EVALUATING YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS IN TEXAS
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The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of both year-round and traditional elementary school principals in Texas on the following year-round school issues: professional staffing and development, administrative issues, student achievement, parental and community concerns, and cost factors. We construct six hypotheses that arise from the literature on these issues and examine them by means of an attitudinal survey. Our findings reveal that both year-round and traditional elementary school principals have positive experiences and/or perceptions of year-round education.

One of the most prominent issues emerging in local government is the move to year-round public education. Advocates of year-round schools argue that shorter and more frequent breaks throughout the school year enhance student learning and retention, reduce costs, ease overcrowding, and, contrary to popular critiques, pose no significant staffing and/or administrative problems (Ballinger, 1987, 1988; Doyle & Finn, 1985).

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of both year-round and traditional elementary school principals in Texas on year-round school issues. The literature surrounding this policy question consists primarily of commentaries by informed proponents and opponents with little input from significant players in year-round educational institutions. Our study is the first to comprehensively survey administrators in both year-round and traditional schools. The opinions of these administrators offer a unique and valuable perspective to the successes and problems of year-round education.

Prominent Issues in Year-round Education

Year-round schools may be categorized as two types. The first type, extension of the school calendar, increases the total number of days each child is in school, thus extending the school year to between 220 to 240 days. However, extension of the school year invariably adds significant, if not prohibitive costs, so that almost all YRS models fall into the second type (Kerr, 1991). The latter, rearrangement of the school calendar, institutes more frequent, shorter breaks throughout the school year, instead of the long summer break. Typical schedules might be 90-30, 60-20, or 45-15 where the first number indicates days of instruction and the second, days of vacation.

The debate surrounding YRE generally focuses on five broad categories: professional staffing and development, administrative issues, student achievement, parental and community concerns, and cost factors. We examine five hypotheses that arise from the literature on...
these issues and test them by means of an attitudinal survey of principals in Texas.

Hypothesis 1: YRS present problems in professional staffing and development.

In traditional settings, teachers are on 12 month contracts, work for nine months, and receive their salary over a 12 month period. Thus teachers often pursue other employment, generally in the summer; Doyle and Finn found that about 30 percent of teachers take summer jobs to supplement their incomes (Doyle & Finn, 1985, 29). Skeptics argue that year-round scheduling risks teachers' extra income from second jobs. Consequently, it may be difficult to recruit and retain teachers in a YRS setting.

Proponents of YRS point out that it gives teachers the opportunity to earn extra income within their profession as substitutes or as instructors for enrichment classes during their vacation periods (Hoke, 1992). YRS may also encourage extended contracts for teachers (Ballinger, 1987). With these options, proponents argue, recruiting and retaining teachers in YRS will not pose a significant problem.

Critics argue that staff development in YRS will be more difficult because college schedules generally do not correspond to the schedules of year-round public schools. Teachers in YRS are often faced with a lack of continuing or enrichment courses at local colleges because courses are offered to coincide with the traditional system's calendar. This is beginning to change as more universities in YRE localities offer night and weekend courses, three-week courses, or extension courses.

Hypothesis 2: YRS create significant administrative benefits.

Although this is an amorphous category, proponents argue that implementation of YRS create significant improvement in four specific areas: administrator burnout, teacher/staff/student absenteeism, utilization of facilities, and student discipline. Supporters maintain that both admin-
is not conclusive; there have been small isolated studies that reveal moderate increases in YRS student scores on standardized tests (Chula Vista, 1991, Alcorn, 1992).

There is a greater degree of consensus, however, on the beneficial effects of YRS on disadvantaged, special education, or bilingual education students. Alcorn reports that, on average, disadvantaged students lose significantly more knowledge in the summer months than advantaged students (1992). Doyle and Finn (1985) argue that special education children adjust well to a YRS schedule because it institutes a larger measure of routine.

Ballinger (1987) analyzed the benefits favoring the bilingual, limited English, and English as a second language student. He found that the additional exposure to English speaking environments was an asset to those students who might otherwise spend their traditional summer vacations in non-English language situations.

**Hypothesis 4: YRS create significant parental/community concerns.**

The memory of long leisurely summers is etched indelibly in our memories. Indeed, the most vehement objections to YRS are from those that fear disruptions in traditional family leisure patterns. These opponents have organized themselves into groups such as Save Our Summers (SOS), made up of individuals and organizations like the Boy Scouts, YMCA, Campfire Girls, and others that have a financial stake in organized summer activities.

