

Open Letter Submitted to the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) School Board, Superintendent of Schools, Alexandria City Council, and the Community:

The undersigned parents and Alexandria residents are concerned about the proposed expansion of the Modified School Calendar (MSC) program to the Mount Vernon Community School, and its potential expansion to other public schools in Alexandria. Given the research that has already been conducted to analyze students' performance when on a MSC (also known as year round school or YRS) as compared to a traditional calendar, we have grave doubts that the stated objectives of a MSC are achievable. Thus, before spending more precious resources on a very expensive program that has already been implemented at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School, we respectfully request the School Board to develop a task force to fully study the MSC issue. This study should result in a public report that includes a review of the MSC program at Tucker, a review of the ACPS' plans for expanding the program to other schools, an analysis of the research on MSC, a cost/benefit analysis of the program, and the conclusions and recommendations of the School Board.

All accredited schools in Alexandria achieved accreditation through the traditional calendar. So we question the urgency in radically modifying the school calendar. MSC will put our children out of sync with their community and with the nation (less than 3% of schools are MSC); it creates difficulties for families with children in more than one school; it sharply curtails the different, non-academic, learning experiences from which children benefit in summer, and it overturns a traditional calendar that has been proven successful. Moreover, a number of schools in other jurisdictions that have tried MSC have switched back to the traditional calendar. You may be interested in a quote from a research report prepared by the Canadian British Columbia Teacher's Federation, which collected and analyzed over 300 papers on year-round schools:

{From the introduction:}

After two years of participation in the pilots and detailed analysis of the literature, we say with some confidence that year-round education is not worth the hassle—the problems associated with it are greater than any benefits.

The report then goes on to quote data derived from many other studies and reports. For example,

The (1993) Resnik study of Oakland Unified School District, California, concluded: "Students at year-round schools show on average a lower academic achievement level than those at other schools, and their achievement has decreased for the period, while it increased for the school in the regular calendar."

The Los Angeles Times of May 28, 1993 reported the results of a vote by parents, teachers, and administrators on single-track year-round schools. The vote was allowed by the district when it was found that single track schools were costing an additional 4.2 million annually. 544 school communities were invited to vote. 543 voted to scrap single-track year-round schools.

Dr. Leo Wisebender, the Assistant Director of Evaluation of Los Angeles School District said: "There is no evidence for higher academic gains under the year-round program as compared to traditional schools in the Los Angeles school system. Don't you think we'd have all our schools on year-round if there were academic advantages? In fact, most schools get off year-round when given a chance."

The San Diego Union Tribune reported that: "San Diego schools lose nearly \$2 million a year because of poor attendance in year-round schools that start the academic year in July instead of September. The district's 38 year-round schools have an attendance rate 15% lower than those of schools with traditional calendars, and 82% have test scores below the district average in reading, language and mathematics.

In Florida, the Orlando Sentinel (October 25, 1995) reported
...Angry parents from school districts across the state packed a legislative hearing on the issue. ... The Seminole County School Board voted Thursday to virtually eliminate year-round education next year, following a crescendo of complaints from teachers and parents.

Recently, one of our parents contacted Dr. Nancy Snyder, the Chief of Staff of the Duvall County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida to find out why that jurisdiction had recently abandoned the MSC. Dr. Snyder stated that the MSC program "totally failed." Dr. Snyder stated that children did not achieve in the program, teachers were worn out, parents were irritated, and children began to resent going to school when their peers were in summer camps.

With so many questions concerning the proposed benefits of MSC, wouldn't the School Board serve the children of Alexandria better by carefully studying the research behind MSC before rushing into an *expensive program*? Last year alone, an additional \$365,105 was budgeted to Samuel Tucker to fund that school's MSC program. This year, the proposed budget includes another \$396,877 for a MSC program at Mount Vernon. That's greater than \$750,000 for just two schools! We have also heard that other schools are considering the MSC for future academic years, most recently Jefferson Houston Elementary School.

Frankly, if we knew the program delivered what its proponents say about it, there would not be a parent who wouldn't provide full support. Many of the claims made for the MSC are vague and unquantifiable. Parents have been provided with no proof or data to support them. So that the Board better understands our concerns, we address three key claims that are proposed as the basis for the need for a MSC.

