

Alternatives to the Traditional School-Year Calendar

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EDUCATION POLICY BRIEF SERIES ON THE USE OF TIME IN SCHOOLS:

- ✓ *Is It Time to Change Indiana's School-Year Calendar? (January 2007)*
- ✓ ***Alternatives to the Traditional School-Year Calendar***
- ✓ *The Daily Schedule: A Look at the Relationship Between Time and Academic Achievement*

In 1994 the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) published the report, *Prisoners of Time*, the title of which alone presented an evocative image of the limitations imposed on America's public schools. The report argued that America's current education system is hindered by the somewhat universal worship of the clock and the calendar. According to the report, consequences of a strict adherence to the demands of the school schedule are predictable:

The school clock governs how families organize their lives, how administrators oversee their schools, and how teachers work their way through the curriculum. Above all, it governs how material is presented to students and the opportunity they have to comprehend and master it. (p. 8)

While identifying a number of design flaws in America's education system with regard to the way time is utilized, the report questioned whether or not current modifications to school calendars accommodate the learning needs of American students. *Prisoners of Time* (1994) addressed this question by stating that schools should "respond to the needs of today's students by remaining open longer during the day and that some schools in every district remain open throughout the year" (p. 34). The implicit assumption in this recommendation is that the needs of students and their families have changed significantly since the dictums of our traditional school calendars were first established more than 100 years ago. Generally speaking, current modifications to traditional school sched-

ules and calendars have not been drastic enough to address the substantial changes in the overall student population and the communities in which they reside.

In January 2007, a report by Elena Silva of the Education Sector, entitled *On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time*, addresses the continuing challenges school administrators face to allocate school time in new and innovative ways that maximize student learning and are reflective of the rapidly-changing global economy. Elevated pressure on school personnel to raise student achievement is being applied from state and federal accountability systems, such as the provisions found in No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

As a result, the regulatory and education policy climate may indeed provide the impetus to change the way schools organize their use of instructional time and the school calendars. The need to revise the standard school day and school year is emerging as a primary education policy topic on a national scale. A number of strategies are currently being implemented that not only reorganize the use of time in schools, but also more effectively guarantee that schools provide the right kind of time. Merely adding minutes to the school day or weeks to the school year does not necessarily mean that the additional time is being successfully utilized for instruction and student engagement, according to the 2007 Silva report.

This Policy Brief will examine two strategies that reorganize the school year or increase the allocation of academic learning time in schools. The brief will examine the use of year-round and extended school-year calendars in schools across the country as alternatives to the traditional school calendar, consider the research base on the effectiveness of year-round and extended school-year calendars, and address the emergence of alternative policies on the use of instructional time. A subsequent CEEP Policy Brief will examine in more detail the emerging policies and trends impacting the use of instructional time during the school day.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL CALENDAR

The common conception of the origins of America's traditional school calendar emphasizes a strong connection to the country's agrarian traditions with students needing time off from school to assist with the summer harvesting of crops. Agricultural interests only paint part of the picture; education during the early days of the country largely accommodated the needs of local community interests and usually maintained no compulsory attendance requirements. Public schooling also possessed a somewhat binary structure with rural students experiencing a much less demanding schedule than urban students; schooling was an occasional activity for rural America in the 19th century. "In rural areas, schools were open at most six months of the year, half in the winter and half in the summer... In many urban areas, by contrast, schools were open much longer" (Rakoff, 1999, p.4). In fact, some urban schools in the middle 19th century were open 49 weeks out of the year.

After the Civil War, the traditional calendar was established with the confluence of urban and rural interests. Pressures increased to create a system of compulsory education in the United States due to a sudden surge in the student population, and in a response to the nation's leader-

ship viewing common schools as a way to perpetuate the democracy and sustain a civil and obedient society. Although it could be argued that only a small, elite subset of the population received formal education, an influx of immigrants, the need for an educated workforce to accommodate rapid industrialization, and the passage of child labor laws were significant factors that demanded a somewhat universal education.

Considering the history of America's traditional public school calendar, the needs of students have certainly changed since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yet the educational system continues to rely on a schedule whose roots can be traced back to about 150 years ago.

