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Year-Round Schools: In Brief

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Summary

In general, year-round schools are schools that reorganize a traditional school year without allowing for any extended breaks in instruction (e.g., 10-week summer vacation). Rather, the days usually included in summer break are redistributed to create regular breaks throughout the year. While year-round schools have existed to some extent since the early 1900s, there was substantial growth in the number of year-round schools from the mid-1980s to 2000. In 1985, there were 410 year-round public schools, serving about 350,000 students. By 2000, the number of year-round public schools had grown to 3,059 schools, serving almost 2.2 million students in 45 states. During the 2011-2012 school year, there were 3,700 public schools across the nation operating on a year-round calendar cycle.

The research on the extent to which year-round schools affect student achievement has generally been found to be inconclusive and lacking in methodological rigor. There is some consensus that year-round schooling has no effect or a small positive effect on student performance; however, the quality of the studies that led to these findings has been questioned.

There are various pros and cons raised in relation to year-round schools. Among the arguments in favor of this calendar approach are stemming the loss of learning over the summer, creating opportunities during the school year to provide remediation and enrichment activities, and cost savings. Among the arguments against the year-round school approach are the costs associated with the initial implementation of a year-round school, the greater need to focus instead on other aspects of education (e.g., effective teaching and parent involvement), scheduling difficulties for families if year-round schools are not implemented districtwide or if their children end up on different schedules within the same school; the lack of opportunities for older students to have summer jobs; and issues related to student participation in extracurricular activities while on breaks.

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Introduction

Congress has been interested in the use of year-round schools for several decades. In April 1972, the House of Representatives, General Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor held a hearing on the “year-round school concept.” Since that time, various bills have been introduced to support the use of year-round schools.¹ This report provides background information about year-round schools, specifically what they are, how prevalent they are today, state policies on year-round schooling, what recent research says about year-round schooling, and the arguments for and against this approach.

What Are Year-Round Schools?

In general, year-round schools are schools that reorganize a traditional school year without allowing for any extended breaks in instruction (e.g., 10 week summer vacation).² Rather, the days usually included in summer break are redistributed to create regular breaks throughout the year.³ This is sometimes referred to as operating on a “balanced calendar.”

According to the National Association for Year-Round Education (NAYRE), schools primarily offer year-round education on a single track or multi-track.⁴ Schools using a single track approach to year-round education provide a balanced calendar for instruction in which summer vacation is shortened with additional vacation days added throughout the school year to create breaks from instruction, which are sometimes referred to as “intersessions.” Intersessions may be used by the school to provide remediation or enrichment activities for students. Schools using a single track approach to year-round education often structure their school calendar in one of three ways:⁵

1. 45-15 calendar: 45 days (9 weeks) of instruction, followed by 15 days (3 weeks) of vacation/intersession;
2. 60-20 calendar: 60 days (12 weeks) of instruction, followed by 20 days (4 weeks) of vacation/intersession; or
3. 45-10 calendar: 45 days (9 weeks) of instruction, followed by 10 days (2 weeks) of vacation/intersession.

Multi-track year-round education is often used to assist schools that are dealing with capacity issues.⁶ By establishing a multi-track system, a school district may be able to avoid having to build a new school or temporary structures (e.g., portable classrooms). A multi-track system is

¹ For example, see H.R. 3548 in the 102nd Congress, S. 342 in the 107th Congress, and S. 2029 in the 113th Congress.

² See for example, “Year-Round Schooling,” *Education Week*, August 3, 2004.

³ Some year-round schools may offer more days of instruction than is required by state law. The focus of this report is on schools that reorganize the school calendar rather than lengthen the school calendar, which is often referred to as extended learning time.

⁴ National Association for Year-Round Education, *Typical Year-Round Calendars*, <http://www.nayre.org/cal.htm>.

⁵ NAYRE has developed charts depicting the difference between how instructional days and days off are distributed in a traditional calendar versus a year-round calendar (also referred to as a balanced calendar). The charts are available online at http://www.nayre.org/calendar_comparison.htm.