1. The first major claim is that the MSC maximizes achievement and improves performance on standardized tests.

At a panel meeting that occurred this past fall at Mount Vernon Community School, two education experts, Ron Fairchild and Ross E. Mitchell, Ph.D (from Johns Hopkins University and Gallaudet University respectively) agreed that current research showed no evidence that MSC programs result in improved academic achievement. As far as we are aware, the only study reports claiming improvement in academic achievement are

connected with the National Association of Year Round Education (NAYRE). This is an *avid* advocacy group for year-round school. Thus, just as we expect the Food and Drug Administration to carefully scrutinize a pharmaceutical company's claim that its studies show its new drug to be safer and better than current therapies, we should carefully scrutinize the studies put out by NAYRE.

No large independent study supports NAYRE's conclusions. Quite to the contrary, independent studies and independent reviews of NAYRE studies consistently show that MSC neither helps nor harms student achievement. One of the largest such studies to date was conducted by the North Carolina Department of Education. This study involved a comprehensive review of research on year-round school, and came to the following conclusion:

After controlling for possible effects due to district, grade level, gender, ethnicity, parental education level, prior achievement and average school-level achievement, there were no significant achievement differences between year-round and traditional calendar students in either reading ($F = 0.91, p < .48$) or math ($F = 0.89, p < .85$). Neither group appeared to perform any better than the other between the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years (Figure 1).

This is available from NC's state website (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/Accountability/evaluation/evalbriefs/vol2n2-yr.html>).

2. The Second Major Claim is that MSC Reduces Learning Loss

The second claim made in support of MSC is that it will minimize learning loss suffered by children as a result of the long summer vacations associated with the traditional calendar. There is a lot of research on this, and there are a lot of different opinions. Promoters of MSC say that children lose most with the long summer break calendar. But others say that the *many breaks* of the MSC cause comparable loss. There's also the question of what learning loss is. Generally, children—just like adults—don't lose fundamental skills during the time they are out of school. That is, they don't forget how to add, subtract, or multiply, but they are more likely to forget things like state capitals. Regardless, as discussed above, since MSC does not show greater achievement compared to the traditional calendar on standardized tests, it may be that learning loss does not have a significant impact on children.

While the long-term significance of summer learning loss is unproven, it is clear that Alexandria has existing summer programs that can address both the concerns about the continued exposure to academic English for our many ESL students, while addressing both the remedial and enrichment needs of all students in the City of Alexandria.

Certainly, if the focus is on helping children most at risk academically, ACPS should be addressing it on a larger scale in connection with all the children of Alexandria. Our

friends across the river in Montgomery County, Maryland addressed this concern through the adoption of an enriched four week summer program and found that:

Students who attended most, if not all, of a four-week summer program known as Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) achieved, on average, higher levels of skill development in reading and mathematics in the first month of Grades 1, 2, and 3 this year, than did their classmates who did not attend the program.

Further, expansion of existing summer programs leave the option with parents as to how they believe their children will be best served during the summer. While some parents may believe an additional 30 days of enrichment and remedial work in the school environment is integral to their children's success in the future, other parents believe that other activities better suit the needs of their children during the summer."

3. The Third Major Claim is that MSC Addresses the Need for Affordable Day Care in the Summer

Lastly, there is the matter of affordable care in the summer. And here too, are there not other solutions besides turning the school calendar upside down. Alexandria has a lot of wonderful summer programs that accommodate children who need partial or full fee waivers. Many of our own children attend these programs run by both the YMCA and the Alexandria Department of Recreation and are very happy with them. We know that the Alexandria Department of Recreation specifically added a staff member to assist Spanish speaking citizens with completion of the camp application process.

Summer is a magic time for children. They don't stop learning during summer. They just learn in a different way. They become active learners, and being away from school, they spend more time outdoors, they meet a whole new set of friends, they get to know their community in a way they didn't before, they get a fresh perspective, and they gain confidence.

With this in mind, if child care is a priority issue, wouldn't every child be better served by a daily swim in the pool during the summer, a chance to learn to roller blade, play tennis, or just hang out with other kids in a safe, low-key, and friendly environment? Wouldn't this option be better for our children rather than forcing them to stay in the same four walls year-in and year-out?