The need for compulsory education was evident, yet the exact duration of an appropriate amount of schooling was still in question. First of all, many urban districts at the time were already pushing for a shorter school year with a longer break during summer months. Growing industrial pollution rendered schools uninhabitable in warmer months, especially with no access to air-conditioning. Also, many teachers required supplemental employment during longer breaks to compensate for low salaries (Rakoff, 1999). Second, on the other end, an appeal to public welfare pressured rural districts to increase the length of their school year. Many school officials contended that obligatory school attendance would protect children from the hazards of industrial labor and allow

more time for the preparation of a capable workforce.

In the end, an increased desire for compulsory education, increased federal influences in public education, and rapid urbanization during the latter half of the 19th century fashioned a compromise between rural and urban values. A series of legal statutes in various states standardizing the amount of compulsory schooling for particular age cohorts continued to the end of the 1800's and into the early 20th century. The length of the average school year continued to shift upward from 170 days during the Civil War period to the average 180-day calendar common in states today.

It would appear then, as many educational historians have suggested, that urban teachers succeeded in their incorporation of a new social function into their teaching — creating classroom norms favoring the authority of rules, clocks, and regulations in order to assist the cultural reproduction of a docile and efficient workforce (Finkelstein, 1989, p. 16).

What may be most interesting about the 180-day school year is not the actual number itself or how it was reached via compromise between urban and rural school systems, but the almost universality of the concept (Rakoff, 1999). Despite the diversity of educational needs in various communities and states, the traditional 180-day school year with lengthy summer break is largely a given. Some states vary on the exact number of days, but most are reasonably close to the 180-day gold standard, with 29 states plus the District of Columbia requiring exactly 180 days (Prendergast, Spradlin, & Palozzi, 2007, p. 2).

Considering the history of America's traditional public school calendar, the needs of students have certainly changed since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yet the educational system continues to rely on a schedule whose roots can be traced back to about 150 years ago. The recent Silva (2007) report suggests that policymakers and educators must consider extended learning time policies and pro-

grams that target low-income students who are most in need of extra learning time. Indeed, it may be time to seriously evaluate more current and viable alternatives to traditional school calendars, leaving nothing off the table to improve the achievement of an increasingly diverse student population. Two approaches that states and local education agencies have implemented are extended school-year calendars and year-round school calendars.

EXTENDED SCHOOL-YEAR CALENDARS

To be clear, a year-round school year and an extended school year are different. Extending a school year merely indicates that a compulsory number of school days will be added to the current school year, thereby shortening the summer vacation period. Most of the arguments for extending a school year claim that summer learning loss can be reduced, especially in students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds who tend to experience a greater degree of the loss. Moreover, proponents of an extended school year cite international comparisons showing that American children spend less time in school relative to other industrialized nations (Cooper, 2003). A move towards extending the school year by as many as 30 days has recently been implemented by the Indianapolis Public School system, which is an issue that will be addressed in a later section of this Policy Brief.

Extending the school year can be an expensive issue, more so than merely lengthening the school day. Changing the calendar affects not only teachers and students, but also a wide range of industries, employers, and parents who rely on the traditional school year (Silva, 2007). Individual demands from each of these groups make a calendar change a difficult reform to implement. Additionally, there are no guarantees that any extra time benefits students who need it the most, namely those at an economic disadvantage, or that the additional days result in quality instructional time. For

instance, even if students and families from low-income backgrounds benefit from extended time, parent groups from middle-class and affluent backgrounds oppose changing calendars because it affects their vacation schedule (Silva, 2007). Ultimately, policymakers will have to decide if any measure that potentially improves achievement of disadvantaged students, such as modified school calendars, serves a greater public good than preserving the summer activities of more affluent families. More likely, states should give local education agencies the authority and the financial support to add days to their school-year calendar.

YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION DEFINED

Different from an extended school year, a year-round calendar redistributes the school days uniformly throughout the year, eliminating a long summer vacation in lieu of shorter breaks called intersessions. For the purposes of this brief, the following definition provided by the National Association of Year-Round Education (NAYRE) will be referenced in all subsequent discussions of the year-round calendar. According to the NAYRE:

Year-round education reorganizes the school year to provide more continuous learning by breaking up the long summer vacation into shorter, more frequent vacations throughout the year. It does not eliminate the summer vacation, but reduces it and redistributes it as vacation or intersession time during the school year. Students attending a year-round school go to the same classes and receive the same instruction as students on a traditional calendar. The year-round calendar is organized into instructional periods and vacation weeks that are more evenly balanced across 12 months than the traditional school calendar. The balanced calendar minimizes the learning loss that occurs during a typical three-month summer vacation (accessed March 1, 2007).

