



Topic overview

Year-Round Education

Encyclopedia of Education

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YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

A concept designed to minimize three-month summer learning losses, year-round education (YRE) maximizes the use of public facilities by dividing the school attendance days into rotating instruction and vacation segments. Students are enrolled in formal learning programs over a twelve-month year, keeping school buildings open at least 240 days.

Intersessions—the equivalent of summer schools—are offered each vacation block. They can be full or partial days, located on campus or cooperatively based in the community. Voluntary intermittent intersessions overcome the nine-month wait for remediation in difficult classes, while creating acceleration, enrichment, and interest specializations for all students throughout the year. They are especially of value for those who lack stimulating out-of-school activities.

Districts often promote this modification of the calendar as a *multiple-vacation plan* featuring shorter segments for both studies and vacations, in contrast with the *single-vacation plan*, which offers one longer instructional period followed by an extensive vacation. The brief but more numerous breaks, which can be one to six weeks in duration, appeal to many families. Six weeks is accepted as the maximum to be classified as YRE unless an individualized format purposely provides for special furloughs.

Educator visionaries go beyond this basic concept. They do not view YRE as a calendar configuration for space, achievement, or enrichment, but rather as part of the transformation toward a philosophy of lifelong continuous learning. They believe that schools and universities, like hospitals, are helping institutions, and therefore should offer planned and spontaneous learning opportunities through combinations of on-and off-campus studies, home computers, and distance instruction 365 days per year.

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Related to this perception, supportive community advocates state there is no rationale for utilizing expensive facilities only one-fourth (e.g, 6 hours) or one-third (8) of the hours of the day, one-half (180) of the days of the year, and three-fourths (9) of the months of the year; no other public or private institutions consider such patterns. Therefore, districts and cities together should create community schools where infants through senior citizens may share an array of services as in child care, library, electronic, theater, and arts centers, vocational enhancement, health clinics, social services, and parks and recreation programs.

Traditionally, there are four reasons for implementing such year-round education designs: (1) to improve student achievement; (2) to increase building capacity; (3) to reduce capital expenses; and (4) to accommodate special-needs youth. Innovators add the following eight criteria:

- promotion of continuous progress: Billy can learn about bugs in July
- employment realities: not all can take summer vacations
- lifestyle diversities: many prefer varied vacations
- curriculum facilities: reduced enrollment provides space for expanded offerings
- improvement catalyst: nongraded individualized programs can create success
- community enhancement: year-round swimming pools, Bible schools, and traffic reduction
- people considerations: especially offering varied support and opportunities for the less affluent
- personal choice: the option of twelve-or nine-month patterns

Adopting YRE does require strong philosophical convictions and plans to make the school better. Combining the four traditional and eight nontraditional categories creates a powerful agenda for year-round education.

Track Plans

In implementing year-round programs, a *track* is related to the calendar, not ability. In a single-track program all students and teachers follow the same instructional blocks, intersession offerings, and vacation periods. For example, in a 45-15 plan, all students and teachers learn together for forty-five days, and then vacation or attend intersession for the next fifteen days. They return for three more forty-five day blocks of instruction, each followed by fifteen days of vacation. State-required and common holiday periods are preserved. Single-track plans do not increase space or save money, but they do promote continuous learning, especially when combined with intersession programs.

Multiple-track adoptions follow the same calendar configurations, but offer three, four, or five tracks to increase building capacity. Using the 45-15 rotation illustration, a school constructed for 600 can enroll 800 students by placing 200 students in each of four tracks (A, B, C, D). When A, B, and C are in school (600 students), D (200) is on vacation. When D returns, A goes on vacation.

Dual track creates two schools-within-a-school; families choose whether to remain on a nine-month calendar (School X), or participate in a twelve-month pattern (School Y). Flexible-track plans allow some students to change groups when rotations are scheduled, or enroll in studies during intersessions, to meet the required attendance days while creating a special-need calendar.

Personalized-track programs individualize curriculum and instruction through nongraded teams of teachers, allowing families, students, and teachers to self-select their own vacation periods. The school ensures a balance of student and staff attendance to maintain a twelve-month program.

There are more than thirty possible calendar configurations, with more being invented as communities seek to meet their own unique environments. Multiple plans can create a 50, 33, or 25 percent increase in capacity; the fewer the tracks, the greater the enrollment, as illustrated by a sampling of patterns, each of which can also be implemented as a single track:

A four-track design of forty-five days in school, fifteen days on vacation; a middle school of 1200 can house 1600 through four rotating tracks (A, B, C, D) of 400 each, with only three groups in attendance at one time. Four hundred of 1200 creates 33 percent increase in capacity; in enrollment figures, 400 of 1600 equates to a 25 percent gain in student numbers.

A four-track plan of 60 days in school, 20 days away; three 60-day blocks equal 180 days, while three 20-day blocks provide 60 days of vacation and intersession programs. Four tracks (A, B, C, D) create the same space figures as in the 45-15; the primary differences are the length of the periods, and the three versus four room change cycles.