We respect those persons who believe that MSC is the best option for them. But is "believing" enough for the School Board to continue expanding an expensive program which the Board has not fully analyzed. Although options are questionable in light of the overcrowding at many other Alexandria schools, many of the parents signing this letter who live in the Mount Vernon Community School district will choose to remove their children from Mount Vernon Community School or seek alternative schools if a MSC is

adopted. For those of us who do not live in the Mount Vernon school district, there is a concern that the MSC program will continue to expand to other schools without any real plan, strategy, or concrete studies. Thus, if the School Board decides to adopt the Mount Vernon Community School MSC proposal despite the many reservations set forth herein, we are hopeful that the MSC program will not continue to expand to other ACPS schools without further significant study.

Respectfully submitted,

**Robert and Ann Seidenberg
Tim and Sharon Smith
Dan and Mary Beth Porter
Larry and Stephanie Campbell
Will and Denise Dunbar
Georg and Natalie Juenger
Ruffin and Cathy Tyler
Brent and Carlene Bahler
Derek and Sissy Walker
Michael and Tamar Powers
Priscilla Goodwin
Richard and Eleanor Seline
Richard and Nancy Crowley
Currie Smith
Malicia Kromer
Terry Davis
Elizabeth Agnew
Elizabeth Schneider
Steve Cousins
Pam Frost
Vince Ruble
Carmen Urban
Elizabeth and Bill Martineau
David and Sandy Hoag
Lori Arrasmith Quill
Colleen O'Malley
Jim Lager
Kate Watters
James Boissonnalt
Laurie Young
Amy and Douglas Zang
Lisa and Dominic Pastore
Sharon Widmayer
Caroline Nold
Jan and Greg Olmstead**

**Roland and Karen Lemke
Nick and Laura Devereux
Stacy and Phillip Norris
Bridget Gazzo
Jennifer Delaney
Jennifer and Tim Adams
Pam Chavez
Peter and Carrie Dykhuis
James and Dorothy Breeding
Jeanne and Eric Dagradi
Page and Patsy Smith
Susan Lathrop
Rob and Frances Talley
Jennifer Dougherty
Jennifer Collins
Cindy and Mark Anderson
Peter Leiberg
Beth and James Jones
Ann and Tom Scully
John and Diane Ehrman
Michelle Dewakar
Kevin and JaneAnne Gleason
Susan and Frank Hyre
Craig and Julie Church
Lee Quill
Mark Phillips
Katie and Kelsey Regen
Betsy Cox and Scott Mace
Bethany and Patrick Burns
Joni Finegold
Molly and Jeb Burns
Heather and Freeman Jelks
Rocky and Kathy Semmes
Karen and Attison Barnes**

Overwhelming parental support for a Modified School Calendar (MSC) at Mount Vernon Community School, is often cited in the press, by the superintendent of schools and by school board members. Attached, is the actual letter sent home to parents announcing the vote tally. Also included in this cover letter are the undisputed facts that concern the vote.

This initiative passed with the precise numerical minimum necessary to move the proposal forward for consideration. Information describing procedures and policies pertaining to instituting a MSC are conveyed verbally, there is no documentation on the ACPS web site that articulates the rules which drives proposals for review. There is no information explaining why MSC is being pursued, a stated objective of the program, or a timetable and criteria to gauge its' success.

Fifth Grade parents were not provided with ballots based on the premise that, as their children would not suffer the consequences of a MSC, their opinion should not impact the outcome. Conversely, no accommodations were made to register the preferences of kindergarten parents whose children would be affected by MSC.

Votes were tracked and recorded individually, as parents were asked to hand them in personally to teachers at parent-teacher conferences

Prior to the vote, multiple fliers were sent home with students, promoting a MSC which did not reflect nor report the findings of the MSC Task Force. Disadvantages and problems caused by a MSC as discovered and discussed by the Task Force were never presented to families.

Parents seeking to have their children attend another ACPS school, exercising the opt out option that had been promised in the MSC plan, were subjected to lengthy conversations with representatives of the superintendent's office to defend the motivation and justification of their vote. As of yet, not one of these parents has been offered alternative placement for their children.