⁶ *Ibid.*

implemented by dividing teachers and students into tracks or groups of similar sizes that each has its own schedule. Students and teachers in a given track follow the same schedule, are in school at the same time, and are on vacation at the same time. Common multi-track calendars include 4 tracks operating on a 45-15 calendar (45 days of instruction, 15 days of vacation/intersession), 60-20 calendar, or 90-30 calendar. A 60-15 calendar is generally used in schools with 5 tracks. For example, if a school that could accommodate 750 students had 1,000 students enrolled, it could divide the students into tracks or groups of 250 students (i.e., 4 tracks). The school could then have three tracks at school at any given time and one track on vacation or intersession. This could enable the school to meet student demand without necessitating expansion of the school facility.

Year-Round Schools by the Numbers

While year-round schools have existed in some form since the early 1900s,⁷ there was substantial growth in the number of year-round schools from the mid-1980s to 2000. In 1985, there were 410 year-round public schools, serving about 350,000 students. By 2000, the number of year-round public schools had grown to 3,059 schools, serving almost 2.2 million students in 45 states.⁸ The number of year-round public schools dropped to 2,936 public schools, serving 2.1 million students, by the 2006-2007 school year.⁹

Based on data available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2011-2012 school year (most recent data available), over the last several years there has again been growth in the number of public schools operating as year-round schools. During the 2011-2012 school year, there were 3,700 public schools across the nation operating on a year-round calendar cycle.¹⁰ This accounted for 4.1% of all public schools in the country. The highest concentration of schools operating on a year-round calendar cycle was in the South (40.5%), followed by the West (24.3%) with equal proportions of these schools in the Northeast and Midwest (16.2% in each region). The majority of schools operating on a year-round calendar cycle are traditional public schools (3,300 schools) compared with 400 charter schools operating on a year-round calendar cycle.¹¹

In terms of school level, over half (57%, 2,100 schools) of all schools operating on a year-round calendar cycle are elementary schools, 900 are secondary schools, and 600 are combined

⁷ National Association of Year-Round Education, *History of Year-Round Education*, <http://www.nayre.org/history.html>.

⁸ NAYRE data as reported in Ann McGlynn, "Districts That School Year-Round," *The School Administrator*, March 2002, available online at <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=10416>.

⁹ National Association of Year-Round Education, *Statistical Summaries of Year-Round Education Programs: 2006-2007*, <http://www.nayre.org/STATISTICAL%20SUMMARIES%20OF%20YRE%202007.pdf>.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2013*, Table 234.12, 2014, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_234.12.asp.

¹¹ While data are not available by community type for the 2011-2012 school year, data by community type are available for the 2007-2008 school year. Based on these data, 17.8% of schools located in city communities, 13.6% of schools located in suburban communities, 11.9% of schools located in town communities, and 13.8% of schools located in rural communities operated on a year-round cycle. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey*, "Total Number of Schools, Percentage of Schools That Have All Students Attending a Year-Round Calendar Cycle and Average Number of Days in the Cycle, by Selected School Characteristics: 2007-08," http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_030_s1n.asp.)

elementary and secondary schools.¹² Most schools operating on a year-round calendar schedule enroll 200 or more students. In addition, 47% of all schools operating on a year-round calendar schedule had 75% or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Nearly 60% of schools operating on a year-round calendar schedule had at least 50% of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In 2011, most states required public schools to provide 180 days of instruction each school year.¹³ The average number of instructional days per school year for schools with year-round calendar cycles was 189 days during the 2011-2012 school year.¹⁴ This number varied by region of the country, type of school (traditional or charter), school level, and enrollment.

State Policies on Year-Round Schools

The most recent data on state policies on year-round schools were compiled by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) for the 2008 school year.¹⁵ Of the states for which information was available, 17 states had a policy on year-round schools.¹⁶ In addition, 30 states reported that they had school districts in their states with year-round schools.¹⁷ Some states specified the number of districts within the state that had year-round schools operating. Of the states reporting a specific number of districts, most reported that five or fewer school districts had year-round schools. However, in some states, the number of school districts with year-round schools constituted a majority of the school districts in the state (e.g., Delaware). As part of their survey responses, some states provided their definitions of year-round schools. These definitions are varied as illustrated below.

