
Year-Round Schools: North Carolina School Systems Test the Waters

by Todd Silberman and John Charles Bradbury



Karen Tam

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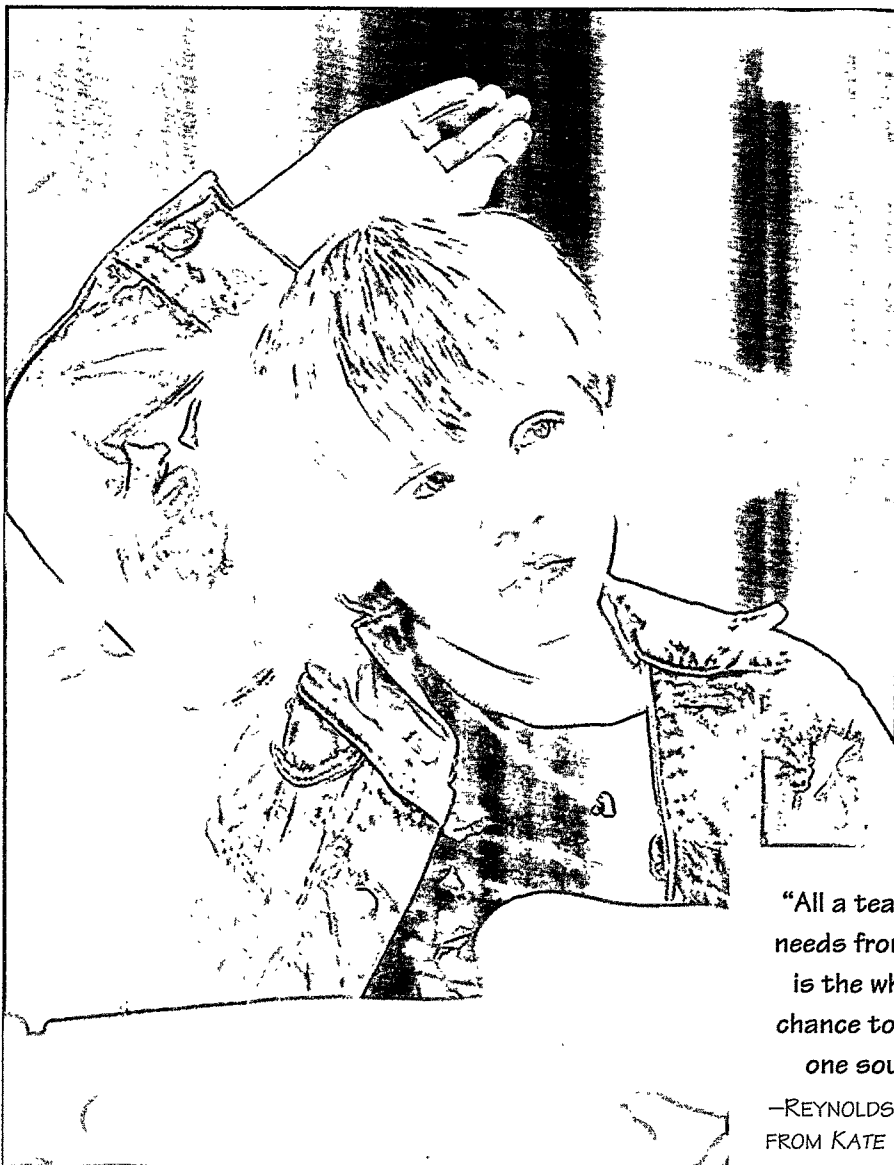
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Summary

North Carolina is near the head of the class in the year-round schools movement. With 111 schools in 35 different school systems, the state has the third highest number of year-round schools in the nation. Year-round school advocates say this different way of dividing the school calendar has an impact on everything from reducing the amount of time needed to review after the long summer break to improving morale among teachers and students. Year-round schools also have been used in other states to relieve school overcrowding, although that has rarely been the primary purpose in North Carolina. But year-round schools also have their critics—chiefly those who think the calendar interferes with the way families traditionally have spent their summers and those who believe this particular education reform magic bullet is really a blank. These latter critics believe reform efforts are being wasted on a model that really doesn't deliver results in the classroom.

In this article, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research discusses the pros and cons of the year-round calendar and considers whether the calendar has had any demonstrable impact on student achievement. The Center reviews several national studies, most of which have produced inconclusive results. The Center also examines studies in three North Carolina school districts: the Wake County Public School System; the Rockingham County Public School System; and the Mooresville Graded School District. In none of these studies does the Center find conclusive evidence that year-round schools produced dramatic gains in student achievement. Yet some career educators point to intangibles such as student and teacher attitudes and an intuitive notion that year-round schools represent a superior way to educate children. Where a choice system is maintained, year-round schools seem popular with parents as well.

We conclude that while year-round schools cannot be definitively proven to be superior to traditional-calendar schools, there is enough evidence to continue with the experiment. It is suggested that school systems considering converting to a year-round calendar keep in mind that maintaining choice seems key to a successful conversion. The Center makes two recommendations: (1) That local school boards keep the year-round calendar optional for parents, teachers, and students where possible when implementing a new school calendar; and (2) That the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education publish comparative data on student achievement in year-round schools versus similar traditional schools that would allow parents to make an informed choice regarding how students perform on these two types of calendars.



Karen Tam

"All a teacher
needs from life
is the whole
chance to lead
one soul."

—REYNOLDS PRICE,
FROM KATE VAIDEN

Last year, more than 30,000 students in North Carolina public schools traded their summer vacations for a choice that would send many other children running: school. In a trend that continues to gain favor with educators and families alike, more and more schools in the state are breaking stride with the traditional long summer holiday and offering students shorter, more frequent vacations throughout the year.

That alternative—known as year-round school—has been embraced by its proponents as a more effective model for education. Proponents say year-round education helps students better retain what they learn, is more in step with the rhythm of contemporary family life, and uses school buildings more efficiently.

By the numbers, year-round schools in North Carolina have gained steadily in popularity since the first one opened in Wake County in 1989 with 275 students. During the 1996–97 school year, year-round programs were being offered at 111 schools in 35 different school systems—nearly one-third of the 118 systems in the state.¹ (See Table 1, p. 6 and Table 3, p. 12) That's an increase of 17 over the 94 schools offering year-round education in 1995–96, and continues the surge of calendar conversions that began in the early 1990s.

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Instead of a summer vacation lasting 10 to 12 weeks, year-round students typically attend school in nine-week blocks that alternate with three-week vacations. Students attend school for the same number of days as those in traditional schools—180 days in North Carolina; it's simply that those days are arranged differently.

There are many different variations on the year-round theme, but two distinguishing characteristics are the multi-track calendar and the single-track calendar. A school on a *multi-track calendar* operates with different groups of students attending on separate calendars. The groups attend on a staggered schedule, so there is always one group of students on vacation. In this way, the capacity of a school can be increased by about 25 percent. Under the *single-track calendar*, all students in the year-round program attend on the same schedule, so there is no increase in capacity. Both types of year-round schools feature the characteristic nine-week session, followed by a short break.

