

# School calendar choices in Tennessee:

a look at year round / nontraditional schools

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**John G. Morgan**  
**Comptroller of the Treasury**  
**Office of Education Accountability**  
April 2003



STATE OF TENNESSEE

**COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY**

John G. Morgan

Comptroller

STATE CAPITOL

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0264

PHONE (615) 741-2501

April 7, 2003

The Honorable John S. Wilder  
Speaker of the Senate  
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Members of the Select Oversight Committee on Education  
and  
Members of the House and Senate Education Committees  
State Capitol  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

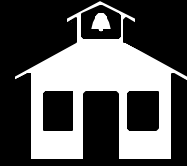
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is a report, requested by the Select Oversight Committee on Education and prepared by the Office of Education Accountability, concerning year round/nontraditional school calendars in Tennessee. The report provides information and recommendations that may be useful to policymakers in considering ways to improve and assist Tennessee's schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John G. Morgan".

John G. Morgan  
Comptroller of the Treasury



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**Russell Moore**  
**Associate Legislative Research Analyst**

Ethel R. Detch, Director  
Jason Walton, Assistant Director  
Office of Education Accountability  
505 Deaderick St., Suite 1700  
Nashville, TN 37243-0268  
615/401-7911  
[www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports)

**John G. Morgan**  
**Comptroller of the Treasury**  
April 2003

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## Executive Summary

Following a national trend, the number of schools operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee increased dramatically over the past decade. As of March 2003, Office of Education Accountability staff estimate that Tennessee will have 147 schools in 27 districts operating on some form of the calendar for the 2003-04 school year, as compared to none in 1993. With other schools and districts studying a possible adoption of the calendar, the number of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee may increase further still. (See Appendix A for a list of the year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee for 2003-04.)

The year-round/non-traditional calendar reorganizes the traditional school calendar by breaking up a portion of the three-month summer vacation into shorter, more frequent breaks dispersed throughout the school year. School officials call these two- to four-week breaks between instructional periods “intersessions.” Intersessions may include remedial, enrichment, and/or accelerated activities and are one of the primary advantages of the year-round/non-traditional over the traditional calendar. Despite the name “year-round school” or “year-round calendar,” students attending schools on a year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee meet the same number of official instructional days as traditional calendar schools. Because of the confusion and controversy associated with the calendar, the majority of Tennessee’s year-round/non-traditional schools and districts refer to the calendar as *balanced*, *modified*, and/or *non-traditional*.

Research on Tennessee’s year-round/non-traditional calendar schools reveals:

**Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee have documented some academic improvements after the adoption of the calendar, although other changes have been implemented concurrently, making direct correlation difficult.** Because the year-round/non-traditional calendar is relatively new in Tennessee, particularly on a district level, comprehensive evaluations of the academic effects of the year-round/non-traditional calendar have not been done; however, some school officials and one academic study from ETSU cite enhanced academic opportunities for failing high school students and some improvement in ACT and TCAP scores. (See pages 7, 9-12.)

**While the year-round/non-traditional calendar may or may not deliver significant academic benefits in the form of higher test scores, other factors related to academic performance, such as attendance and discipline referrals, show significant improvement in some Tennessee schools.** Some year-round/non-traditional calendar schools and districts have documented significant reductions in teacher absenteeism and student discipline referrals. School officials think intersession periods reduce absenteeism and student discipline by providing vacation periods that relieve burnout throughout the school year, offering students and teachers two- or three-week breaks in the fall and spring. (See pages 9, 11-12, 14.)

**Tennessee schools have experienced cost savings, cost neutrality, and cost increases after the adoption of the year-round/non-traditional calendar.** Because year-round/non-traditional schools operate at different grade levels, as pilot programs or

district-wide, and with differing levels of intersession programming and funding sources, costs associated with the calendar vary throughout the state. Some schools have documented cost savings through the reduction of teacher absences and student discipline referrals. Other schools have increased transportation, intersession, administrative, and utility costs. (See pages 12-16.)

**Although a few schools and districts have discontinued the calendar, most year-round/non-traditional schools and districts report positive experiences with the calendar at this time.** Although the year-round/non-traditional calendar presents scheduling challenges for schools, districts, teachers, parents, and students, the measured and deliberative approach taken by most Tennessee schools has resulted in successful and sustainable transitions to the calendar at this time. (See pages 8, 9, 16-19.)

**Schools and districts considering a transition to the year-round/non-traditional calendar have no statewide source of information on the calendar in Tennessee.** Because there is no statewide source of information on year-round/non-traditional calendars, some schools and districts are unaware of other year-round/non-traditional calendar schools operating across the state. Although schools may obtain information from the National Association for Year-Round Education, surrounding states, and schools and districts in close proximity to them, a source of statewide information would provide all interested schools and districts with Tennessee-specific information about the calendar. (See page 9.)