Parallel programs to MSC, such as intensive summer enrichment, were not investigated at either Tucker or Mt. Vernon, even to provide a context to compare the claims made by its' proponents. School board chairman Wilkoff and Dr. Lopez, principle of Mt. Vernon, refused engage in conversation that did not focus exclusively on a MSC.



Mount Vernon Community School

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December 3, 2004

Dear Parents,

Here are the Modified School Calendar Survey results:

| | Ballots In Favor | | Ballots Against | | Ballots No Response | | Total Votes |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # |
| Grand Total | 210 | 75.000 | 69 | 24.643 | 1 | 0.357 | 280 |

Number of ballots sent to parents= 351

Minimum number of returned ballots required = 70%, or 246

Total number of ballots received from parents = 280

Total number of ballots needed to reach 75% approval rate - 210

This information was tabulated by Monitoring and Evaluation Services, ACPS.

We have submitted a proposal to the Superintendent's office for her consideration. We will keep you informed of any information we receive regarding the status of our proposal.

Thank you all for your continued support of our school!

Sincerely,

Lilia "Lulu" Lopez, Ph.D.
 Principal

Evaluation Brief

Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, Phillip J. Kirk Jr., Chairman
Department of Public Instruction, Michael E. Ward, State Superintendent

Volume 2, Number 2
February 2000

Year-Round Schools and Achievement in North Carolina

Although different people use the term “year-round education” in different ways, it is most accurately summed up by the National Association for Year-Round Education (2000):

Year-round education (YRE) reorganizes the school year to provide more continuous learning by dividing the long summer vacation into shorter, more frequent breaks. Students in a year-round program attend the same classes and receive the same amount of instruction as students on a nine-month calendar (usually 180 days)...The year-round calendar is organized into instructional blocks and vacation periods that are evenly distributed across 12 months.

There are two basic models of year-round education – school wide (SW) and school-within-a-school (SWS). In the SW model, all students attend on a year-round (12-month) calendar. In the SWS model, some students attend on a year-round calendar, while others attend on the traditional nine-month calendar. Teachers in the SWS model are also usually divided into two groups – those who teach in the traditional program, and those who teach in the year-round program. The SWS model basically creates one traditional August-May program and one year-round program, each with its own teachers and students, but operating on the same campus with the same administrative staff. Although there are many types of calendar arrangements in year-round schools, the most common is a 45/15 schedule, where students attend for 45 days (9 weeks) and then go on break for 15 days (3 weeks). These shorter breaks are typically referred to as *intersessions*.

Some SW year-round schools also operate as “multi-track” year-round schools. In these schools, different groups (i.e., tracks) of students begin the school year at different times, with the intersession schedules for each track being spaced out in such a way that at least one track of students is always on break. Multi-track year-round schools are often implemented to ease overcrowding because the school building can then accommodate more students than if they all attended at the same time.

Facts about Year-Round Schools in North Carolina:

- Year-round schools have been operating in North Carolina since 1990.
- There were 133 year-round schools in 45 districts in North Carolina in 1998-99.
- Most year-round schools are at the elementary (81%) or middle (13%) school level.
- Most are single-track (87%), and most are on an approximate 45/15 schedule (94%).
- Most offer some form of instructional activities during intersessions (94%).
- 68% of year-round schools operate a SW model and 32% operate a SWS model.
- Compared to traditional calendar schools, students in SW year-round schools are *more* likely to be Black (38% vs. 27%); however, in schools operating a SWS model, the students in the year-round track are *less* likely to be Black (30% vs. 36%)¹.

¹ These data are based on students in grades 3 through 8.

Research on Year-Round Schools

Interest in year-round schools can essentially be attributed to three perceived advantages of a year-round calendar: increased student achievement, greater parent/teacher/student satisfaction, and cost savings. The first two are often mentioned in conjunction with all year-round schools, while cost savings are typically associated only with multi-track year-round schools, as they can help postpone the need to build new schools in areas experiencing significant population growth (Inger, 1994).