Educators who champion the year-round model believe students benefit because they're never away from school long enough to forget what they've learned. As a result, teachers need less time for review at the beginning of the year.

Also, the year-round model is thought to be especially beneficial to those students who have a hard time keeping up. Instead of falling further behind all year and then trying to catch up in summer school, such students can get remedial help during the break between each nine-week session.

But perhaps few other recent changes in American education made in the name of reform have produced so much conflicting evidence about their effect on student performance. Research has been spotty, and the studies that have been completed often show mixed results. And, for all the apparent popularity of year-round schools in North Carolina, their growth has come at a time when debate elsewhere—particularly in Florida and California—has been intense. School systems there have chosen to abandon the alternative altogether or to scale back because of high costs or objections from parents who rebel against often conflicting vacation schedules of two or more children.²

Year-round schools long have drawn fire, particularly when parents and families are given no choice, and often when a year-round calendar is mandated as a stopgap space-saving measure to forestall costly construction of new schools. For example, a parent rebellion in Blowing Rock ended a pilot program at an elementary school in 1995, and parents in Davidson County fought off a pro-

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There is summer learning loss.

—CHARLES BALLINGER,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

posed elementary school program. The Asheboro City Schools reverted a middle school to a traditional calendar in 1996, and the Henderson County Board of Education returned two schools to a traditional calendar in 1997. Even in Wake County, which has the largest year-round enrollment in the state, bitter resistance among some parents derailed a proposal in 1992 that many feared could have put all the county's schools on a year-round calendar.³

Still, such unrest has remained muted in North Carolina. By and large, the year-round option has been gaining ground here without significant opposition.

Few school systems have made their programs an all-or-nothing proposition, and most year-round programs are offered as a "school-within-a-school" or a magnet school so that families may still choose a traditional calendar. At a time when parents and politicians are clamoring for "school choice," the advent of the year-round school has done just that—provided more choice. And that, many educators say, is a critical first step for making a successful school. If parents feel that they have chosen their child's school—instead of having it chosen for them—they are more likely to become involved and supportive.⁴

National Evidence on the Effectiveness of Year-Round Education

For every study that year-round advocates can show as evidence that their calendar is more effective in helping students learn better, year-round detractors can point to another that produces inconclusive results. Put simply, when it comes to unassailable proof that year-round schools are superior to traditional, the jury is still out.

Even year-round's tireless champion, Charles Ballinger, who heads the National Association for Year-Round Education, concedes that no such guarantee exists. But he is quick to add that there is ample evidence showing that students are no

**Table 1. Counties with Year-Round Schools in North Carolina and
Number of Year-Round Schools in Each County, 1996-97**

County	Number of year-round schools	School districts in county with year-round schools
Alamance	1	1
Buncombe	3	2
Cabarrus	1	1
Caldwell	3	1
Carteret	2	1
Catawba	16	2
Craven	1	1
Cumberland	2	2
Chowan	3	1
Davidson	2	1
Durham	4	1
Edgecombe	1	1
Forsyth	7	1
Guilford	3	1
Henderson	3*	1
Hoke	3	1
Iredell	7	1
Lincoln	1	1
McDowell	1	1
Mecklenburg	3	1
Nash	6	1
New Hanover	5	1
Northampton	2	1
Orange	1	1
Pender	1	1
Randolph	3	1
Robeson	1	1
Rockingham	7	1
Rowan	2	1
Scotland	4	1
Union	3	1
Wake	9	1
Total=32 of 100 counties	111 schools (43,329 students)	35 school districts

* The Henderson County Board of Education has voted to return to a traditional calendar format for two of its three year-round schools for the 1997-98 school year.

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

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

An Opportunity To Lengthen the School Year? —continued from page 7

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.

An Opportunity To Lengthen the School Year? —continued from page 9

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

Overall, there appears to be a slight but not overwhelming advantage for year-round students in learning basic content.

—N.C. EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

development. Students who score at Level III or IV are considered to have shown consistent mastery of grade-level subject matter and skills, and they are thought to be prepared to advance to the next grade.¹⁷

All three year-round magnet schools had a higher number of students scoring at Levels III or IV than the school system average by the fifth grade. However, all three year-round schools had a higher percentage of students who initially scored at Levels III or IV on the EOG tests in the third grade compared to the school system average of third graders. This suggests that students initially opting for year-round schools were—on average—slightly better students than their traditional school counterparts. By the fifth grade, the number of students scoring Levels III or IV stayed about the same among year-round students in both math and reading, with one exception,¹⁸ while the system-wide average increased (See Table 4, p. 13.)

The stable pattern in year-round schools was probably due to the fact that so many students scored at Levels III or IV initially and may have hit a ceiling on achievement.¹⁹ The student population of the Wake County year-round magnet schools is very different from the system-wide student average. The student population at year-round schools is mainly composed of white, middle-class children of highly educated parents. The number of students with free or reduced-price lunches is between 6 and 11 percent, well below the system average of 25 percent.²⁰ The percentage of non-white students in the year-round schools ranged from 11 to 21 percent, compared to the system-wide average of 31 percent.²¹ (See Table 5, p. 14.) And in the 1992 study, parents of year-round students were found to be more than twice as likely to have a college degree. In that study, 75 percent of the parents of year-round students had an education of college or higher, and 25 percent of the parents had a master's degree or higher (the second Wake County study

did not examine parent education, and the composition of magnet year-round schools may be changing as more students needing remedial help transfer into the program).²² The 1990 Census found that 35.3 percent of Wake County residents ages 25 and over hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

To factor out student differences, the second study used an "effectiveness index" to compare similar students across the school system. It found that "year-round elementary students are performing about the same as similar students in other schools."²³ Thus, neither of the Wake County studies found that year-round schooling leads to better academic performance.

In Reidsville, N.C., Rockingham County Consolidated Schools officials presented three studies of the system's year-round program to its school board in November 1995. Each of these studies matched individual students in the year-round program with counterparts on the traditional calendar. The pairings were based on several factors: grade level, sex, race, free/reduced/paid lunch status, and past performance on several tests. In one case, the data showed a statistically significant difference in performance for year-round students. Year-round kindergartners at Moss Elementary performed better than their traditional calendar peers on a teacher-developed test.²⁴

In a separate study conducted at Dillard Primary School, year-round first- and second-graders were matched with traditional calendar students on sex, race, and scores on an entrance test prepared by the principal. The study covered both the 1993–94 school year and the 1994–95 school year, and the year-round students generally outperformed their counterparts on the traditional calendar.²⁵ No statistical tests were applied. Yet another study of fourth-graders at four different schools noted non-statistically significant positive differences in reading for year-round students and in math for traditional students.²⁶

If a district is looking to show major increases in standardized tests, year-round schools are not the answer.