Year-round school calendars have been in use since the latter half of the 19th century. Records indicate their use in various states continues today. One of the first official year-round education (YRE) programs is credited to William Wurt, superintendent of schools in Bluffton, Indiana, who initiated work-study-play schools and his famous year-round “platoon” system. At the time, as many as 240 communities adopted this very successful extended-day, extended-year curriculum-oriented, space-saving plan (Glines, 1997, p. 2). Conventional wisdom maintained that it was inefficient to construct facilities that would only be used for three quarters of the year. Thus, in the name of efficiency and thrift, a number of similar YRE programs sprouted up in various communities throughout the early half of the 20th century.

Many YRE programs did not survive the Depression or World War II, as interests shifted from novel programmatic options to the task of accommodating burgeoning enrollments. An upsurge in these programs has only been experienced in the last few decades, yet these early YRE programs such as the one in Bluffton set the stage for what is seen in the YRE movement today (Glines, 1997, p. 2).

As of the 2005-06 school year, data from the NAYRE indicates that 2,850 public schools utilize YRE calendars with a total enrollment of 2,116,364 students. Moreover, 45 states plus the District of Columbia have public schools that use YRE calendars. Please refer to Figure 1 for a comprehensive map of public, private, and charter YRE schools for the 2005-06 academic year in the United States.

There are myriad ways YRE calendars can be organized, but a tendency is to organize them into two distinct categories — single-track and multi-track calendars. While both categories are considered under the umbrella of year-round education, the two types of calendars serve different purposes.

SINGLE-TRACK YRE

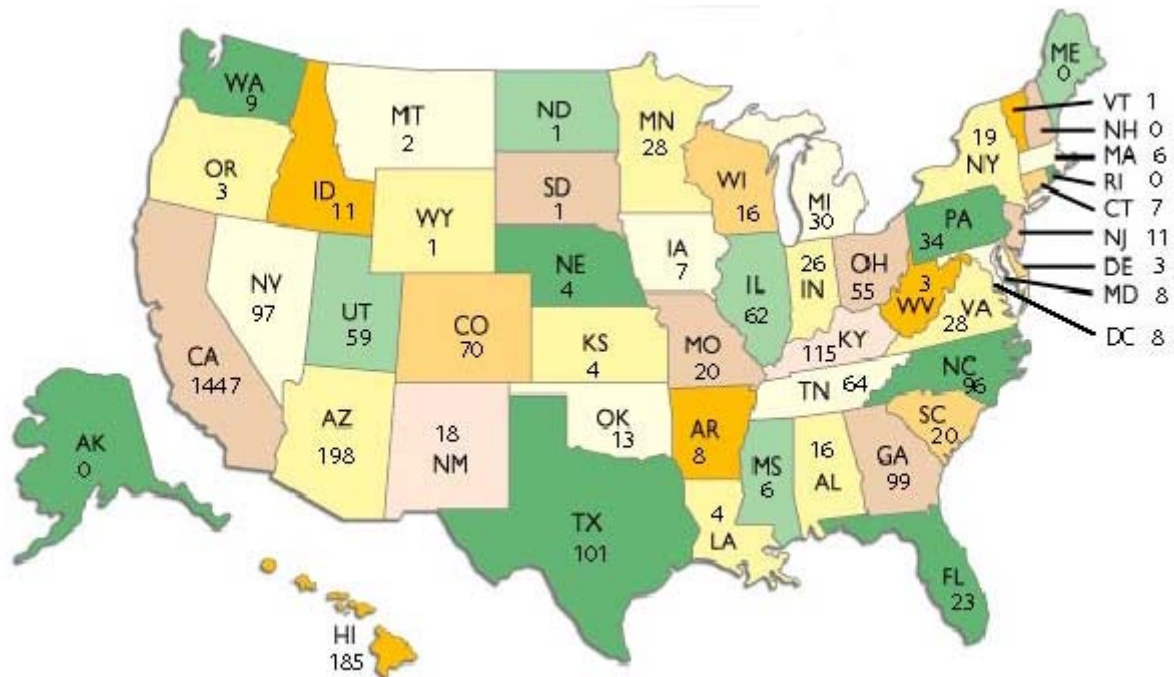
Single-track YRE programs redistribute school days throughout the entire year to eliminate the traditional extended summer break and instead create a number of short intersessions that allow for remediation and enrichment. Options for single-track calendars vary, but the most common ratios according to the NAYRE between school days on and days off are 45-15, 60-20, and 90-30. Single-track schools are not meant to reduce overcrowding or increase the efficient use of facilities since all students are in attendance at the same time. However, single-track YRE programs are touted to provide a more balanced and continuous instructional schedule meant to increase achievement and reduce summer learning loss. Research on this issue will be addressed in a subsequent section of this brief.

