

# Year-Round Schooling

[1991]

The terms *year-round schooling* (YRS) and *year-round education* (YRE) are synonymous. They were originated to describe a reorganization of the traditional nine- or ten-month school year by reducing the summer vacation period and interspersing those days throughout the year, thereby enabling schools to operate over a full 12 months. Specifically, YRS can be defined as a method of scheduling the school year calendar so that

- school buildings can be used throughout the year,
- instructional blocks can be interspersed with shorter more frequent vacation periods,
- instructional time remains consistent with traditional calendars,
- a variety of plans can be offered:

—single-track plans in which all teachers and students follow a concurrent calendar of instruction and vacation with varied timeline options.

—multi-track plans in which two or more groups of teachers and students from the school population are placed on separate calendars, called tracks, scheduled so that at least one group is on vacation at any given time.

In Alberta, students involved in a YRS program would attend classes for the same number of days as they would have in the traditional calendar. It is important to understand that YRS is a reorganization of time to deliver the same educational program.

## Traditional School Calendar

In Canada, because education is a provincial matter, each province has legislation that governs, in whole or in part, its school calendar. In addition, the school calendar will be influenced by established practice as well as local school jurisdiction responsibility. In Alberta, Section 40 of the *School Act* gives local school boards legislated authority to stipulate, within specified limitations, the school calendar, including the number and the days of school operation. Given the possibility of significant variance, school calendars in Alberta have generally remained consistent; that is, students typically attend school September through June for ten months and take a similar summer vacation during July and August. There is also a winter vacation extending at least from December 24 to January 2, a five-day Easter or spring vacation and recognition of statutory holidays. The school year varies from 190 to 200 days and includes instructional days as well as noninstructional days for the purpose of professional development, inservicing, preparation and school start-up and closure activities. The school day varies between five and six hours.

## Context

Year-round schooling is predominantly an American system of school year organization with roots in the late 19th century. To date, YRS calendars typically continue to be used in regions experiencing rapid growth in population and lacking the school space to house dramatic increases in enrolment. In many instances, state legislatures have passed bills offering financial incentives to jurisdictions participating in YRS. To date, no Canadian school jurisdiction has adopted YRS on a systemwide or continual basis. Individual public and private schools, however, have used a year-round calendar from time to time for both economical and educational reasons.

## Areas of Concern

Year-round schooling provides alternatives to existing school calendars. Whether these options improve or reduce the quality of education is not generally apparent.

Proponents suggest that YRS helps by providing calendar, curriculum and family options that more closely fit changing and evolving lifestyles, work patterns and community involvement. They view YRS as being more consistent with lifelong learning and offering a unique opportunity to extend learning to more people. On the other hand, opponents of YRS argue that it is nothing more than a “mechanical” scheduling phenomenon with little increased educational value. They point out that economic rather than educational considerations are responsible for the renewed interest in the concept. YRS is seen as a space and cost cutting measurement of providing education for a rapidly expanding student population.

The success or failure of YRS depends upon many variables and conditions. Each jurisdiction must examine the feasibility of the concept within its own area. While there will be advantages and disadvantages, it must be recognized that the local context, and ideally the students’ best interests, will be the final determining factor. The implementation of YRS could affect the following areas: educational program, administration, society and economics.

1. Educational Program. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect student learning.

- (a) professional development—activities related to professional practice
- (b) instructional
  - (i) program delivery, eg, graded, nongraded, individualized
  - (ii) differentiated programs—enrichment, remediation, extended learning
  - (iii) communication—student–student, student–teacher, teacher–teacher, teacher–parent
  - (iv) opportunities—inconsistencies between tracks, program equity
  - (v) evaluations—flexibility, adaptability
- (c) student achievement
- (d) high needs/risk students
- (e) cocurricular and extracurricular activities
- (f) curriculum—adaptations or modifications
- (g) counselling—availability and coordination of services
- (h) stress—student, teacher, administrator
- (i) alternative programs—home study, distance education, work experience
- (j) scholarships and bursaries—timelines

2. Administration. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect the organization and operation of schools.

- (a) demands on personnel, eg, responsibilities, expectations, roles, time, planning
- (b) scheduling—timetabling
- (c) facility, eg, storage, classroom assignment, teacher work areas
- (d) communications—students, teachers, central office, parents

- (e) school procedures, eg, attendance, evaluations, conferences, reports, registrations, activities
  - (f) staff deployment—assignments
  - (g) staff development—formative
  - (h) coordination of jurisdictional activities—schools, central office
3. Society. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect the relationship between school and community.

- (a) political issues, eg, language, minorities, funding
  - (b) community resources, eg, daycare, recreation facilities, camps
  - (c) workforce, eg, summer employment, job supply and demand
  - (d) lifestyle, eg, flexibility, occupation, values, culture
  - (e) demographics, eg, age, gender, race, family structure, ethnicity
4. Economics. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect cost effectiveness.

- (a) enrolment—minimum number of students
- (b) capital costs, eg, construction, restoration
- (c) operating costs, eg, instructional, administrative, maintenance, transportation
- (d) funding, eg, grant structures, taxes
- (e) contractual, eg, collective agreements, substitute teachers

Implications in each of these areas need to be analyzed prior to the implementation of a year-round schooling program.

## Conditions

For school systems considering year-round schooling, a number of conditions must initially be met. First, the need for change must be motivated by educational considerations; that is, there must be a specific demonstration of how the learning needs of children will be better met. Second, a local feasibility study must be undertaken to determine viability of the plan. This study should examine the aforementioned areas for implications of YRS. Third, stakeholder involvement is critical in the discussion and decision-making processes. Fourth, curriculum adaptations and support structures, if required, must be in place prior to the implementation of the revised school calendar. Fifth, supportive collective agreement provisions are required. Last, a pilot project must be conducted and evaluated prior to adoption of YRS. These conditions are necessary to maintain the integrity of the educational program provided to students.

## Conclusion

Year-round schooling is a reorganization of time to deliver the same educational program that could be delivered using the traditional calendar. A decision to opt for YRS must not be made hastily. There are many considerations that need to be addressed and resolved prior to implementation of YRS. Teachers must be involved in all decision-making processes. If implementation of YRS requires curriculum adaptations, these must be completed in advance. Pilot projects should be undertaken and evaluated prior to the adoption of YRS.

The needs of students must be given the highest priority. Changes to the school calendar should not have adverse effects on students, teachers or educational programs. While the concept of YRS may be feasible and workable in some areas, the motivation for change must be to improve the educational program for students.