Several reviews of year-round education research have been conducted (Kneese, 1996; Merino, 1983; Worthen & Zsiray, 1990), with the general consensus being that the outcomes of year-round education are equal to or better than those achieved under the traditional school calendar. The basic conclusions from these reviews are:

- Achievement in year-round schools is equal to or greater than in traditional schools.
- Teachers and students in year-round schools have more positive perceptions of their school.
- Although there will always be some parents who do not like year-round calendars, most parents will be satisfied with a year-round program if it is well-implemented.
- Single-track year-round programs will cost as much or more than traditional school programs, while multi-track year-round programs can result in significant cost savings.

Although researchers have not adequately offered reasons why achievement may be slightly higher in year-round schools, one possibility is that year-round schools can use intersessions to provide remediation and enrichment activities. Another possible explanation is that splitting up the long summer vacation into smaller pieces helps to alleviate some of the “forgetting” has been shown to occur with the traditional school calendar (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay & Greathouse, 1996).

Existing research on year-round schools, however, has suffered from a variety of limitations that make it difficult to draw solid conclusions. For example, year-round schools (especially SWS programs) are often schools of choice, raising the possibility that observed differences in outcomes between year-round and traditional schools may be due to characteristics of the families and students who choose year-round schools. In addition, some studies have used the term “year-round” to refer to schools that have more than 180 instructional days per year (e.g., Gandara & Fish, 1994), raising the question of whether some year-round achievement advantages might actually be due to an increase in total instructional time.

Achievement Analyses

To study further the issue of academic achievement in year-round schools, the Evaluation Section of the Department of Public Instruction studied a matched sample of year-round and traditional public schools in North Carolina using data from the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years.

Study Design. Based on survey data and several archival data sources, 65 schools were identified that operated a school-wide year-round calendar in grades 3 through 8 during 1997-98². Each of these 65 schools was then matched with a traditional calendar school that satisfied each of the following criteria:

- was located in the same LEA.
- served approximately the same grade levels.
- had a parent population with similar levels of education.
- had a similar percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch.
- had a similar number of students tested.
- had a similar percentage of students tested who were White.

² Only schools operating a SW year-round calendar were included in this study. Schools operating a SWS model during the 1997-98 school year were not included due to two major factors: 1) SW year-round calendars are the most common form of year-round education in North Carolina, and 2) The differences between SW and SWS models are too numerous to consider combining them into one group. For example, SWS programs are often designed so that the year-round “track” is optional, while SW year-round schools are less likely to have optional enrollment (i.e., students are more likely to be assigned to the school).

The matching procedure was conducted so that schools were as similar as possible with respect to those six characteristics, thereby lessening the possibility that any observed differences in achievement between the two types of schools could be explained by those factors. For 15 of the 65 year-round schools, a matching traditional calendar school could not be found from the same LEA. In those cases, a match was found either from a neighboring LEA or another LEA that was similar in size and urbanization.

Data Preparation. Since end-of-grade (EOG) tests are given only in grades 3 through 8, and because the study was designed to look at achievement gains from 1996-97 (Year 1) to 1997-98 (Year 2), the study used all of the available data from students who took EOG tests in grades 4 through 8 during Year 2. The final sample included almost 28,000 students who took EOG tests in either reading or mathematics in Year 2 at a given grade level and who also took the EOG test in that same subject area in Year 1 at the previous grade level. Therefore, students who did not have available data in a given subject area for both years were excluded from the analysis for that subject area. Students who were retained during Year 2 were excluded from all analyses. Because the scale on which EOG scores are based is not the same across grade levels, scale scores were standardized to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 prior to conducting any analyses.

Other Variables. Using additional demographic data, a variety of student-level and school-level factors which are commonly associated with academic achievement were created to be used in the achievement analyses. Although the actual focus of the analyses was to examine differences between year-round and traditional calendar conditions, these other factors were included to provide a more precise test of that difference and also to help rule out potential competing explanations, should any differences be found. The same six factors were used for both the reading and mathematics analyses. In addition to gender, ethnicity, and parental education level, these also included the average test score in the student's school during Year 2, the ethnic composition of the school³, and the student's prior achievement (based on her/his EOG test score in the same subject area from Year 1). Therefore, any differences that might emerge between the two calendar conditions in the analysis could be said to be "over and above" any effects that might be attributed to these other factors or the matching criteria listed earlier.