— PHI DELTA KAPPA
CENTER FOR EVALUATION,
DEVELOPMENT, AND RESEARCH

Table 3. Number of Year-Round Schools in North Carolina, 1996-1997

School Level	School w/in a School**	Single-Track	Multi-Track	Total No. of Year-Round Schools	Enrollment in Year-Round Schools
Elementary Schools	43	39	6	88	33,989
Middle Schools*	13	1	2	16	6,976
High Schools	0	5	0	5	2,240
Special Education	0	1	0	1	113
Medical	0	1	0	1	11
Total	56	47	8	111	43,329

* Includes Penderela Elementary of Pender County which is K-8.

** School-within-a-school refers to a school that operates on both a year-round calendar and the traditional calendar, and allows students to choose between the two. For purposes of this table, multi-track schools are considered to be those with more than two tracks.

Source: N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction, "North Carolina 1996-1997 School Year Year-Round Education," Fact Sheet.

A later study comparing performance of fifth grade students who had been on the year-round calendar for two years to students on the traditional calendar found the year-round students to be outperforming their traditional calendar counterparts. The study, which matched students on I.Q., gender, race, and socioeconomic status, found the year-round students to have outperformed the traditional calendar students on 12 of 12 comparisons of end of grade scores on reading and math. In nine of the 12 comparisons, the differences were statistically significant.²⁷

The Mooresville Graded School District is another leader in year-round education in North Carolina. Opening its first year-round program in 1990 at the elementary level with 202 students in a school-within-a-school setting, it has since expanded to almost 1,200 students in grades K-8. All of the programs follow an optional school-within-a-school approach.²⁸ With numbers provided by the school district, the Center has been able to make some observations about the effects of the year-round program on students. Using EOG test scores gathered over a three-year period (from the 1992-1993 to the 1994-1995 school year), it is possible to track four groups of students as they progress over three grades and compare

year-round students with their peers on the traditional calendar. (The initial scores and finishing scores are listed in Table 6, p. 17.)

The groups are: (Group 1) students progressing from third grade through fifth grade; (Group 2) students progressing from fourth grade through sixth grade; (Group 3) students progressing from fifth grade through seventh grade; and (Group 4) students progressing from sixth grade through eighth grade.

In the group of children tracked from third through fifth grade and the group tracked from fourth through sixth grade, a higher percentage of traditional calendar students scored at Levels III and IV after three years than did the year-round calendar students. The percentage of traditional calendar students scoring at this level in reading and math also increased more over the three years than did their year-round counterparts scoring at this level.²⁹ Thus, the traditional calendar students began the three-year period with a lower percentage of students at Levels III and IV than the year-round students, but traditional students ended the study period with a higher percentage. The percentage of year-round students scoring Levels III or IV increased very little in reading and actually declined in math over the three-year span.

**Table 4. Percentage of Students Scoring at Grade Level
or Above on the End-of-Grade Test,
Wake County Public School System, 1993-1995,
Year-Round vs. Average for County Elementary Schools**

Year-Round School	1993 Reading Score (%)	1995 Reading Score (%)	Increase or Decrease in % Passing	1993 Math Score (%)	1995 Math Score (%)	Increase or Decrease in % Passing
Durant Elem.	86	86	0	81	88	7
Morrisville Elem.	91	92	1	91	90	-1
West Lake Elem.	90	89	-1	89	85	-4
County Elementary School Average	74	80	6	72	77	5

Students scoring at grade level or above (Levels III and IV) on the End-of-Grade Test are considered to have shown sufficient mastery of course material to advance to the next grade.

Source: Wake County Public Schools, "Are WCPSS Multi-Track Year-Round Schools Effective?" March 1996.

In the groups tracked from fifth through seventh grade and from sixth through eighth grade, a higher percentage of year-round students scored at Levels III or IV on both reading and math after three years. But in reading, traditional calendar students started with a lower percentage scoring at this level. By the end of the three-year period, the percentage of traditional calendar students scoring at Levels III or IV had increased more than had the percentage of their year-round counterparts. In math, for the group tracked from fifth through seventh grade, the year-round students progressed more than the traditional calendar students, and in the group tracked from sixth through eighth grade, the students on both calendars progressed about the same. The population of those tracked from fifth through seventh grade changed quite a bit over the time period studied. The number of traditional calendar students increased by 43 percent, while the number of year-round students declined by 10 percent. It is unknown how this change affected the test results of this group.

Each of the four groups of students had two opportunities—in reading and math—to do better than their counterparts on the opposite calendar. This provides eight areas of comparison for each calendar to perform better than the other. In over-

all achievement, students on both calendars outperformed each other an equal number of times in terms of the percentage of students scoring at Level III or IV in reading or math after three years. But, in the growth of the percentage scoring Levels III or IV over the three-year period, the percentage of traditional calendar students scoring at this level increased more than the year-round students in seven out of the eight opportunities. And, the one time that the year-round students showed greater increases in scores occurred among the group followed from fifth through seventh grade. This group had a strange population fluctuation that may have skewed the results.

Therefore, the Center's analysis indicates that the Mooresville End-of-Grade test scores do not provide any evidence that year-round education leads to better academic achievement. If anything, the traditional calendar students outperformed their year-round peers. Unfortunately, socioeconomic data on the students involved was not available and therefore could not be included in this evaluation.

Carol Carroll, curriculum director for grades kindergarten through eight for the Mooresville Graded Schools, says the same remediation and extended help available to year-round students has

**Table 5. Student Characteristics,
1994-1995, Wake County Elementary Schools,
Year-Round vs. All Wake County Elementary Schools**

Year-Round School	Race			% Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
	White	Black	Other	
Durant Road Elementary	79.2%	17.6%	3.2%	11%
Morrisville Elementary	86.7%	8.8%	4.4%	6%
West Lake Elementary	88.8%	9.9%	1.3%	7%
Average for All Wake County Schools	69.4%	26.0%	4.6%	25%

Source: Wake County Public Schools, "Are WCPSS Multi-Track Year-Round Schools Effective?" March 1996, p. 2.

in recent years been offered to traditional calendar students, so all Mooresville students have benefited from the move to the year-round calendar. This has resulted in higher test scores for students on *both* calendars, she says. Carroll also points out a flaw in the data comparing year-round and traditional students. "In tracking grade levels over the years, we are not necessarily tracking the same students," says Carroll. "There's been lots of fluctuation between calendars over the years because we continually operate with choice. You may get children at any point who have not had equal numbers of days of school."

Carroll also notes that in the first year of the three-year period the Center examined (1992-93), the year-round students' scores were higher. "This group included almost all the students who had joined the program in 1990-91, and so they had had two years of intensive help," says Carroll. That was the year the school system did its own evaluation of the program. "We evaluated the initial project on the 1993 year, when all the scores were higher," Carroll says. She adds that 1992-93 also was the year RJR-Nabisco grant funding ran out. Since then, the year-round program has received fewer resources and has increasingly been a magnet for students who are not performing well on the traditional calendar. "For problem students, it's an opportunity for more time," says Carroll, "but it dilutes the scores."