**A comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the calendar using statistical procedures would provide educators, parents, and community members with more authoritative conclusions on the impact of the year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee.** While some schools and districts have documented improvements following the adoption of the calendar, only East Tennessee State University has used statistical procedures to evaluate one school's transition to and experience with the year-round/non-traditional calendar. Although numerous studies and evaluations of the calendar exist, many are not directly applicable to the calendar used in Tennessee or suffer from methodological shortcomings. (See pages 11, 12.)

**The Department of Education's list of year-round/non-traditional calendars generated by the Education Information System (EIS) is incomplete.** Because the Department of Education's EIS calendar data entry row has only two mutually exclusive choices, "year-round" and "traditional," and schools and districts use various terms for the calendar, some schools and districts operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar identify their calendar as "traditional." By including more calendar choices with less exclusivity, the EIS could more accurately capture the number of year-round/non-traditional calendars operating in Tennessee. (See page 6.)

**Recommendations** (See page 20.)

**The Department of Education should make available information on year-round/non-traditional alternatives to the traditional calendar to interested schools and districts throughout the state.** Because there is no central source of information in

the state, schools and districts may be unaware of the number of Tennessee schools operating on and the potential of a year-round/non-traditional calendar. In addition, because multiple schedules and designs of the calendar exist, information and studies from other states may not be directly applicable to Tennessee. By disseminating information about the year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee, the Department of Education could provide interested schools and districts with Tennessee-specific information on the opportunities and challenges of the calendar.

**The Department of Education should conduct an evaluation of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee.** Although individual schools and districts have gathered some school performance data and anecdotal information, an official evaluation and assessment of the calendar in Tennessee has not been done. By evaluating the calendar, the Department of Education could establish best practices for most effective school calendars. The Department of Education may wish to collaborate or contract with a higher education institution to conduct this evaluation and assessment.

**The Department of Education should modify the calendar data entry row on the Education Information System (EIS).** Because schools only have two choices to designate their calendar on the EIS and apply a variety of titles to calendars that reorganize the traditional school year, those operating on a non-traditional calendar may often check “traditional” rather than “year-round.” By modifying the calendar data entry row on the EIS, the Department of Education will be able to better track the year-round/non-traditional calendar trend in Tennessee.

The Department of Education indicates that it is receptive to these recommendations and will consider implementing them. (See Appendix E for the Department of Education’s response to the report.)

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## Introduction

Following a national trend, the number of schools operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee increased dramatically over the past decade. As of March 2003, Office of Education Accountability staff estimate that Tennessee will have 147 schools in 27 districts operating on some form of the calendar for the 2003-04 school year, as compared to none in 1993. With other schools and districts studying a possible adoption of the calendar, the number of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee may increase further still.

In September 2002, the Select Oversight Committee on Education requested this briefing paper. It provides information about the year-round/non-traditional calendar concept, statistics on the number of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools nationally and in Tennessee, differences in academic achievement and cost between the traditional and the year-round/non-traditional calendar, and the integration of the year-round/non-traditional calendar within the community.

## Methodology

The information provided in this briefing paper is based on:

- interviews with Tennessee school superintendents, assistant superintendents, supervisors of attendance and curriculum, principals, and assistant principals of districts and schools operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar;
- a statewide survey of Tennessee school superintendents;
- a review of academic research on the year-round calendar and changes in the traditional school calendar;
- information from and interviews with Tennessee Department of Education staff;
- a review of related newspaper articles, websites, and books;
- interviews with Kentucky school district superintendents;
- an interview with the executive director of the National Association for Year-Round Education; and
- interviews with education departments in other states.

## Background

Passed by the United States Congress in 1991, the Education Council Act established the National Education Commission on Time and Learning to review the relationship between time and learning in school.<sup>1</sup> In 1994, the commission released the report *Prisoners of Time*, which concluded that changes in the global economy and American society required a change in the use of instructional time in America's schools and urged schools and districts across the country to examine ways to improve the structure, composition, and length of instructional time. One option the commission explored to improve time and learning in schools was year-round education.

Bluffton, Indiana opened a school the National Association for Year-Round Education considers the forerunner of modern year-round education in 1904.<sup>2</sup> Several school systems, including

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<sup>1</sup> *Prisoners of Time*, Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, April 1994.

<sup>2</sup> National Association for Year-Round Education website, <http://www.nayre.org/history.html>. Accessed March 18, 2003.