Results

After controlling for possible effects due to district, grade level, gender, ethnicity, parental education level, prior achievement and average school-level achievement, there were no significant achievement differences between year-round and traditional calendar students in either reading ($F = 0.91$, $p < .48$) or math ($F = 0.89$, $p < .85$). Neither group appeared to perform any better than the other between the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years (Figure 1).

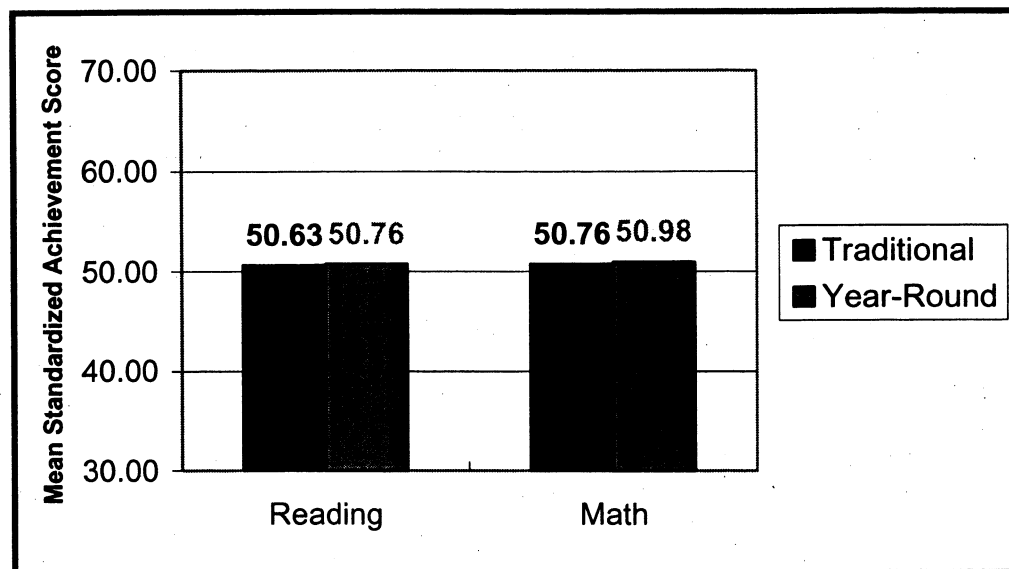
Previous research on year-round education suggests that students in year-round schools will perform as well as or better than their traditional calendar counterparts. The results reported here do not imply any clear advantage or disadvantage to year-round education with respect to student achievement in reading and math. Although increased achievement is often touted as a benefit of year-round education, the results of the current investigation would suggest that the utility of year-round education should probably be judged instead on cost savings, stakeholder preferences, and other factors. If year-round education can result in more positive outcomes in non-academic areas while being at least neutral in terms of student achievement, then it may be a desirable option in many circumstances.

Cautions Regarding Interpretation of These Results. Because these analyses included only K-8 school-wide year-round schools, the results cannot be generalized to year-round schools operating a SWS model or to any grade levels other than 3 through 8. The current analyses also did not allow for the

³ This variable was included due to a small (4%) difference in the ethnic composition of the two groups even after the attempt to match schools based on ethnicity.

examination of differences between single-track and multi-track year-round schools, as both types were included together in the year-round school sample. In addition, because this study was not a true randomized experiment (i.e., children were not randomly assigned to schools and schools were not randomly chosen to operate on a year-round calendar), the obtained results offer only a tentative comparison of achievement in year-round versus traditional schools.

Figure 1: Reading And Math Achievement – Year-Round vs. Traditional Students



References

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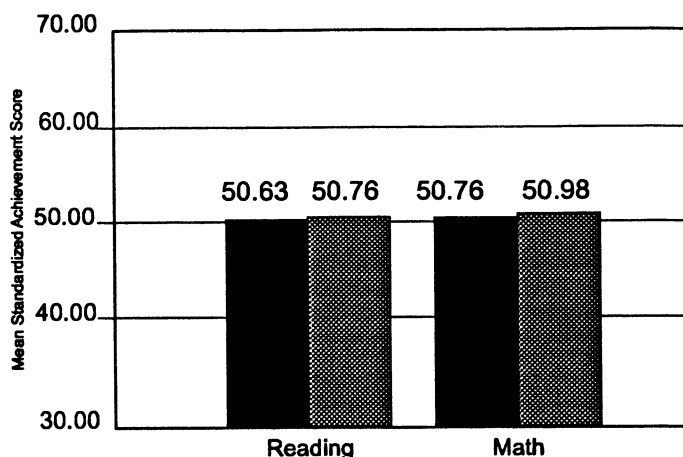
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What the Research Says

