

What's the Problem?



Year Round Education

An Opinion

Year Round Education is Not a Good Idea

To solve our schools' problems with declining test scores, rising costs, overcrowding, and bad behavior, more and more people are beginning to turn to a year-round school calendar. However, year-round education is not the answer to low standardized test scores and cannot guarantee savings. Before a school system decides to institute a year-round calendar, it should look closely at whether or not educational benefits can actually be achieved. It should also consider the social disruptions that may be caused to students and their families and take a close look at the costs of switching to a year-round schedule, not just to the district itself, but to teachers, students and their families. Year-round education is not a panacea for our educational woes. Until the quality of time spent in schools is improved, changing the days spent in school will not do much good.



Academics

Probably the primary reason that supporters of year-round education have for switching from a traditional calendar is that they believe that year-round schooling can offer students a better education. Educator Susan Morse (1992) believes that the longer students are on vacation, the less material they retain. She adds that year-round education can improve the academic performance of students who cannot depend on their home care to help them with learning. This sounds logical, but Morse gives no supporting evidence that year-round education actually improves students' academic performance. In fact, Teresa Greenfield (1994) found that although teachers and parents may have observed some improvement, the results of standardized tests showed no such improvement. In addition, Dr Gary Peltier (1991) notes that when the scores of year-round school students were compared to those of traditional calendar students, no significant difference was seen. So, if year-round education does not appear to enhance students' academic performance, why would a school district consider implementing it in a school system? Instead of extending the school year, educators should concentrate more on improving the quality of time now being spend in school. Until the quality of time spent in schools is raised, increasing the number of days will not do much good.

Instead of extending the school year, educators should concentrate more on improving the quality of time now being spent in school.

Social Life

Many people want to change from the traditional school calendar to the year-round calendar because of the social benefits they believe such a change can offer. Overcrowding is one social issue mentioned, and I acknowledge that the year-round calendar addresses that problem. But it may also limit who gets to see whom on a regular basis. Elaine Warrick-Harris (1995) reveals that families have more opportunities to take vacations during the off-season, so they can enjoy lower rates and less-crowded areas. This may be true for some families but may lead to problems in families whose children are on different school calendars. Such conflicting schedules may also cause disruptions with day care arrangements. Additionally, Lorraine Forte (1994) notes that year-round education can create problems for teachers, too, since vacation times are staggered and may interfere with system-wide teacher training. Certainly stress created by conflicting schedules will not enhance relationships in school or at home. Because it appears that social benefits are not guaranteed by a change in the school calendar either, year-round education is not a good idea.

Costs



The April 1990 Legislative Analyst's report notes that the primary reason for implementing a year-round calendar was to save money on new building construction (as cited in Webster & Nyberg, 1992). Don Glines (1992) agrees. He says that year-round education can reduce overcrowding and provide extra space, which can ultimately reduce financial problems and negate the need to build new facilities. Also, according to Dr. William White (1992), year-round education allows classrooms to be used at all times rather than remaining empty for the entire summer break; this can also create savings opportunities. However, using the buildings year round could actually cost more. For example, schools could face higher air conditioning costs (Sardo-Brown & Rooney, 1992). Further, Webster and Nyberg note that maintenance problems can be created with year-round education because students and teachers are in the school buildings almost all of the year. These conflicting views show that year-round education does not always cost less than the traditional school calendar and in fact may cost a school system more.

Year-round education may also cost parents more, since new day care arrangements might have to be made. Parents have traditionally relied on teenage siblings or babysitters who were always available during the summer months and who were willing to accept less than minimum wage. With year-round schooling, these teenagers will no longer be available, forcing parents to use high-cost day care professionals all the time. For their parts, teenagers may also find that a summer job is out of reach with a year-round system, leaving them without spending money or money for college. They are forced then to choose the alternative -- working during the school term -- which may lower grades overall. Teachers who depend on summer employment outside the educational system to augment their income will also lose money. Because it appears that saving money cannot be guaranteed, I do not believe schools should change to a year-round calendar.

Conclusion



There are additional reasons for not changing the traditional school calendar. Summer time allows children to grow and mature, which may ultimately give them a new outlook for the upcoming school year and provide them with the chance for a fresh start. As White (1988) points out, summer can also provide children with educational opportunities that they may not get while in school, such as enjoying a summer reading program at the public library, learning to swim, attending a summer camp, or visiting faraway historic sites on vacation. Allowing children the summer off gives them time to explore the world without being graded as they are in the classroom. Moreover, if children do need remedial help, one or two hours of summer school per day can be offered to provide them with additional tutoring. Most traditional school calendars offer summer school already, so there is no need to change the calendar.

Although the controversy about year-round education continues, most of us who grew up enjoying summer off will find it difficult to accept anything other than the traditional school calendar. Implementing a year-round calendar in a school system is not an easy task and requires extra planning, thought, and commitment. I believe that we should focus less on trying to change the school calendar and concentrate more on the quality of time being spend in school. Providing the summer time off for children allows them time to think, play, and explore their world. This time can give the child more freedom to mature and develop his or her own personality while not being judged on academic performance. In today's society, children are faced with many decisions and are forced to mature fast enough. We should not take summer away from our children. We should let them enjoy being children for as long as possible.