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Concept 6

A three-track calendar dividing the year into six blocks of approximately 41 days is termed *Concept 6*. Students attend two consecutive eight-week periods, followed by an eight-week vacation. For Concept 6, most states allow 163 days of attendance rather than 180 by increasing the number of minutes per day. A high school built for 1600 can house 2400. Three tracks (A, B, C) each enroll 800 students. While A and B are in school, C is on vacation. When C returns, A vacations. Thus 800 of 1600 is a 50 percent increase in building capacity; 800 of 2400 is a 33 percent enrollment gain. Modified Concept 6 is the same except there are twelve four-week blocks. A student rotates eight weeks in and four weeks out of school. An elementary facility built for 600 can house 900 (300 each in A, B, C) by rotating the three groups.

A five-track calendar stipulates that students attend school for 60 days and have vacation for 15 days. Three such rotations equal 180 days in school, but with only 45 days off, providing 15 days to use as desired for additional vacation time. If space is an issue, a school constructed for 400 can house only 500 students; with five groups (A, B, C, D, E), 100 of 400 equals 25 percent increase in capacity, while 100 of 500 increases the enrollment figure by 20 percent.

Personalized Year

A completely individualized calendar, personalized year's curriculum is continuous and self-directed. Students and teachers may be away any length of time—two days or even a year. Upon returning, they continue from where they were at their last attendance. This plan can function as a single or multiple track program by assuring a balance of staff and students.

Other Calendars

Other possible calendars among the more than thirty include Concept 8, 25-5, 30-10, 90-30, Flexible All-Year, and the Orchard Plan. Such modified configurations are not new, as YRE dates from 1904 in Indiana. Many successful programs existed prior to World War II. Reinvented in the 1960s, year-round education has witnessed steady growth. By the turn of the twenty-first century, more than 2 million youths were enrolled in over 3000 schools in forty-four states and Washington D.C., four Canadian provinces, and four Pacific Islands.

In considering the adoption of a continuous learning model, there are more than sixty basics that must be addressed. Each is easy to resolve with creative thinking, commitment, and visitations, for numerous districts have offered modified calendars for twenty to thirty years. All the perceived dilemmas—costs, community acceptance, teacher union contracts, and other realistic factors—can be resolved, but even more, arranged to enhance the learning climate. There are students who never attended a nine-month school, for when they enrolled in kindergarten, year-round was offered at all grade levels. They graduated from a year-round high school after spending their K–12 years in a twelve-month calendar pattern.

Major Obstacles

The major obstacle in the adoption of year-round education is tradition. When first proposed, 30 percent of the community are strongly in favor, 40 percent are undecided, and 30 percent are strongly opposed. The ideal is to begin on a voluntary basis for the 30 percent who are ready; they usually will be joined by half of the middle group. If YRE must be mandated for space reasons, the key is to convince the 40 percent group that it is the best solution. Critics cite numerous objections:

- Possible separation of families (elementary student on twelve-month and high school student on nine-month calendar)
- Employment of parents during the traditional school year (that may require vacation in the summer)
- Child care issues
- Family lifestyles preference
- Disruption of summer recreation and camp programs
- Changing rooms in multiple track calendars
- High school social and athletic schedules
- Student employment and family events
- Assemblies at the school

Arguments in Favor

Those who oppose YRE overlook numerous factors: (1) construction workers in cold states can best vacation in January and February; (2) the single-parent hotel housekeeper may best vacation in November; (3) the snow-ski family living in warm climates may want winter vacation in the mountains; and (4) children from low-income families and those who are low achieving can benefit

from food service, caring, and twelve-month assistance from concerned staff. More than fifty percent of the population in the United States either cannot or should not take a summer vacation because of employment issues or other activities or family factors; in addition, many prefer three or four shorter seasonal vacations.

Wherever year-round education has been implemented, it has been successful. Every program that began and then closed was the result of political reasons (new board, new superintendent, parents' desire for uniformity of calendar), or unusual circumstances. No district ever discontinued YRE from lack of success. More than thirty evaluation studies have verified that students in continuous programs do as well as or better than matched pairs of nine-month students in every category of school achievement and personal growth. Surveys of satisfaction, including doctoral dissertations that document interviews of parents and teachers, have verified that the overwhelming majority of those who have participated in YRE like it, and would vote to continue the concept. Surprising to many are the number of sport, music, and drama championships earned by schools on rotating school calendars.

See also: COMMUNITY EDUCATION; ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, subentries on CURRENT TRENDS, HISTORY OF; SCHOOL FACILITIES, subentry on MAINTENANCE AND MODERNIZATION OF; SECONDARY EDUCATION, subentries on CURRENT TRENDS, HISTORY OF; SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS; SUMMER SCHOOL.

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