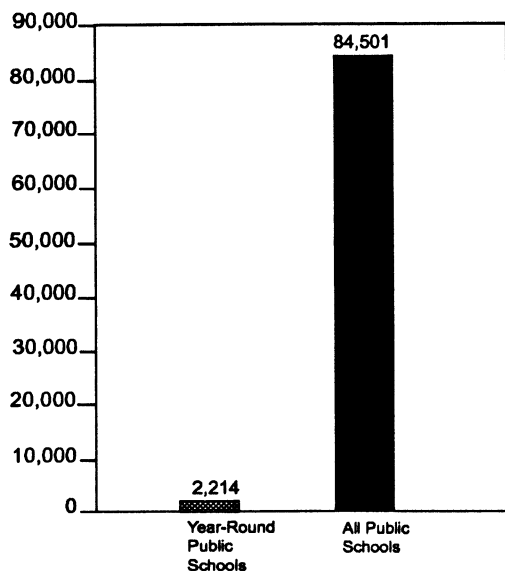
Reading and Math Achievement — Year-Round vs. Traditional Students



After controlling for possible effects due to district, grade level, gender, ethnicity, parental education level, prior achievement and average school-level achievement, there were **no significant achievement differences** between year-round and traditional calendar students in either reading or math.

North Carolina State Board of Education, February 2000

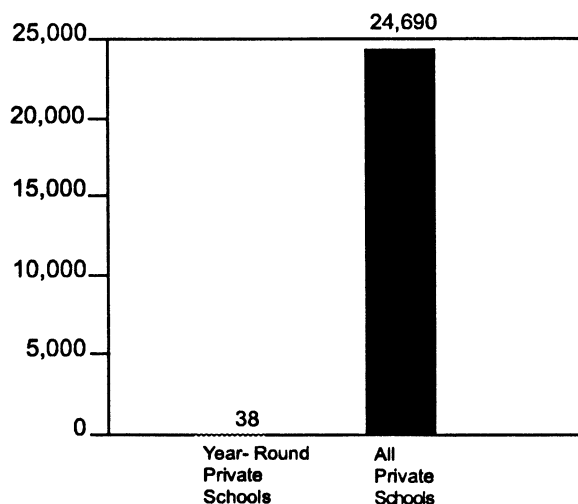
Number of Public Year-Round Schools compared to all Public Schools



Public year-round schools represent **2.62%** of the total number of public schools in the USA. They are heavily concentrated in a small number of states and in some states within certain geographic areas, mainly high-growth, urban and low socio-economic communities.

British Columbia Teachers' Federation Research Report 1994-95

Number of Private Year-Round Schools compared to all Private Schools



Year-round private schools represent **.0015%** of all private schools in the USA. If the educational arguments for year-round schools are so convincing, why are there so few private institutions that take advantage of them?

British Columbia Teachers' Federation Research Report 1994-95



Tracy Parents against MTYRE and YRE



New study by CUNY PHD Debunked the MYTH of the Agrarian summer

AERA NEWS

American Educational Research Association

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Reconstructing Summer Vacation:

CUNY Education Professor Sets Record Straight

WASHINGTON, DC, July 30, 2001 -- Contrary to popular belief, these lazy, hazy days of summer that elementary, middle and high school students today enjoy stem not from labor practices of 19th-century agrarian America, according to an historian of education.

"Rural areas held very tentative winter and summer sessions throughout most of the 19th century, leaving the spring and fall completely open for farm work," explains Kenneth M. Gold of the City University of New York. "Cities opened schools nearly year round in the antebellum era, and neither setting had a well-established summer vacation until after the Civil War."

What difference does setting the record straight make?