Potential problems with extracurricular activities and family schedules in general produce skepticism for YRS. Indeed, problems in coordinating extracurricular activities for secondary students is one of the primary reasons that a majority of year-round schools are elementary schools. Parents may also find it inconvenient to have one child in a YRS and another in a traditional school. This may be why parents have been much more supportive of YRE if it is offered as an alternative rather than a mandatory program (Read, 1992).

YRS advocates claim that the notion of a long summer vacation is dated; most families no longer spend their summer vacations on long family outings. Rather, long summer vacations have become a problem for families that must may child-care arrangements. Although child care may be more complicated for parents of children in YRS, proponents for the latter claim it is no more difficult than arranging child care for the long summer months.

Supporters of YRE maintain that the growing number of children with nothing to do in the summer months is a troubling social trend; they contend that more frequent occupancy of school buildings reduces vandalism (Ballinger, 1987). Other studies, however, have found no significant differences in vandalism in YRE and traditional schools and neighborhoods (Loyd, 1991).

**Hypothesis 5a: Operating and maintenance costs are higher in YRS.**

**Hypothesis 5b: Multi-track scheduling reduces total costs.**

The cost effectiveness of YRS has not been convincingly measured. David Hough (1989) points to the disagreement in costs saved in a year-round system. Just as the fabled status of the half-glass, one district will report a "cost"; whereas, another district will report a "savings." He feels the "costs" are related directly to school/district policies and revenues, concluding that YRE costs no more, no less than traditional education.

Complex and potentially contradictory theories of cost effectiveness produce two hypotheses for purposes of our study. The first is that operating and maintenance costs increase for YRS. The schools are paying teachers and staff an increased salary if they work during the intersessional enrichment programs (Glines, 1990). Insurance costs may be affected because liability exists during year-round school sessions (Kerr, 1990). Maintenance is needed more consistently because of year-round use of facilities.
maintenance may become a problem because major repairs can no longer be done in the idle months of summer.

The second hypothesis is that YRS, especially multi-track scheduling, lowers long-term costs. Under multi-track schedules, the facilities are used 240 days of a year, while students attend class 180 days a year. By spreading fixed costs over a larger number of pupils, savings are achieved (Kerr, 1990). Multi-track YRE was originally designed to handle overcrowding; because it does so efficiently and effectively, it may postpone or even preclude the need for building new schools (Ballinger, 1997).

Survey Methodology

Our study tests the preceding six hypotheses by surveying the attitudes of elementary school principals in Texas. Because principals enjoy a unique slot in the educational tier, their perspective is valuable. In their mid-management positions, they see both the big and little picture. They are decision-makers, a role that continues to expand as the trend toward site-based management heightens. They have classroom experience, and are generally considered community leaders.

The survey includes principals of both year-round and traditional nine-month schools (TRAD). A total of 105 surveys were mailed including 59 surveys to principals in all of the 59 elementary schools in Texas participating in YRE. In addition, 46 surveys were mailed to principals in traditional schools. Sixty-one questionnaires were returned for a total response rate of 58 percent. The response rates for year-round and traditional schools were 71 and 41 percent respectively.

To facilitate analysis, we constructed indices from questionnaire items dealing with five of the six hypotheses: (1) professional staffing and development problems, (2) administrative benefits, (3) increase in student achievement, (4) parental and community concerns, and (5a) increases in operating and maintenance costs. To test hypothesis 5b, multi-track scheduling reduces total costs, we relied on response to one statement only. Responses to the questions were coded as follows: +2 = Strongly Agree; +1 = Agree; 0 = No Opinion; -1 = Disagree; and -2 = Strongly Disagree. Zero represents a position of neutrality. Hence agreement or disagreement with the questions (hypotheses) is indicated by means significantly greater than zero. In addition, we used analysis of variance to test for differences between YRS principals and TRAD principals.

Table 1
Index Means and Standard Deviations for Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Problems in Staffing and Development Index</td>
<td>-.820</td>
<td>2.975</td>
<td>-2.152*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Administrative Benefits Index</td>
<td>4.279</td>
<td>3.742</td>
<td>8.930**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Student Achievement Index</td>
<td>5.016</td>
<td>3.552</td>
<td>11.030**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Parental and Community Concerns Index</td>
<td>-2.836</td>
<td>2.888</td>
<td>-7.670**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a) Higher Operating and Maintenance Costs Index</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>2.738</td>
<td>-.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b) Multi-track Scheduling Save Money</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.942</td>
<td>3.932**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significantly greater than zero at p < .05
** Significantly greater than zero at p < .001
Findings

In general the findings presented in Table 1 present an optimistic picture of year-round education. Both year-round and traditional elementary school principals evaluate year-round education favorably. That is, they express statistically significant levels of support or opposition to all the hypotheses except that which purported operating and maintenance costs in YRS to be higher. In several cases traditional school principals (TRAD) expressed less support for YRS than YRS principals; however, TRAD support for these issues was still statistically significant.