- Arkansas: A year-round school must meet the state requirement for the minimum number of school days between July 1 and June 30 of each school year and have no vacation, including summer vacation, last more than six weeks.
- Oklahoma: A year-round school must offer at least 10 months of 4 weeks during which the school is in session and instruction is offered for not less than 180 days.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, *National Center for Education Statistics*, Table 198, December 31, 2013, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_198.asp.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2013*, Table 234.12, 2014, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_234.12.asp.

¹⁵ Council of Chief State School Officers, *Key State Education Policies on PK-12 Education: 2008*, Table 4, 2009, <http://programs.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/KSP%20final%20draft3.pdf>.

¹⁶ The following states had policies on year-round schools: Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The data on Pennsylvania's state policies are from 2006. In Massachusetts, all policies regarding year-round schools are decided locally.

¹⁷ The following states had districts with year-round schools: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Hawaii had some districts that operated on a multitrack system, whereby the schools are open year-round but different cohorts start and end at different times.

- Texas: A year-round school must operate during the “greater part” of 10 months and up to 12 calendar months of the year.

Research on Year-Round Education

The research on the extent to which year-round schools affect student achievement has generally been found to be inconclusive and lacking in methodological rigor. For example, in reviewing the literature on the effects of year-round schooling on student achievement, Cooper et al. concluded that “a truly credible study of modified calendar effects has yet to be conducted.”¹⁸ Wu and Stone reached similar conclusions and noted that while “there is a general consensus that [year-round school] has no effect or a small positive effect on student performance, the methodology of many studies had left copious room for more rigorous verification.”¹⁹ Their own study of whether year-round schools in California had an effect upon the outcome and growth of schools’ Academic Performance Index (API) scores used more sophisticated statistical analyses than prior studies and found that year-round schools failed to affect either measure.²⁰ Cooper et al. in their meta-analysis of studies on year-round school found that the “cumulative results of past studies is so close to a chance outcome that the argument that poor designs have led to random findings remain plausible.”²¹ They also note, however, that there is some evidence that suggests that year-round schools may improve academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students.

A second aspect of year-round education that researchers have sought to examine is whether year-round schools affect the cost of education. Based on a review of the literature conducted by the Education Commission of the States (ECS),²² schools operating on multi-tracks experience reduced capital expenditures (i.e., facility costs), but do not tend to achieve savings with respect to operating expenditures (e.g., personnel costs, electricity). However, the savings from capital expenditures outweigh any increases in operating expenditures. It is less clear, however, whether schools operating on a single-track experience cost savings. A more recent study of year-round schools in one setting, Clark County, NV, generally supports the conclusions noted by ECS, finding significant cost savings as a result of the implementation of multitrack year-round schools.²³ The researchers concluded that savings were largest with respect to real estate and operations.

¹⁸ Harris Cooper, Jeffrey C. Valentine, and Kelly Charlton, et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars on Student Achievement and on School and Community Attitudes,” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 73, no. 1 (Spring 2003), p. 43. (Hereinafter referred to as Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars.”)

¹⁹ Amery D. Wu and Jake E. Stone, “Does Year Round Schooling Affect the Outcome and Growth of California’s API Scores?,” *Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 83.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 79-97. (Hereinafter referred to as Wu and Stone, “Year Round Schooling and California.”)

²¹ Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars” p. 43.

²² Education Commission of the States Information Clearinghouse, *Scheduling: Year-Round School*, June 1997, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/14/29/1429.htm>.

²³ Nassar Daneshvary and Terrence M. Claretie, “Efficiency and costs in education: year-round versus traditional schedules,” *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 20 (2001), pp. 279-287.