MULTI-TRACK YRE

The other category of YRE programs is the multi-track schedule. Although it embraces the basic tenets of YRE, namely a more continuous learning regimen and the intersession, the multi-track school calendar is utilized precisely to alleviate overcrowding in districts with constrained school facilities. In some cases, multi-track programs are implemented as a less costly alternative to constructing new school buildings or temporary structures as a result of increasing enrollments. To alleviate overcrowding, students and teachers are grouped into a number of tracks and assigned their own school schedule. Moreover, according to the NAYRE, each track attends school at different times, thus creating the “school-within-

a-school” concept. As with single-track programs, there are several options available in terms of the ratio of days on to days off school. The total number of tracks must be adjusted to accommodate the desired ratio. For instance, to maintain a 45-15 or 60-20 ratio, the school population must be divided into four distinct tracks. If a 60-15 or 90-30 calendar is desirable, then an additional track is necessary. The above ratios are the most common when multi-track schools are implemented and chosen based on how much capacity needs to increase to meet enrollment.

Figure 1. Number of Public, Charter, and Private Schools with Year-Round Programs, 2005-2006



Source: NAYRE. Reproduced with permission.

RESEARCH ON YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

Ultimately, one must consider the needs of the individual school community before switching to a year-round schedule. Support for year-round education, however, is attributable to three major factors: (1) reduction of summer learning loss with increased student achievement; (2) greater satisfaction among parents, teachers, and students; and (3) cost savings (McMillen, 2001, p. 67). Cutting costs as a result of more efficient use of existing school facilities is often touted as a key benefit of multi-track, year-round schooling and is not usually a consideration for implementing single-track schedules. Communities who seek innovative ways to increase student achievement turn to a modified school calendar as a way to address the negative impacts of summer learning loss. Some reservations with regard to long summer breaks focus on the perceived benefits of continuous instruction and the selectively negative impact of learning loss on students with special needs (Cooper, 2003). Evidence for these benefits is not substantial because little in the way of comprehensive and long-term research has been conducted on the use of year-round education, whether it is single or multi-track, despite their use in schools beginning some time ago.

Opponents cite a number of reasons they do not support YRE programs; including:

- Students learn about the same under YRE.
- Teachers are stressed and frustrated by YRE.
- School administrators suffer burnout because of the unremitting pressure of ‘minding the store.’
- YRE seriously interferes with vacations for many families.
- YRE dilutes or destroys many traditional school and community activities.
- YRE saves no money and may actually cost more (Worthen & Zsiray, 1994, p.2).

Some of the most vehement opponents of YRE come from the tourist industry and teachers’ unions. Many businesses tout the summer season as a boon to their bottom line and many teachers’ groups are generally leery of adding additional days to school calendars. Parent groups also exert considerable pressure against changing the traditional calendar. “Socially conservative by nature and touting family values, groups such as [Save Our Summers] are quickly gaining power in some states” (Cook, 2005, p. 27). Largely from middle-class backgrounds, these groups may ignore the benefits YRE programs can have on lower income students who do not have family structures to support their education over long summer breaks. Such specific benefits of YRE programs on lower SES districts must be considered.

Most of the arguments for extending a school year claim that summer learning loss can be reduced, especially in students from lower SES backgrounds who tend to experience a greater degree of the loss.

Yet continued work needs to be done to solidify the overall benefits of YRE programs. Effective and trustworthy large-scale research studies have not been conducted on the benefits or disadvantages of year-round and other modified school calendars for all types of students. On the other hand, there have been a few comprehensive meta-analyses of research studies on year-round education and other calendar modifications. An inclusive review of literature on YRE done by

Worthen & Zsiray (1994) notes that only a loose collection of research has been completed, most lacking scientific rigor and thus precluding the construction of a stable foundation on which to build future research. Nevertheless, a review of 20 years of research on YRE by the authors reveals a slightly positive result on student attitudes, attendance, dropout rates, and achievement. Overall, both parents and teachers positively rate the impact of YRE programs, especially if organized public relations campaigns are implemented to assuage the fears of opposing groups. Given that a primary justification for YRE programs is the improvement on student achievement, it does not seem promising that these programs only demonstrate modest results.