As an historian of education at the CUNY's College of Staten Island, Professor Gold wants to remind policy-makers what parents seem to know about this long-standing school and entrenched cultural practice: "Summer has always served social purposes beyond the cognitive development of children.

"As school systems across the country raise academic standards and initiate rigorous and mandatory assessments, they have assigned an important role to summer schools," says Gold, an assistant professor of education whose book, *School's In: The History of Summer Education in American Public Schools*, is scheduled to be published in the spring of 2002 by Peter Lang Publishing. He presented his research on school calendars and summer vacations to colleagues at the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting, held this spring in Seattle.

In reviewing school calendars and summer vacations from the 19th century, Professor Gold gleaned that summer vacation emerged from the processes of centralization, professionalization and standardization within public education. Larger cultural practices and medical beliefs played a role as well.

City and state school officials pried away control of the school calendar from local districts partly to establish uniform vacations. They also feared that over-taxing students with too much schooling would impair their health. While teachers needed to rest too, a lengthy vacation was intended to give them time for professional development, he notes.

"Summer appeared to be the natural season for this vacation," he adds. "It was a hot and sticky time to be in school, it was already established as the vacation time of the social elite who ran the fledging school systems, and it was seen as the academically weakest of the school terms.

"In cities like New York and Chicago, students who are not promoted at the end of the school year are mandated to attend summer school and pass examinations in August in order to move into the next grade," he says. "As high absentee rates in New York have shown, students and families do not lightly give up summer vacations.

"Of course, knowing that some American children once attended school in the summer-only if they were not contributing to the family economy-will not make families more likely to enroll their children today," he says. "If parents, educators and policy-makers know that summer vacations were conscious creations, not natural byproducts of an agrarian economy," Professor Gold argues, "then they can reconstruct summers that balance academic goals with other activities that may have more lasting importance."

"Mass and elite cultures, rich and poor, people of color and white alike participate in activities centered on summer vacation and warm weather: Fourth of July fireworks, baseball games, outdoor concerts, amusement parks,

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Agrarian_Myth_Debunked

vacation and warm weather: Fourth of July fireworks, baseball games, outdoor concerts, amusement parks, summer camps and camping, barbecues, hours by the pool, days at the beach, weekends at the shore, and months abroad," Professor Gold notes.

"There are also a legion of cultural artifacts, from the Fresh Prince rap music to Edith Wharton literature, that edify images of summer freedom, romance, personal growth and more," Professor Gold says. "Increasing summer school may be a good educational policy for raising standardized test scores, but is it good social policy to tamper with the season during which many families and friends forge their most enduring bonds and memories?"

-- AERA --

The American Educational Research Association (AERA), a professional society that represents more than 23,000 educators who conduct research and evaluation in education, offers a comprehensive program of scholarly publications, training, fellowships, and meetings to disseminate research findings and improve the profession. Founded in 1916, AERA is based in Washington, D.C.

Editor's Note: To interview Professor Gold, please call (718) 982-3737.



Washington likely to align school dates

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PHOENIX - The Washington Elementary School Board plans to align the start dates and calendars of its 32 schools at a meeting tonight.

Now, three schools - Lakeview, Mountain View and Shaw Butte - are on year-round calendars, meaning they start earlier and take longer breaks during the year with a shorter summer recess.

The board likely will decide to convert those schools back to a traditional calendar at its 7:30 p.m. meeting at Ironwood Elementary School, 14850 N. 39th Ave.

The schools adopted the year-round calendars with hopes of improving student achievement and increasing enrollment, but neither seems to have happened, said interim Superintendent Margo Olivares-Seck in a letter Tuesday to parents and staff. Mountain View went year-round in 1994, Shaw Butte in 1996 and Lakeview in 1999.

"Given the financial challenges facing the district, including declining enrollment, it is not responsible to spend the additional dollars to support a year-round calendar that does not clearly result in increased student achievement or increased student enrollment," Olivares-Seck wrote.

This school year, year-round schools started July 26, compared with traditional schools' start date of Aug. 23.

Shaw Butte Principal Marjorie Jones said families complained that their elementary, middle school and high school students were off at different times.

If approved, the new districtwide calendar for the 2005-06 school year would run from Aug. 8 to May 24.