Other Measures of Effectiveness: Teacher Morale and Student Attitudes

Karen Banks, who directs the Wake school system's evaluation and research department, says that if educators are looking at a year-round calendar as the answer to lagging student performance, they may be looking in the wrong place. "Achievement benefits aren't compelling enough to convert for that reason alone," Banks says. "The achievement benefits plus the climate benefits become a stronger argument. The more frequent breaks for students and teachers can be very uplifting."

And it's such issues, whether improved morale for teachers or better attitudes among students, that educators often cite as points that favor year-round schools. That's the conclusion Bruce Boyles, the Mooresville school system personnel director, drew after studying the year-round programs in his school system. Even though such objective measures as test scores gave no clear-cut evidence that year-round is superior, he says better morale among teachers is a positive element that shouldn't be ignored. "Clearly the attitudes of year-round teachers included in this study were more optimistic, and

***Effie Green Elementary School
Principal Caroline Massengill with
students in cafeteria.***

they had higher satisfaction levels at the conclusion of the second year” of the program, Boyles says. Norris Baker, principal at Walkertown Elementary in Winston-Salem, downplays the significance of test scores and says gains are evident only “when you see it and live it.”

Caroline Massengill, former principal at Morrisville Elementary in Wake County and now principal at Effie Green Elementary in Raleigh, is even more emphatic about what she says is a positive climate helped by the year-round calendar. “The difference in teachers has been amazing,” says Massengill, who pioneered the year-round program in the state seven years ago. “The biggest place that I see the benefits of year-round is at the end of the year. As a teacher [in a traditional school], when it got to be May or June, we were dead.”

With a year-round calendar, says Massengill, teachers and students are able to return to school four times a year feeling refreshed, instead of one or two times under the traditional calendar. “I don’t care if these kids have been in day care for three weeks or at grandma’s for three weeks, they’re happy to be back,” she says. “I used to see that two times during the year: at the beginning and after the Christmas holiday.”

Elaine Hall, principal of Newton-Conover Middle School, where all 650 students are on the same year-round calendar, says the program has made a noticeable difference with student behavior. “Our referrals [to the principal’s office] have gone way down,” Hall says. “In-school suspensions have dropped, and so have out-of-school numbers.”

Year-round advocates also point to what they say is a hidden advantage of the three-week intersessions that come between the typical regular 45-day academic sessions. “It’s a different way of looking at time and spending time,” says Massengill. She likes to use the term “extended learning” to describe how the three-week break is used by the school and students. Students needing remediation get four or five days of extra help, usually right after the nine-week session ends, giving them as many as 12 extra days of school a year. The cost of the remedial programs is covered by state funds that would otherwise be used for summer school.

Morrisville and other schools also sponsor enrichment programs for all students. At Morrisville, they’re known as “discovery days”—special classes in each intersession that focus on a particular theme or activity such as aerodynamics or



Karen Tom

Egyptology. Students are charged \$50 to participate in each of the three-day programs, Massengill says. Local YMCAs or other day-care providers also are tapped to provide supervision for students when they are on break.

"There are plenty of things for kids to do during breaks," Massengill says. "We have parents who say that summer was too long—the kids were inside watching TV all day."

But opponents of year-round schools wonder if such intangible benefits are worth the cost—both in the dollars that might be needed and in the disruptions that families often face. Sabrina Owen, who helped block a year-round school-within-a-school in Davidson County, says she didn't think the program was worth the cost at a time when the schools were short on textbooks and other supplies. Owen feared that if the program were begun, it would take preference over the traditional calendar.

"I have a concern about money," she says. "It's like taking a house and dividing it down the middle. The traditional kids are being slighted to make the year-round program work." Owen also suspects that offering a single-track school-within-a-school represented an effort to introduce a more ambitious multi-track program in the future. Year-round programs had been proposed for the county's two most crowded elementary schools, even though the single-track calendar wouldn't save space. "We knew that multi-track was in the backs of the minds of the [school] board and the superintendent," she says.

Owen says her opposition boils down to a basic question: "Why pay more for something that doesn't do anything extra?" She adds, "Superintendents are looking for ways to raise scores, but what they're getting is an outdated idea. It's never been proven to do any of the things that they claim. School systems are sold too many ideas. They need to go back to the basics instead of looking for some magic to raise scores. I look at it like this: If IBM had been

We have parents who say that summer [on the traditional calendar] was too long—the kids were inside watching TV all day.

—CAROLINE MASSENGILL
YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

School systems are sold too many ideas. They need to go back to the basics instead of looking for some magic to raise scores.

—SABRINE OWEN
YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL FOE

making a computer since the 1960s and hadn't benefited, they wouldn't do it for that long. Why do it with year-round schools?"

A Charlotte-based group opposed to year-round education nationwide shares the view of Owen and parents like her. The group, which calls itself Time To Learn, receives backing from amusement parks, summer camps, and other interests that view year-round schools as a threat—both in terms of their market and their labor pool of high-school age students. To counter the upbeat promotional message delivered by the National Association for Year-Round Education, Time To Learn disseminates a different message: evidence of year-round's failures across the country. Through newspaper reports of disillusionment with the 12-month calendar and critical studies, the group has tried to build the case that year-round education is more a failure than a success.

"Increasing student achievement, controlling the cost of education, and eliminating overcrowding are excellent goals," Time To Learn concludes in a position paper. "But year-round schools have not been proven to meet these goals. On the question of how to improve education, year-round schools do not appear to be the answer."³⁰

Cost Effectiveness of Year-Round Programs

In many cases, particularly in such high-growth states as Florida and California, year-round schools have been adopted because they are seen as a less costly alternative to building more schools. By staggering vacation schedules, students essentially attend school in shifts, often allowing a school to accommodate a population that is as much as a third larger than otherwise.

But many educators say a year-round school can be more costly to operate than one on a traditional calendar. A variety of expenses can raise the

budget: utilities needed to air-condition during the summer, additional bus transportation costs, higher maintenance costs due to the extra wear and tear on the building, and the salaries of specialty teachers—such as art and music—who must work during the intersessions classroom teachers have off.

Indeed, the Asheboro City Schools system dropped its school-within-a-school year-round offering at the middle school level largely because dwindling enrollment led to excessive cost. “We had to have extra money to make it work, and we were taking it away from the traditional calendar,” says North Asheboro Middle School Principal Daryl Barnes. “We were willing to offer it if enough students had signed up.” The calendar was phased out for the 1996–97 school year. In the prior year, only 95 students chose the year-round calendar. That meant smaller class size for year-round students, which was more expensive. It also meant that cer-

tain teachers who serve both calendars—such as teachers of band, art, vocational education, and Spanish—had to be on a 12-month calendar. Again, this added to the expense of operating the school. “There were not enough dollars to make it work,” says Barnes. “We were taking dollars away from our traditional students and giving them to our year-round students.”