A more recent review of studies conducted by Cooper et al. (2003) echoes similar concerns with regard to research on YRE programs mentioned previously. They maintain that no truly trustworthy studies have been done on modified school calendars that can serve as the basis for sound policy decisions. Furthermore, serious methodological flaws hinder definitive conclusions from such research:

Matching and statistical control can never completely eliminate concerns about differential selection into treatment groups. The most obvious concern is that groups may be under matched. If important differences between groups are omitted from the matching characteristics, rival hypotheses remain plausible to explain effects otherwise attributable to calendar differences (p. 37).

Of the more than 400 research documents included in the review of the effects of YRE on achievement, it is suggested that the effect of modified calendars on student achievement is modest relative to other educational reforms noted in these studies. On a more positive note, the effects of modified school calendars were greater in districts reporting a higher proportion of students from low SES backgrounds compared to districts with more mixed or moderate economic circumstances (p. 27). Attitudes from parents, students, staff, and administrators fared

much better with results indicating resoundingly positive experiences, especially in programs that were most recently implemented. Nonetheless, longitudinal studies with more rigorous methodologies are necessary to provide stronger evidence for or against YRE and other modified calendar programs.

One final distinction must be reinforced between single- and multi-track year-round programs. As mentioned previously, the central rationales for single-track school calendars tend to be the potential benefits to student achievement through the reduction of summer learning loss and a more symmetrical and continuous mode of academic instruction. Moreover, intersessions in a single-track schedule provide opportunities for remediation or enrichment that may benefit students. Multi-track school calendars are most likely implemented to cut educational costs through a more efficient use of school facilities and resources. Multi-track programs may save costs, but are fraught with logistical problems: less time for large-scale cleaning and maintenance, burnout and fatigue from administration, and lack of coordination with a variety of special education services (Ziebarth, 1997). This brief will now turn to an individual profile of California and the recent systemic problems it faced during a relatively large-scale implementation of multi-track school calendars. As a result of these problems, what was once a state with the most year-round schools in the country, California will phase out most of their year-round schools by the year 2012.

WILLIAMS V. CALIFORNIA

During the 2005-06 school year, California had the largest YRE public school enrollment at 1,264,058 students in approximately 1,500 schools (NAYRE, 2007). In fact, around 60 percent of the nation's year-round-school students were enrolled in the California public school system alone (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005). Thus, when considering the use of modified school calendars, it is reasonable to examine the recent situation in California, which identifies sev-

eral caveats with the implementation of a multi-track year-round calendar.

An important distinction must be made, however, with the problematic type of YRE program utilized in the California public school system. First and foremost, the YRE program in California public schools was organized as a multi-track calendar. Therefore, implementation of multiple tracks rather than a single, unified track was meant to accommodate a rapid increase in the student population while saving costs from the construction of new school facilities. California's unique multi-track schedule was titled the Concept 6 Plan, which was a three-track plan that varied between a rotation of four months on and two months off or two months on and one month off (Orellana & Thorne, 1998). Two critical social and political consequences of this multi-track plan have been noted in order to adequately understand California's problems: the de facto segregation caused by creating distinct "schools within schools" and the significant biases in the distribution of educational resources and opportunities (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005, p. 532).

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Segregation within the multi-track system and subsequent educational disparities have largely been caused by the way students are selected into particular tracks. Overall, multi-track systems rely on three central mechanisms for selection: attendance boundary, program differentiation, and preferential choice (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005). Resources

are then allocated to each specific track based on student needs, but can also be asymmetrically diverted due to the whims of individual staff and faculty.

The coordination of the above three processes typically lead to very different types of programs and students in various tracks, thus resulting in tracks being differentiated by social status. More "privileged" groups may find their way into preferential tracks and also exert social and political pressure to allocate more resources and opportunities to their students' educational programs. For instance, a Los Angeles school district conducted their Korean bilingual program on one specific track. Therefore, all Korean-American students who need this program were assigned to the same track regardless of other factors, such as geography and personal preference. Ethnicity being highlighted in such a manner is one way institutional practices indirectly lead to racial segregation in a multi-track school (Orellana & Thorne, 1998).

