with 56 of 111 year-round schools using the school-within-a-school model, differences in academic performance between students on different calendars operating within the same school may be hidden in the overall school scores. To allow parents to assess how well students are doing on the *year-round-school* calendar versus the traditional calendar, scores for both calendars should be reported by school. These school-by-school indicators should be compiled in an annual report on year-round schools that would provide a resource for both parents and local school boards who are attempting to assess the success or potential of the year-round calendar.

These data would allow parents to see how children on the year-round calendar at a particular school perform on such measures as end-of-grade tests in reading, writing, and math. This is particularly important for school-within-a-school models where parents could just as easily pick one calendar as the other. And, the data would provide valuable information for the state and for local school boards as well. Over time, patterns might emerge that would contribute greatly to knowledge of the efficacy of the year-round calendar. After all, the experiment is still a young one in North Carolina, dating only to 1989 but growing by leaps and bounds ever since. As North Carolina public schools rush to the head of the national class in the year-round schools movement, it seems wise for the state to provide some evaluation, as well as guidance and quality control measures to assure that the public is getting what it thinks it is getting with the year-round school calendar.

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTES

[1] Carolyn Calvin Kneese and Stephanie L. Knight, Texas A&M University, a report presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, Calif., April 18–22, 1995, p. 3.

[2] Blaine R. Worthen and Stephen W. Zsiray Jr., "What Twenty Years of Educational Studies Revel About Year-Round Education," report commissioned by N.C. Educational Policy Research Center, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, March 1994, pp. 10–11.

[3] *Year-Round Schools: Do They Make a Difference?* Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research, Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, Ind., May 1990, p. 243.

[4] McGladrey & Pullen, LLP, *Wake County Public Schools Cost Comparison of Year-Round Schools Versus Traditional Schools*, Wilmington, N.C., June 6, 1996, pp. 2–3.