The Pros and Cons of Year Round School

Is Going to Year Round School a Good Idea? From [Amanda Morin](http://childparenting.about.com/bio/Amanda-Morin-74969.htm)

Would year round school or a longer school day solve our nation's concerns about school performance? Would it help to produce more globally competitive citizens? It is questions like these that lay at the heart of debate about whether or not to have longer school days or to make school a year round institution.

**Why Have Year Round School?**

Many who argue for year round school believe that more is better. United States President Barack Obama is among them. ""The-challenges of the new century demand more time in the classroom." he stated.

Frederick M. Hess, Director of Education Policy Studies for the [American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research](http://www.aei.org/home), notes that few countries offer more than seven consecutive weeks of vacation for students--as opposed to the United States' average of thirteen weeks. Hess suggests that following the [agrarian calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrarian_society) is an anachronistic way of running schools.

**What Does the Research Say About Year Round School?**

Not all educators agree that more time is better and the research, including studies published in the *Economics of Education Review*(2008); *Phi Delta Kappan* (2007) and research conducted by [Elena Silva](http://www.educationsector.org/person/elena-silva), a policy analyst at [Education Sector](http://www.educationsector.org/), back them up.

In fact, all of these studies found that for most students there is no correlation between the length of the school day or year and academic achievement. What they did find, however, was that how the time in the classroom was spent was incredibly important. In other words, it's not how long kids are in the classroom, it's how engaged in learning they are while there are there.

**The Pros of a Year Round School or Longer School Day**

* Shorter summer breaks mean students are less likely to incur [summer learning loss](http://childparenting.about.com/od/schoollearning/tp/summerbraindrain.htm), which may decrease the number of students being served by[intervention programs](http://childparenting.about.com/od/schoollearning/tp/summerbraindrain.htm).
* Remediation needs can be addressed during the school year as opposed to during summer programs, possibly decreasing retention rates and decreasing the need to include [summer school](http://childparenting.about.com/od/schoollearning/a/is_summer_school_a_good_idea.htm) in local budgets.
* Vacation time can be more evenly distributed throughout the year, making it easier to[schedule family vacations](http://childparenting.about.com/od/summer/a/summerschedule.htm) and giving students opportunity to regenerate more frequently. This may cut down on the need to re-teach skills after long vacations, allowing teachers to use classroom time more efficiently.
* Families who struggle to find childcare or pay childcare expenses will benefit from such programs as will children who are in sub-par childcare during summer vacation or afterschool.
* The school system would be more like that of other countries, providing students with the ability to have a more global educational experience.
* [Multi-tracking systems](http://childparenting.about.com/od/summer/a/summerschedule.htm), those in which groups of students are on different school schedules, may allow for more school consolidation.
* Students with lower test scores increase academic skills with more instructional time. (Silva, 2007)

**The Cons of a Year Round School or Longer School Day**

* School maintenance costs, including day-to-day upkeep and utilities, can increase up to 10 percent if schools are open for longer. (Silva, 2007).
* Students who have [difficulty with attention](http://pediatrics.about.com/od/adhd/Attention_Deficit_Hyperactivity_Disorder.htm), either due to disability or because young elementary students are not developmentally ready to attend for longer periods of time are unlikely to get more out of a longer school day. This, too, may increase the amount of [behavioral issues](http://childparenting.about.com/od/behaviorproblems/Behavior_Problems.htm) in the classroom.
* [Teens who need to work](http://parentingteens.about.com/od/summerjobsforteens/ht/summer_job.htm) to help support themselves or make money for college may have difficulty holding or finding a job. (Silvernail & Bickford, 2009)
* Budgets and staffing issues simply may not allow for extended school programs. Many schools already struggle to pay teachers a competitive wage, making it hard to keep high quality teachers. The cost of teaching as a full-time endeavor may not be feasible either locally or federally.
* Multi-tracking programs mean that parents could possibly have students on different schedules.
* [After school activities](http://tweenparenting.about.com/od/afterschoolactivities/tp/After-School-Activities-Hub.htm), such as sports or the arts may suffer or get lost in the shuffle (or budget) if school days are longer.
* Students in year round school may miss out on opportunities to spend time with children of other ages and/or learn about nature as typical summer camp experiences may no longer be a part of the childhood experience.

The Pros and Cons of Year-Round Schools

**Learning Benefits**

The very thought of sending kids to school year-round makes some parents cringe. They balk at the idea of kids attending schools with no summer break. They question the value of a continuous school year interspersed with several short breaks. While the schedule is definitely not what the majority of adults grew up with, it's not nearly as onerous as some people think. Rather than giving kids less time off, a year-round schedule offers the same 180 days of schooling as the traditional calendar, created long ago to ensure children were home to help their parents harvest crops.

**What Exactly Is Year-Round Schooling?**

Kids in year-round schools attend classes for anywhere from six to nine weeks in a row, broken up by two- to four-week vacations. That, say some educators, keeps the learning process ongoing with minimal disruption. A Duke University study even suggested kids attending year-round schools are at a slight advantage, because they don't forget what they learned during the long summer break.
Schools in fast-growing areas transition to year-round schedules as a way to ease overcrowding. When that occurs, kids are placed on multi-tracks, and alternate tracking in and out of the school, a process that keeps the buildings in constant use.

**The Multi-Schedule Juggle**

Frequent breaks are a mainstay of year-round schooling, but they aren't for everyone. Patricia McCracken, who grew up attending a year-round school in Virginia Beach, Virginia, says she found the two-week breaks, which occurred every six weeks at her school, to be disruptive. "It was really hard to get involved in the work because as soon as you geared up, you had to gear back down again."
Mary Brown, a middle-school teacher in Wake County (where three-week breaks occur every nine weeks), says she doesn't see that as a problem at her school. "Our schedule offers the kids a break from school right when they need it," she says. Earlier this year, after their first three-week break, she says, the kids seemed refreshed. "They didn't have the bored, glazed-over look of kids who had been in school for weeks on end with no break in sight."

Juggling different school schedules is one of the toughest problems parents of children in both year-round and traditional schools face. Many high schools don't employ a year-round calendar because of sports schedules. And teens want to be able to take [**summer jobs**](http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3746706).

The year-round schedule can make finding appropriate childcare a problem too. Because her mom was a teacher in a traditional school, McCracken says, "It meant my sister and I were basically latchkey kids for two or three years because it was impossible to find a babysitter for two weeks every six weeks." As year-round schooling becomes more common, however, communities are meeting the demand by offering track-out programs for kids who aren't in school.