Another significant and one of the most contentious problems with California's Concept 6 Plan was logistical in nature. In order to address significant overcrowding in schools with three tracks, it was necessary to eliminate as many as 17 days of the school year while increasing the length of the school day by 40 minutes. "This is justified by a quantitative or utilitarian view of time units as interchangeable, with each minute equal to any other minute, without regard to qualitative experience or context of placement" (Orellana & Thorne, 1998, p. 456). A four-track schedule would increase the number of possible school days but reduce the amount of available instructional space and was therefore less preferable. It is precisely this meticulous obsession with the clock that the critics contend was a major source of California's problems. According to the authors, measurement of the quantities of time says nothing of the quality of that time. Thus, the logistical requirements of time management on paper stole significant attention away from the quality of instructional time in schools.

If there exists a trend towards initiating calendar changes, such as extended year or YRE, then transitions away from traditional calendars can be more successful if the surrounding communities are adequately informed and empowered to choose what is best for their students.

Quality of instructional time, however, was not the only factor to draw the ire of the ACLU and other civil and legal rights organizations in the case of *Williams v. California*. The case was filed as a class-action lawsuit on May 17, 2000, against the state of California in order to address the denial of the basic tools fundamental to an adequate education under the state's constitution (Allen, 2005, p. 9). Factors relevant to the ineffectual use of the Concept 6 multi-track plan were only part of the overall problems with California's public school system. Plaintiffs argued that a systemic crisis existed with regard to several deficiencies in the system, namely with the poor allocation of educational resources and the provision of safe and clean facilities. The lack of clean school facilities most likely references multi-track YRE programs directly. Since there are students in school almost every weekday of the year, a thorough cleaning of buildings is not possible.

A settlement between parties was reached on August 13, 2004, with the passage of five bills based on legislative proposals from the initial lawsuit. One of those laws was AB 1550, which outlined the "phasing out of the use of Concept 6 multi-track, year-round school calendar[s] by July 1, 2012, and setting bench-

marks for districts to reach this goal" (Allen, 2005, p. 11). The lawsuit found serious faults in the need to reduce the number of instructional days to 163 in order to accommodate a Concept 6 multi-track plan. Any student enrolled in a school with a Concept 6 plan was at a serious disadvantage in terms of educational opportunities. When taken as a whole, "MT-YRE schools have somewhat lower achievement, a bit more challenging student populations, and slightly less adequate resources than traditional-calendar schools" (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005, p. 549).

Additionally, the de facto race and class segregation that can take place within a multi-track school create an environment in MT-YRE schools where students are at a summative disadvantage from a variety of fronts. With Concept 6 removed as a result of widespread discontent, action plans mandated by the settlement reveal the construction of new facilities as a way to address growing enrollments so that students may attend school in their own community. Moreover, in eliminating multi-track calendars, some schools are adopting single-track YRE calendars to improve educational achievement. Further supervision will be necessary in California to ensure successful implementation of the *Williams v. California* settlement.

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR AND YRE IN INDIANA

Recent data from the Indiana Department of education indicates that 17 schools in six districts and four charter schools in Indiana used some form of year-round education calendar during the 2006-07 school year, with a total enrollment of approximately 8,023 students. Table 1 provides the most current listing of schools on year-round education calendars in Indiana. Indiana Code currently provides the state superintendent with the authority to "encourage the development and establishment of innovative or exemplary school calendars" (IC 20-30-2-8), but makes no reference to any particular types of calendar

reforms. Such information indicates an opportunity for YRE or extended calendars in Indiana.

LOCAL ALTERNATIVE CALENDAR ISSUES

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) recently extended a proposed modification of school calendars at six middle schools and two elementary schools in the district, requiring that students attend school an extra six weeks to mitigate low test scores (Gammill, 2007a). School officials cite freedom to work with at-risk students and the mitigation of summer learning loss as key educational advantages. Since the proposal's initial introduction, IPS moved to extend the calendar from 180 days to 210 in four struggling middle schools that currently enroll almost 2,000 students. The four schools plan to use their extra time enriching students with guest speakers or re-teaching lessons for those who need extra help (Gammill, 2007b).

An address given by IPS Superintendent Dr. Eugene White at a recent NAYRE conference adds insight behind the recent calendar modifications in several IPS schools that "will extend learning time and reduce the loss of that which has been learned" (White, 2007). He cites in his keynote address specific student groups who stand to benefit the most from year-round education:

Those students with learning problems and gaps; those students learning English as a second language; those students learning English as a first language; those students who need more time for learning; those student who need enrichment and unique educational experiences; and those students who really want to retain what we taught them last June (White, 2007).