Still, other year-round proponents defend the year-round program as costing no more to operate. “We’re doing the year-round and the traditional program within the same budget,” says Boyles of the Mooresville school system. “We do know there are some things that cost us less.” Boyles says because the school operates two calendars, year-round students returning for remediation during the break can ride buses that are already on the road for traditional students. Cafeteria personnel can be trimmed back at times because there are fewer students eating

Table 6. Percent of Students Scoring at Grade Level or Above on End-of-Grade Tests, Mooresville Graded School District, 1993–1995, Year-Round vs. Traditional

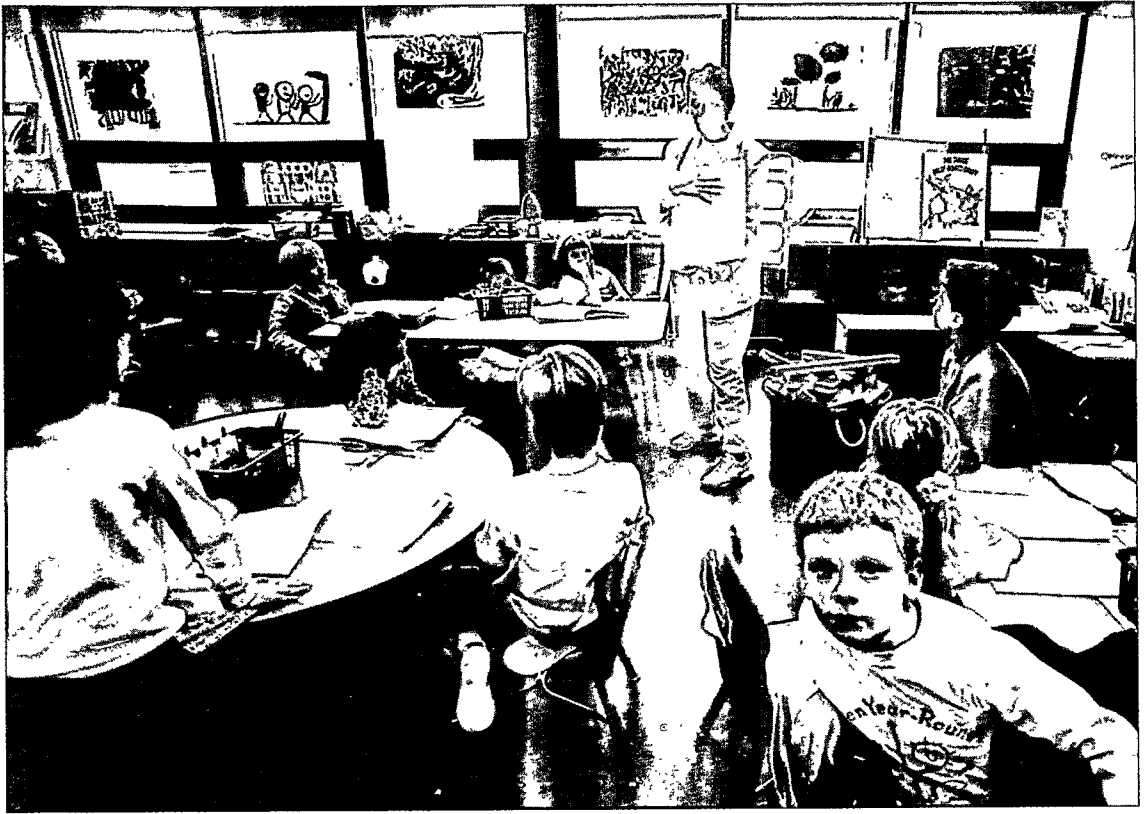
Group	Grades		1993	1995	Increase or	1993	1995	Increase or
	Tracked	Calendar	Reading, % Passing	Reading % Passing	Decrease in % Passing	Math, % Passing	Math, % Passing	Decrease in % Passing
1	3–5	Year-Round	69.7	71.4	1.7	75.6	67.7	-7.9
		Traditional	66.2	75.2	9.0	70.0	70.8	0.8
2	4–6	Year-Round	69.9	70.5	0.6	68.7	65.3	-3.4
		Traditional	66.7	76.2	9.5	65.3	73.5	8.2
3	5–7	Year-Round	69.9	73.5	3.6	65.5	76.5	11.0
		Traditional	64.0	71.3	7.3	62.0	66.4	4.4
4	6–8	Year-Round	76.1	84.1	8.0	69.0	79.7	10.7
		Traditional	62.7	76.5	13.8	65.5	77.1	11.6

= Lighter areas represent groups that outperformed peers on the other calendar.

Number of times outperformed peers on other calendar: Year-Round = 4
 Traditional = 4

Students who score at Levels III and IV on the end-of-grade test are considered to have shown consistent mastery of grade-level subject matter and skills. They are thought to be prepared to advance to the next grade level.

Data provided by Mooresville Graded School District.



Karen Tom

lunch when students on one calendar or the other are on break. And teachers can be employed for an extra month or two with no corresponding increase in certain benefit costs such as hospitalization.

A study done by an outside contractor for the Wake County Public Schools also found year-round elementary schools to be competitive with traditional schools when operating costs were compared on a per student basis.³¹ The study by the Wilmington, N.C., office of the accounting firm McGladrey & Pullen found average operating costs of \$3,849 per year for year-round elementary schools and \$3,819 for traditional elementary schools. When capital costs were factored in, the year-round elementary schools were found to be cheaper, at \$4,664 per student compared to \$4,811 per student for traditional schools.

Indeed, the most ambitious experiments with year-round schooling—most notably in California, Texas, and Florida—have been launched in the name of saving money that would be needed to build new schools. By using a “multi-track” calendar, typically one in which about a quarter of a school’s enrollment is on vacation at any given time, more students can attend the same school than if they all attend on the same calendar.

Hence, some educators have argued that such

an approach can be an effective way to save millions of dollars on school construction by making existing schools more efficient. “When you have overcrowding, multi-track scheduling is always a solution,” says Charles Ballinger of the year-round association in San Diego, Calif.

But even though school systems and taxpayers save in the short term on school construction, several studies suggest that the long-term costs may exceed the initial savings.³² For example, a 1992 study in Wake County concluded that, after 20 years, the additional costs of operating a multi-track school would have exceeded the cost of building an entire new one.³³

The system’s most recent study, however, found costs to be slightly lower for year-round elementary schools than for traditional schools when capital costs and operating costs were combined.³⁴ And the prospect of squeezing more students into the same number of classrooms to save money in the short-term remains a powerful argument in favor of year-round schools. In New York City, school officials have been looking at the multi-track option as they wrestle with a shortage of 30,000 seats alone for a high-school population of about 312,000 students.³⁵ Chicago, too, is considering a year-round calendar, both as a way to stem overcrowding in

It's just another reinvention of the flat tire, like whole language and the open classroom.

—YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL OPPONENT
DON PATTERSON

schools and to boost student performance.³⁶

In North Carolina, the State Board of Education endorsed the concept of year-round education in 1991, citing more efficient use of buildings as a key factor.³⁷ Also, the 1994 report by the N.C. Educational Policy Research Center at UNC-Chapel Hill listed several areas of perceived cost savings in addition to reduced capital outlay for new schools:³⁸

- Reduced debt service for new construction.
- Cost savings for such items as books and furniture that can be shared by students.
- Savings from not having to hire additional personnel, from principals to custodians, who would be needed to staff new buildings.³⁹

The same report, however, goes on to give ammunition to those who are not convinced of the cost savings from year-round schools. Year-round costs could be higher, the report says, due to the following factors:

- High costs of starting the program.
- Higher utility costs for providing air-conditioning during the summer.
- Construction costs for installing air-conditioning units in year-round schools without cooling.
- Increased maintenance costs due to extra use of the building.
- Extra money for remedial teaching during intersessions.⁴⁰

The experiences of school systems in other states suggest that big savings shouldn't be expected with multi-track, year-round schools. For example, the system in Albuquerque, N.M., has been retreating from an aggressive push toward mandatory year-round schools partly because savings weren't being realized, in addition to a backlash by parents and changes in the makeup of the local school board, says Don Patterson, a member of the board. Patterson, who ran for the school

board as an opponent of the year-round concept, says the shift to a 12-month calendar didn't live up to its promise.⁴¹

"The whole thing died under its own weight because the claims never hold true," Patterson says. "The cost savings are never realized. The academic improvements don't happen. Schedules become very complicated for families." Patterson argues that students benefit from unstructured learning time away from school during the long summer break and that the increased stopping and starting of the segmented year-round calendar interrupts the rhythm of learning. "With year-round education, the aggregate time reviewing is probably longer than on a traditional schedule since after each three-week break there is a need for reacclimating children to the school routine and reminding them where they left off. . . . A segmented schedule maximizes forgetting."

At its peak during the 1992-93 school year, Albuquerque's year-round calendar was in place at 25 of its 126 schools (20 percent). Eight year-round schools now remain (6 percent). Patterson says the school system embarked on the year-round model under a false premise: that voters wouldn't support a bond referendum for school construction.

"The administration didn't do its homework," he says. "The premise wasn't adequate for the purpose. The cost savings were exaggerated. There is no cost savings. We've figured out that we could build schools cheaper." Patterson characterizes year-round schools as another quick-fix reform that sounds good on paper but fails in practice. "It's just another reinvention of the flat tire," he says, "like whole language and the open classroom."

Critics such as Patterson often cite the experiences of Los Angeles, which all but abandoned a systemwide single-track program at 543 schools after a two-year experiment that the state helped to finance. The program cost the system an extra \$4 million a year to operate.⁴² Nevertheless, Los Angeles continues to be a big player in the concept of 12-month schools. Some 240,000 L.A. students—about one-third of the system's total enrollment—still attend multi-track year-round schools due to overcrowding.⁴³

But even year-round advocate Ballinger concedes that a distinction needs to be made between those school systems that resort to year-round sessions simply as a quick fix to crowded schools and those systems that embrace the alternative calendar for its educational benefits. Quick-fix programs eventually will be rejected, as they were in Albuquerque or in several Florida school systems that

now are backing away from year-round programs. The other approach, aimed at improving education, stands a better chance of success, he says.

The Seminole County school system in Florida adopted a year-round calendar in the early 1990s, even after an internal report concluded that the per-student cost in a multi-track program would run 12 percent more than the cost of a traditional school calendar. The same report concluded that any savings in capital costs would be lost after six years.⁴⁴ But the school system had no choice other than adopting a year-round program because voters in 1990 had rejected a \$520 million bond referendum that would have paid for new schools.

The 1990 study by Phi Delta Kappa concluded that, "Cost savings which result from the avoidance of new construction are reduced by higher operating and maintenance costs. In growing districts, savings may be entirely offset if inevitably neces-

sary new construction is completed above original estimates, due to inflation, or other increases. A district should not consider implementing year-round schools simply to save money."⁴⁵

The Importance of Broad Public Support

Seminole County Superintendent Paul Hagerty distinguishes between multi-track and single-track year-round calendar schedules. He told a group of parents in Orlando, Fla., that "a multi-track schedule is a very effective short-term solution to overcrowding but is not desirable for a permanent design. On the other hand, single-track schedules can be highly desirable." Once additional space became available in the Seminole County Schools, multi-track schedules were eliminated. The single-

"In her classroom our speculation ranged the whole world. She breathed curiosity into each of us. When she left us, we were sad, but her light did not go out. She had written her indelible signature on our minds. . . ."

—JOHN STEINBECK



Karen Tam

Glossary of Year-Round Terms

Enrichment: An optional learning program offered during the intersession. The activities offered are normally less academic and are intended to be fun as well as educational. Sometimes called "discovery days."

Extended year: A year-round calendar in which students attend school more than the traditional 180 days apart from summer school or remediation.

Grade enhancement: A week of educational review, administered during the intersession, that is offered to students who want to improve their grades.

Intersession: A short break between school sessions. Typically three to five weeks, part of which can be devoted to remedial work and enrichment activities.

Magnet school: A school that students can *choose* to attend as opposed to being *assigned* to a school according to a zoned district. Each school has a unique area of specialization such as math and science, performing arts, or a year-round calendar.

Multi-track: A year-round program that operates with different groups or *tracks* of students attending on separate calendars. The groups attend on a staggered schedule that rotates, so there is always one group of students on vacation. This way, the school can accommodate a greater capacity of students.

Remediation: A week of educational review, administered during the intersession, that is given to students who are at risk of failing. It is the year-round version of "summer school."

School-within-a-school: A school that operates on both a year-round calendar and the traditional calendar, and allows parents and students to choose between the two.

Single-track: A year-round program in which all of the students in the year-round program attend school on the same calendar and take breaks at the same time. It is offered for educational purposes rather than as a means to remedy overcrowding.

Traditional calendar: The typical American school calendar in which students attend school for nine months, from late August to early June, with a concentrated three-month summer break.

Year-round calendar: A calendar in which students attend school during all seasons of the year. The school calendar is reorganized by eliminating the long summer break and replacing it with more frequent short breaks.

—John Charles Bradbury

track schedules also were eliminated, says Hagerty, for one valid reason and one not so valid reason. The valid reason, Hagerty says, was the lack of a common K-12 calendar in the Seminole County Schools. The not so valid reason? The multi-track experience eroded enthusiasm and psychological support for the year-round experiment among parents and teachers. Support for even the more manageable single-track calendar could not be sustained.