Arguments For and Against the Implementation of Year-Round Schools

Based on reviews of the literature conducted by Cooper et al., Wu and Stone, and ECS, as well as arguments put forth by proponents of year-round education, including NAYRE, and opponents of year-round education, including the Coalition for the Traditional School Year and Summer Matters, this section provides an overview of some of the arguments made in favor of or against year-round education.

Pros

- The use of year-round schools can prevent the loss of learning over the summer, which may be a particular problem for children with special educational needs (e.g., English learners) and addresses the uneven effects of the summer break on students based on socioeconomic status.²⁴
- Using a modified school calendar creates opportunities to provide remediation and enrichment activities to students during the school year rather than waiting to provide these activities during summer school.
- Proponents of year-round education often argue that the use of a balanced calendar increases student achievement, but as previously discussed, the research in this area is inconclusive.
- There may be cost savings realized when operating multitrack year-round schools, particularly with respect to capital expenditures.
- The use of a balanced calendar could help to prevent staff burnout by providing more frequent breaks for staff. In addition, teachers could choose to substitute teach during breaks to earn additional money while providing students with a teacher with greater knowledge of the curriculum than a substitute teacher that did not regularly work at the school.²⁵

²⁴ Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars,” and Wu and Stone, “Year Round Schooling and California.” Further, a meta-analysis of loss of learning studies conducted by Cooper et al. found that summer learning loss was equivalent to at least one month of instruction. That is, on average, students’ test scores were at least one month lower in the fall than they were in the previous spring. The results of their analysis suggested that the loss of learning was greater for math overall than for reading overall. The meta-analysis also determined that all students, regardless of “the resources in their homes,” experienced about equal losses in math skills over the summer. However, with respect to reading comprehension skills, the analysis found that middle-class children made gains over the summer, while disadvantaged students experienced a loss of learning. (Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars,” pp. 6-7.) A more recent student conducted by Alexander et al. also identifies a loss of learning experienced by lower income students over the summer months. (Karl L. Alexander, Linda Steffel Olson, and Doris R. Entwisle, “Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 72 (April 2007), pp. 167-180.)

²⁵ For more information, see the reviews of literature conducted by Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars,” and Wu and Stone, “Year Round Schooling and California.”

Cons

- The initial implementation of a year-round school program may be costly due to a variety of factors including preparing a facility to serve students for more months during a calendar year.
- Opponents of year-round education note that while year-round schools may not have a negative effect on education, the data on its positive effects are inconclusive. Instead of changing school calendars, they argue that the focus should be on issues such as effective teaching and parent involvement.
- Operating on a year-round schedule may require paying more staff (e.g., administrative staff and maintenance workers) on 12-month contracts instead of 9-month contracts, thereby increasing operational costs. In addition, staff may experience burnout, particularly principals who are managing buildings that are now occupied by students for the entire calendar year.
- Families may find it difficult to have their children on different schedules if year-round schooling is not offered districtwide or if their children end up on different tracks in a multitrack school.
- There may be a lack of opportunities for older students to have summer jobs, and there may be complications related to student participation in extracurricular activities over breaks.²⁶ Concerns are also raised about year-round schooling by organizations (e.g., amusement parks, campgrounds) that could potentially be adversely affected economically by a change in the school calendar.²⁷
- It may be difficult to conduct large maintenance projects and may require doing routine maintenance at night or on the weekends, which may incur overtime costs.
- Several disadvantages related specifically to multitrack year-round schools are cited, including possible difficulties in offering remediation if space is an issue, lack of convenience for teachers who may not have a regular classroom in which to keep their teaching materials, and disrupted communication and training among staff as a portion of the staff is always out of the school.

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²⁶ Cooper et al. note that advocates admit that most year-round school programs are based in elementary schools because of concerns about the effects of the modified schedule on the after school activities of older students. (Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars.”)

²⁷ For more information, see Cooper et al., “The Effects of Modified School Calendars,” and Lyn M. Pickeral and Susan Hubbard, “The Effects of Year-Round Schools on the Hospitality Industry’s Seasonal Labor Force in the State of Tennessee,” *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2002), pp. 49-58.