TABLE 1. Information for Year-round Schools in Indiana as of the 2006-07 School Year

County	School	Student Population	Description of School Calendar
Boone	Harney Elementary School	K-5	180 days, alternative schedule, two-week fall, holiday, spring breaks; approx. seven-week summer vacation
Harrison	Lanesville Elementary School	K-8	180 days, 45-10 balanced YRE calendar, with two-week intersessions and approx. six-week summer break
Harrison	Lanesville Junior/Senior High School	7-12	180 days, 45-10 balanced YRE calendar, with two-week intersessions and approx. six-week summer break
Lake	KIPP Lead College Prep Charter School	5-8	Extended day and year calendar, approx. 200 days, Saturday school > twice per month, three-week summer session
Marion	21st Century Charter School Fall Creek	K-11	194-day extended year calendar
Marion	Brookview Elementary School	K-5	180 days, 9 weeks of instruction, 2-3 week intersessions, 5.5 weeks summer break
Marion	Daniel Webster School 46	K-6	Initial 11-week session, followed by a 45-15 calendar for the remainder
Marion	Eagle Creek Elementary School	PK-5	Continuous 182 days, organized into trimesters of 61-65-56 instructional days; varying intersessions
Marion	Ernie Pyle School 90	K-5	180 days, initial 45-15 calendar with declining duration of intersessions from three weeks down to one week
Marion	Fishback Creek Public Academy	K-5	Continuous 182 days, organized into trimesters of 61-65-56 instructional days; year-round classes
Marion	Henry W. Longfellow Middle School	7-8	For 2007-08 school year, moving from 185 to 210 day YRE calendar; variable ratio, initially 55-5, then 50-10 and 55-5
Marion	Irvington Community School	K-9	200 days, extended holiday break, one-week fall and spring breaks, six-week summer vacation
Marion	Key Learning Academy	K-12	180 days, 45-15 YRE calendar
Marion	Lowell Elementary School	K-5	180 days, 9 weeks of instruction, 2-3 week intersessions, 5.5 weeks summer break
Marion	Moorhead Elementary School	K-5	180 days; 45-15 YRE calendar
Marion	New Augusta Public Academy-North	6-8	Continuous 182 days, organized into trimesters of 61-65-56 instructional days; year-round classes
Marion	New Augusta Public Academy-South	K-5	Continuous 182 days, organized into trimesters of 61-65-56 instructional days; varying intersessions
Marion	Southeast Neighborhood School of Excellence	K-5	180-day YRE calendar, approx. 11 weeks in attendance with three two-week intersessions
Marion	Stonybrook Middle School	6-8	180 days; 45-15 YRE calendar
Marion	Warren Early Childhood Center	PK-K	Traditional and year-round program - parental choice. YRE program 7/20 to 6/8 with two 15-day intersessions
Vanderburgh	Lincoln Elementary School	PK-5	Two 45-15 semesters with one-week holiday break

Source: Indiana Department of Education, various district and school web sites.

Reactions to the initial proposal and the subsequent calendar extension are mixed. Officials recognize the hardships that the extra 30 days may impose on families, namely those with students on different school schedules. Students predictably note that they would not enjoy being in attendance longer than peers from other schools. Another concern raised is that of cost; extra days will extend the commitments of teachers and increase expenditures for facilities. IPS plans to utilize Title I funds to pay for the extended school year since the four schools in question qualify for these supplementary resources.

Susan Howard, Principal of Lowell Elementary School in Marion County, Indiana, argued that giving parents and other community members the choice to adopt a modified school calendar potentially eases the transition (Susan Howard, personal communication, October 20, 2006). Adopting a single-track YRE calendar at Lowell Elementary School was a choice option for parents more than ten years ago. Ms. Howard, who was principal during the transition, contended that the calendar change resulted in improved test scores due to a periodically refreshed staff and student body, plus additional time for remediation. The lesson here may be in the administration of a transition to a modified school calendar. If there exists a trend towards initiating calendar changes, such as extended year or YRE, then transitions away from traditional calendars can be more successful if the surrounding communities are adequately informed and empowered to choose what is best for their students. Imposing calendar reform, or other changes for that matter, may provoke resistance rather than encourage cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Proponents and opponents of calendar modifications both cite various reasons for and against the implementation of year-round education. Supporters of year-round or extended calendars argue that summer learning loss can be reduced and more time would be possible for enrichment or remediation activities. Opponents of calendar modifications, on the other hand, contend that the perceived benefits are too modest to necessitate drastic change and the traditional calendar is far too entrenched in the fabric of society to tear it away. Moreover, opposition of YRE does not necessarily arise from the education sector. Resistance to changing the school calendar can come from groups who are less motivated by student achievement, such as the tourism industry, and are more motivated to preserve an extended summer vacation to maintain a significant source of their revenue.