To Ballinger, the Florida system's sudden disaffection is no surprise. "In Florida, it was a top-down expansion without real buy-in from parents,"

Ballinger says. "Too often, principals and superintendents haven't bought in to the year-round idea. They're doing it simply to solve the problem of overcrowding."

Ballinger's point seems crucial to the debate about year-round schools. As long as everyone involved—parents, teachers, principals, and students—think that the unconventional calendar has merit, it holds promise as a potentially effective reform. But rarely has the 12-month calendar survived or flourished when parents and school personnel feel that it has been forced upon them.

In North Carolina, virtually all of the three

dozen school systems that offer year-round programs have largely avoided serious opposition because they operate their programs on a voluntary basis. Those systems either run their alternative programs side-by-side with traditional classes in the same school, forming a school-within-a-school, or they operate the entire school on a 12-month calendar with voluntary enrollment. Wake County has the only school system in the state with multi-track programs—to help ease a critical shortage of space—but those are voluntary as well and are operating near capacity.

With the school-within-a-school model, however, educators often come to a crossroads in which the number of students choosing one calendar or the other gets out of balance and school

boards feel they must make a choice. In most recent cases, this has resulted in the phase-out of year-round schedules. Such was the case at North Asheboro Middle School. “I’m totally committed to year-round education,” says Principal Daryl Barnes. “If the school board would give me total year-round, I’d take it in a heartbeat. But school-within-a-school at the middle school level is tough. I could take it for awhile if we were moving toward total year-round, but that was not going to happen here.”

Barnes says he saw declining interest in the year-round calendar as students hit the seventh and eighth grades and became more interested in extracurricular activities. “Kids seem to make the decision more than parents the higher up they go,”



Karen Tam

says Barnes. The decision to drop the year-round calendar was the direct result of this declining interest, which caused resources to be stretched between the two calendars.

A similar result occurred in Hendersonville, where the Henderson County Board of Education elected to drop school-within-a-school year-round calendars at one middle school and one elementary school but retain a single track year-round calendar at another elementary school. Hendersonville Middle School Principal Bobby Wilkins professes some dismay at the decision, which takes effect in the 1997-98 school year. "We had more kids in year-round this year than traditional," says Wilkins.

Hendersonville Elementary Principal Catherine Childress says her school retained its single-track calendar, but she is worried that the loss of the middle school option will hurt parents with children of both elementary and middle-school age. "It could have a ripple effect on us because that's where kids go from here."

One North Carolina school system has taken a different tack by placing all of its programs and students on the same, single-track, year-round calendar. Newton-Conover City Schools took that step after finding that parallel schools-within-schools created a degree of conflict for parents and teachers.

"We felt there was division among teachers and in the community," says Elaine Hall, principal of

"Education and religion are two subjects on which everybody considers himself an expert."

—ROBERTSON DAVIES,
THE REBEL ANGELS

Newton-Conover Middle School. "There was an issue for teachers who had children on a different schedule."

The school system has about 2,700 students in three elementary, one middle, and one high school. "We still have some folks who aren't happy with the calendar," Hall says. "But the majority is in favor. We were trying to give everyone a choice, but we began hearing that whatever we're going to do, let's do the same thing."

For teachers, Hall says, the two different calendars posed problems with staff development efforts, because it was difficult to schedule meetings and programs that worked for both schedules. "We were losing cohesiveness," she says.

Nevertheless, some strong opposition to dropping "choice" from the calendar came from high school students and their parents. They were concerned about summer jobs, special summer programs, and athletic seasons that wouldn't match up with the 45/15 (nine weeks on/three weeks off) year-round calendar. In fact, most systems with year-round schools—even those with ambitious programs—have steered clear of high schools for such reasons.

But Hall says the sports issue hasn't been the problem in Newton-Conover that some had feared. The football team finished 10 and 0 in its first season on the year-round schedule, she says. "We found that students had to be around in the summer anyway if they made a commitment to a sport or to the band." Thus, in a year-round school, students might have to return to school during their breaks to play in a game or participate in practice. School superintendent Everette Simmons also says that summer jobs have not been a problem in Newton-Conover. Students tend to take jobs during the school year anyway, so most student jobs are not affected.

A multi-track program is especially difficult for a comprehensive high school because of class scheduling conflicts. For example, a low-enrollment advanced placement course might not be feasible for each of the four tracks. Those kinds of

Organizations to Contact

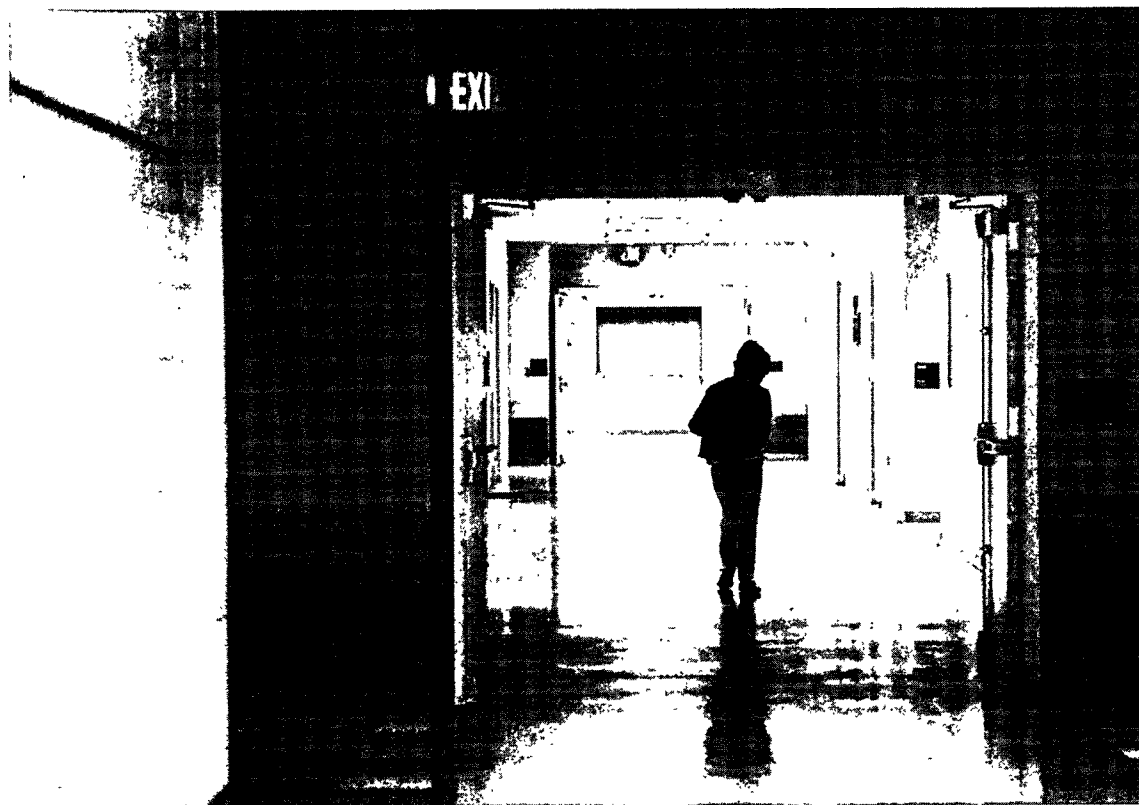
*for More Information
About Year-Round Schools:*

Supports Year-Round Schools

The National Association for
Year-Round Education
P.O. Box 711386
San Diego, CA 92171-1386
Phone: (619) 276-5296

Opposes Year-Round Schools

Time To Learn
P.O. Box 12525
Charlotte, NC 28220
Phone: (704) 442-1131



Karen Tam

concerns led the Wake County school board to shelve a proposal for a year-round high school in the early 1990s.