Findings for Hypothesis 1

In general, principals do not agree that YRS presents staffing and development problems. They also disavow the notion that it is difficult to recruit or retain teachers in YRS. Table 1 shows that the negative mean of -.820 is significant at the p < .05 level. Analysis of individual items in this index, however, indicates that principals did agree that local college scheduling failed to meet the developmental needs of teachers.

Findings for Hypothesis 2

A second hypothesis tested in this study is that YRS provide significant administrative benefits including less administrative/teacher burnout, less teacher and student absenteeism, better utilization of facilities, and less student discipline problems. Both YRS and TRAD principals were strongly supportive of this hypothesis. The mean for the administrative benefits index is 4.28 significant at the p < .001 level. It is worth noting, however, that the only item in the index not supported is the notion that administrator burnout is reduced by frequent breaks.

Findings for Hypothesis 3

The most compelling hypothesis tested in our survey is that YRS increases student achievement. Questions addressing this hypothesis emphasized achievement in several areas including fewer retention problems, benefits to special education children, benefits to bilingual/ESL/LEP students, additional learning from enrichment programs, and higher standardized test scores. Table 1 indicates that support for this hypothesis is very strong with a mean significantly different from zero at the p < .001 level. While TRAD principals expressed significantly lower support for these items, their support was still statistically significant.

Principals were most enthusiastic in the effect that YRS has on bilingual and special education and in the value of enrichment programs allowed by a YRS schedule.

Findings for Hypothesis 4

This hypothesis posits that YRS creates problems for parents and communities. Principals were asked if YRS interfered with family leisure time, interfered with extracurricular activities, or presented obstacles to childcare. The index for Parental/Community Concerns in Table 1 shows that principals strongly disagreed in general with these concerns (p < .001). However, principals were neutral on the individual item that stipulates YRS creates obstacles for child care. Principals did agree that YRS seems to reduce the incidence of vandalism.

Findings for Hypotheses 5a, 5b

Speculation over the effect of YRS on cost factors calls for two different hypotheses. The first, that YRS increases operating and maintenance costs, yielded no support among principals surveyed (p < .577). This was also true when responses of YRS and TRAD principals were analyzed separately. The second hypothesis, that total costs are reduced by multi-track scheduling, was tested with a single statement rather than an index. This hypothesis received significant support from principals (p < .001). The latter, however, showed no support for a similar statement that single-track scheduling in YRS saves money.

Conclusion

Our findings reveal that both year-round and
traditional elementary school principals see no major obstacles in the implementation of year-round education. Rather their experience or perception has convinced them there are positive consequences. They perceive no significant problems in the recruitment and retention of staff although they do cite the lagging response of local colleges to year-round schools. They do not support the concerns of some that YRS interferes with family leisure time although some did comment that this is a potentially difficult situation for parents with children on different school schedules. Elementary school principals in our survey did not feel that YRS interfered with extracurricular activities, although secondary principals may have responded very differently.

Principals in our survey responded most enthusiastically to the proposition that YRS increases student achievement. This is particularly true of specialized groups such as bilingual and special education students; they also supported the notion that YRS helps students retain material and affects standardized test scores. Obviously, empirical data is needed to confirm these expectations, but certainly these attitudes lay solid groundwork for further study.

References


Doyle, Denis P. and Chester E. Finn, Jr. (1985). Now is the time for the year-round school. Principal, September, 29-31.


1When Georgia Superintendent of Schools, Werner Rogers, wanted to add one school day to the existing school calendar, he found it would have cost the state $40 million (Kerr, 1991, p. 13).

2Rearranging the school calendar may mean implementing either a single or multiple track system; in the latter, different sets of children are in and out of school at the same time. The multiple-track systems are particularly useful in overenrolled school districts such as Los Angeles.

3In the latter case, careful consideration was given to identifying traditional elementary schools that shared similar characteristics with the year-round schools. All but three of the traditional schools were located in the same district as the YRS.

The questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.

Brief Biography of Authors

Cynthia Opheim is Associate Professor of Political Science at Southwest Texas State University. Kristine Hopkins Mohajer serves as a certification specialist with the Texas Education Agency; she is also an Instructor at Austin Community College. Robert W. Read, Jr. is presently a teacher at Northeast ISD in San Antonio, Texas.