Recommendation

Comprehensive research must be done on a longitudinal basis as to the benefits of modifying the school year to an extended calendar or year-round education. Both of the major reviews of YRE research cited in this Policy Brief lament that definitive conclusions could not be reached with regard to the benefits of modified school calendars. Yet, modest benefits of modified school calendars have been shown in schools with a higher proportion of low SES backgrounds. Districts such as IPS clearly advocate for calendar change based on these purported benefits, implementing an extended year calendar in at least four schools that require an extra boost in achievement. Nonetheless, districts implementing calendar change in the face of inconclusive or minimal empirical evidence demonstrate the need for this issue to be examined with greater methodological rigor, especially considering the costs of changing the school day or year. School districts embarking on the use of a modified

calendar must document student achievement outcomes and regularly evaluate its benefits.

Conclusion

There are a vast number of potential extended and year-round education modifications. For instance, choosing a particular YRE calendar option depends on the desired ratio of instructional days to vacation days. The NAYRE identifies one of the most common types of YRE calendar as the single-track 45-15 schedule. In this model, 45 instructional days precede a 15-day intersession when further enrichment and remediation are possible to improve student achievement. Proponents of YRE also cite the recuperative advantages of an intersession, giving students and staff some much-needed rest in a more symmetrical fashion throughout the school year. But there are also considerations as to the number of tracks that are necessary for a particular school community, which depend on the needs of the district.

If a district is interested in raising student achievement regardless of cost, then a single-track YRE calendar is an option. However, multi-track schools are implemented precisely to accommodate rapidly growing enrollments while saving costs on the construction of new facilities. A focus on costs and meticulous attention to the accounting of time may have been the causes of California's failed implementation of multi-track YRE schools outlined above.

Recommendation

Seek clarity on the ultimate goal of the calendar modification. Cutting costs or increasing student achievement will determine which scheduling reform is most appropriate. Moreover, the nature of the transition away from the traditional calendar requires detailed consideration. As indicated above by Susan Howard, calendar modifications as choice options for parents and other community members may yield more positive results. This would require fre-

quent collaboration and informational sessions with members of the community to ensure that the calendar changes are in the best interests of the students. In the end, it is student achievement and their well-being that should be the focus of any discussion on school calendars and not the needs of special interest groups who may be less concerned with the quality of education.

Conclusion

Focusing on the number of minutes in a school day or the number of instructional days per year does not ensure the effective use of time. There must be a guarantee that the instructional time is used effectively and reaches the students who require the most support before more time is granted. Any reform based on time must also consider issues of quality rather than just the quantitative measures of seconds, minutes, or days. Just because a student is in school an extra 40 minutes per day does not provide an assurance that the extra time is being used effectively and resources are diverted to their best use first. Furthermore, according to the Silva (2007) report, “research shows that extending the right kind of time to the students who need it most can improve student learning and effectively close achievement gaps between poor and minority students and their more affluent peers... the benefits of adding time to the school day or year are by no means certain or universal” (p. 9).

Recommendation

Considering that the origins of the traditional calendar in the United States stretch to the very early years of the country, there should be little doubt that the needs of the public school population have changed since then. Moreover, in order to meet those new demands, innovative educational reforms that accommodate an increasingly diverse society are necessary. Before such change is enacted, however, it is essential to evaluate the current use of school time to ensure its effective use on

engaged academic learning. If students are not doing well in certain schools and time is not being used efficiently, how can requiring more time in those institutions actually solve the problem? Continued research and analysis of instructional time already within the purview of public schools should be conducted before increasing the amount of time students must spend in such an environment.

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WEB RESOURCES

National Association of Year-Round Education (NAYRE)

<http://www.nayre.org>

Education Sector

<http://www.educationsector.org>

Summer Matters

<http://www.summermatters.com>

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)

<http://www.kipp.org>

ERIC Digests

<http://www.ericdigest.org>

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