Incrementally, however, more high schools are sampling the year-round schedule. One alternative high school, for example, has found the calendar to be a natural fit for students who fail to flourish within the traditional school setting. Cape Lookout High in Morehead City implemented the year-round calendar for the 1996–97 school year, and Principal Laura Beth Taylor already is impressed with the results. “We saw year-round as a really natural step to take because we can do nine weeks of work and then remediate,” says Taylor. “We’re finding we can keep kids focused for nine weeks. They work like their pants are on fire, knowing they’re going to get a break.”

About 40 percent of the school’s 60 students are enrolled in algebra II, says Taylor. “And they’re all at-risk kids,” she says. “They’re not just taking it. They’re passing it.”

Yet another high school that has converted to the year-round calendar is Northampton County High School West. The school operates on a 90-days-in-school, 30-days-out calendar with 15-day breaks in the fall and spring. Northampton County Schools Superintendent Gregory Todd says the

schedule allows the school to use a semester system and get exams in before the Christmas and summer breaks. Remediation programs are incorporated for students who are failing. “The other high school and two middle schools are going year-round next year,” Todd says.

Conclusion

The debate over the year-round school calendar typically has turned on a simple question: Is it the solution to the myriad problems that public education faces today? This, however, may be requiring an experiment with the school calendar to carry too much baggage. One strong argument made by proponents of year-round schools is that they allow school facilities to accommodate more students—thus relieving overcrowding and reducing construction costs for new schools. A second major argument is that the restructured calendar actually can improve academic achievement.

But as much as proponents want to believe that year-round schools increase academic achievement, studies have produced inconclusive or mixed results. This is in part due to difficulties inherent in matching year-round students with their counterparts on the traditional calendar in order to design

studies that fully account for differences in abilities among students. In this sense, the studies in North Carolina are as inconclusive as those in other states. While there are some hints of increased achievement on the year-round calendar, there are other examples where students on the traditional calendar have outperformed their year-round peers. No dramatic leaps in learning should be anticipated unless year-round schools are willing to use time when their students are on break to lengthen the school year. Even then, the differences may be subtle and may take years to materialize.

A more dramatic result of the year-round calendar seems to be the increase in positive attitudes among teachers and students who enroll in the program on an optional basis. Teachers enjoy more frequent vacations and may therefore experience less "burnout." This is increasingly an issue as North Carolina attempts to retain its best classroom teachers. Many students also may benefit from more frequent remediation on a case by case basis, even though there is little evidence that it helps all or even most students. And teachers say the more frequent breaks keep students fresh and more eager to learn. Parents with lifestyles that are more conducive to frequent breaks rather than one long break also benefit. Supporters say that these factors—happy teachers, happy students, and happy parents—combine to create a better atmosphere for learning than the traditional calendar.

But if the atmosphere for learning has improved, why is there so little evidence of increased achievement? While it makes sense intuitively that shorter breaks and more frequent remediation might enhance learning, compelling empirical evidence indicating stronger academic performance does not exist. The best proponents can claim is that year-round education does no worse than the traditional calendar.

Because the findings on year-round schools are still debatable, the public schools should move cautiously on this issue. It must be remembered that many school systems across the country (Los Angeles, California; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Orange County, Florida) and in North Carolina (Blowing Rock, Catawba County, Asheboro, and Hendersonville among others) have ended or scaled back year-round programs for reasons such as cost, community dissatisfaction, and lack of academic results.

Satisfaction among parents, teachers, students, and the community is vital to success of any year-round program. To make sure this support exists, North Carolina should continue its permissive approach of allowing individual school districts to ex-

periment with different year-round approaches. Where possible, year-round programs should remain optional. Forcing people to participate in a program they strongly oppose makes success less likely. By allowing localities to experiment, costs and benefits will be clearer, and successes in one district can be adopted in another. □◀

FOOTNOTES

¹ N.C. Department of Public Instruction, "North Carolina 1996-97 School Year Year-Round Education," Fact Sheet.

² Linda K. Wertheimer, "Parents: Turn Back Calendars; Year-Round Education Loses Favor Amid Furor," *The Orlando Sentinel*, Orlando, Fla., June 4, 1995, p. B1.

³ Todd Silberman, "School bond details put off," *The News & Observer*, Raleigh, N.C., Sept. 18, 1992, p. B1; Silberman, "Crowds putting schools in bind," *The News & Observer*, Sept. 8, 1992, p. A1; Silberman, "Group readies school protest," *The News & Observer*, Aug. 11, 1992, p. B1; Tim Simmons, "Year-round schools on hold," *The News & Observer*, July 17, 1992, p. B1.

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the school choice issue, see Tom Mather, "School Choice: A Simple Term Covers a Range of Options," *North Carolina Insight*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (September 1995), pp. 2-50.

⁵ Walter L. Winters, "A Review of Recent Studies Relating to the Achievement of Students Enrolled in Year-Round Education Programs," National Association for Year-Round Education, Nov. 1994, p. v.

⁶ 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.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Blaine R. Worthen and Stephen W. Zsiray, Jr., "What Twenty Years of Educational Studies Reveal 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.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹ Jane L. Zykowski *et al.*, "A Review of Year-Round Education Research," California Educational Research Cooperative, School of Education, University of California, Riverside, Feb. 1991, p. 49.

¹² *Year-Round Schools: Do They Make a Difference?* Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research, Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, Ind., May 1990, p. 243.

¹³ D. Kirk Grotjohn and Karen Banks, "An Evaluation Synthesis: Year-Round Schools and Achievement," Wake County Public School System, 1993, p. 3, presented at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Ga.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ A "multi-track" school operates with different groups of students on separate calendars, or tracks, that rotate when the groups are in session. The groups attend on staggered schedules with one group always on vacation. This way, the school can serve a greater number of students. The Wake County schools use a 45-15 calendar, where each track attends school for nine weeks (45 days) then takes a three-week (15 day) break. "Magnet" refers to a school that is optional for students to choose to attend, as opposed to going to the school to which the student is assigned by zoning. In Wake County, the entire student body of

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