Nashville Public Schools, continued experimentation with variations of the year-round/non-traditional calendar in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Experimentation with the concept faded during the Great Depression, World War II, and the 1950s, but the late 1960s saw a resurgence, often used to accommodate increases in student population without adding new school buildings and facilities.<sup>3</sup> While space needs still drive conversions, schools increasingly adopt the calendar to enhance the academic performance of students and address special education needs among “at-risk” and English as a second language students.<sup>4</sup>

## What is the difference between a traditional calendar and a year-round/non-traditional calendar?

The year-round/non-traditional calendar reorganizes the traditional school calendar by breaking up a portion of the traditional three-month summer vacation into shorter, more frequent breaks dispersed throughout the school year, as shown in the exhibit below.

**Exhibit 1: General Comparison between a Traditional and a Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar**

School Calendar Months	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Total Instruction Days
Traditional Calendar Schedule													180
9-2 Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar Schedule													180

*Note: Black areas designate vacation periods. Calendar graphic does not include one day holidays such as Labor Day, Martin L. King Day, Presidents’ Day, Good Friday, and Memorial Day.*

Despite the name “year-round school” or “year-round calendar,” students attending schools on a year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee meet the same number of official instructional days as traditional calendar schools. However, because the term “year-round school” and “year-round calendar” can cause confusion and misunderstanding among the public, many schools in Tennessee and other states use various terms for this reorganization of the traditional school year, including:

- Balanced or modified calendar
- Achievement calendar
- Non-traditional or alternative calendar
- 9-2 or 9-3 calendar

<sup>3</sup> Don Glines, *Year-Round Education: History, Philosophy, Future*, San Diego, CA: National Association for Year-Round Education, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn M. Shields and Steven Lynn Oberg, *Year-Round Schooling: Promises and Pitfalls*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

- Continuous learning calendar
- Modified traditional calendar

Most Tennessee schools and districts use the terms *balanced calendar*, *modified calendar*, 9-2 or 9-3 calendar, which refers to nine weeks of instruction followed by a vacation period of two or three weeks, and *non-traditional calendar* to refer to the calendar.<sup>5</sup> Although a few schools in Tennessee refer to the calendar as “year-round,” the majority do not because of the confusion and controversy associated with misunderstandings about the calendar’s length.<sup>6</sup>

### What are single-track and multi-track designs?

Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools usually operate on a single-track or a multi-track design. On a single-track, all school personnel attend school on the same instructional and vacation schedule. As of the 2002-03 school year, all of Tennessee’s year-round/non-traditional calendar schools operate on a single-track design. A multi-track design divides students and teachers into groups, or tracks, and then assigns each group its own individual instructional and vacation schedule. Multi-tracks utilize staggered schedules so that one of the student/teacher tracks is always on vacation, as shown below.

**Exhibit 2: General Example of a Multi-Track Design**

School Calendar Months	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.
Multi-Track Schedule A	Black				Black				Black			
Multi-Track Schedule B		Black				Black				Black		
Multi-Track Schedule C			Black				Black				Black	
Multi-Track Schedule D				Black				Black				Black

*Note: Black areas designate vacation periods. Calendar graphic is an adaptation of North Carolina’s 2002-03 Wake County Public School System’s 45/15 Multi-Track Schedule. Calendar graphic does not include Thanksgiving break, Christmas break, and one-week July summer break for students on all tracks.*

<sup>5</sup> OREA interviews with year-round/non-traditional schools and districts in Tennessee, November 2002 – January 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn M. Shields and Steven Lynn Oberg, *Year-Round Schooling: Promises and Pitfalls*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

By having one track always on vacation, a school can substantially increase its school capacity. For example, a school with a student capacity of 600 students on a traditional schedule could expand its student capacity to 800 students by converting to a multi-track design as shown below.

**Exhibit 3: Student Capacity Comparison between a Traditional Calendar School and a Multi-track Calendar School**

School	Traditional Calendar School	Multi-track Calendar School
1	600 students	800 students
2	600 students	800 students
3	600 students	800 students
4	600 students	N/A
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>2,400 students</b>	<b>2,400 students</b>

*Note: In this example, the multi-track design allows each school to increase its student capacity by 200 students. Example demonstrates that three multi-track calendar schools can accommodate the same number of students as four schools on a traditional calendar.*

For this reason, schools often use a multi-track design to alleviate overcrowding without an increase in capital expenditures for new buildings.<sup>7</sup> Although a multi-track design increases the number of instructional days at the school, it does not increase the number of instructional days per student. For example, a four-track, multi-track, year-round calendar’s instructional days will total approximately 220-240 days, depending on the schedule used; however, students attend school the same number of official instructional days as a traditional calendar school.

Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools also operate on different instructional and vacation schedules. The most common schedules are the 45-15, the 60-20, and the 45-10. On a 45-15 schedule, students attend school for nine weeks followed by three-week vacation periods. On a 45-10 schedule, students attend school for nine weeks followed by two-week vacation periods. Accordingly, the 60-20 schedule breaks up 12 weeks of instruction with four-week vacation periods. Although year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee do not use one uniform schedule, approximately 92 percent of them operate on some form of the “9-2” or 45-10 schedule. One of the benefits of the “9-2” schedule mentioned in interviews is it allows school systems to incorporate year-round elements into the school year without a substantial reorganization of the traditional summer break. One superintendent noted that the “9-2” schedule leaves an eight week summer break for students and families who value a longer, traditional summer break.<sup>8</sup>

Another calendar option is the dual-track design, also known as a school-within-a-school. Schools operating on a dual-track design offer a traditional calendar track and a year-round/non-traditional track within the same school. This calendar option provides parents, students, and teachers with a choice between calendars and can also provide school administrators and

<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth A. Palmer and Amy E. Bemis, *Year-Round Education*, University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1999. See [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu).

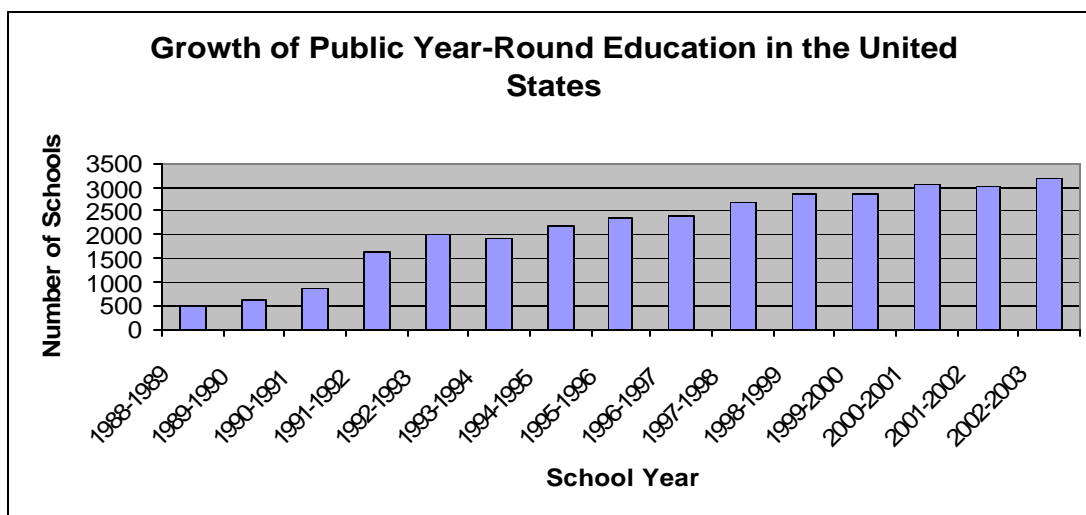
<sup>8</sup> Interview with Charles Daniel, Superintendent of Dickson County Schools, November 19, 2002.

teachers with a vehicle to explore the calendar before converting an entire school or district. Several Tennessee schools have used dual-track designs to ensure parents choice of schedules. For example, Johnson City Schools operated three dual-track schools at Woodland Elementary, Southside Elementary, and Cherokee Elementary to allow parents the choice between the traditional and the year-round/non-traditional calendar.<sup>9</sup> Two of these schools, Woodland Elementary and Southside Elementary, decided to convert entirely to a single-track, year-round/non-traditional calendar, while Cherokee Elementary switched back to a traditional calendar. Rutherford County Schools also provided parents with a choice by offering two dual-track schools at Cedar Grove Elementary and Siegel Middle School, although this school system discontinued the dual-tracks in 2003 in favor of a uniform, more traditional calendar for the entire district. Alcoa City Schools and Bradley Elementary in the Murfreesboro City School System both offered dual-track schools before converting entirely to the year-round/non-traditional calendar.

### How many schools use the year-round/non-traditional calendar nationally?

The number of public year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in the United States has increased dramatically over the past 15 years – from 494 schools operating on the calendar for the 1988-1989 school year to 3,181 schools for the 2002-03 school year, according to the National Association for Year-Round Education.<sup>10</sup> As of the 2002-03 school year, over 2.3 million American students attended a school on some form of the calendar. These 2.3 million students attend schools in 46 states, with California, Kentucky, Hawaii, Arizona, and Texas leading the nation in the number of schools. The overwhelming majority of these schools are elementary schools (2,479), with 315 middle or junior high schools and 174 high schools comprising the remainder of schools.

**Exhibit 4**



Source: National Association for Year-Round Education, “Statistical Summaries of Year-Round Education Programs: 2002-2003.”

<sup>9</sup> Telephone interview with Barry Tolley, Principal of Cherokee Elementary, November 25, 2003.

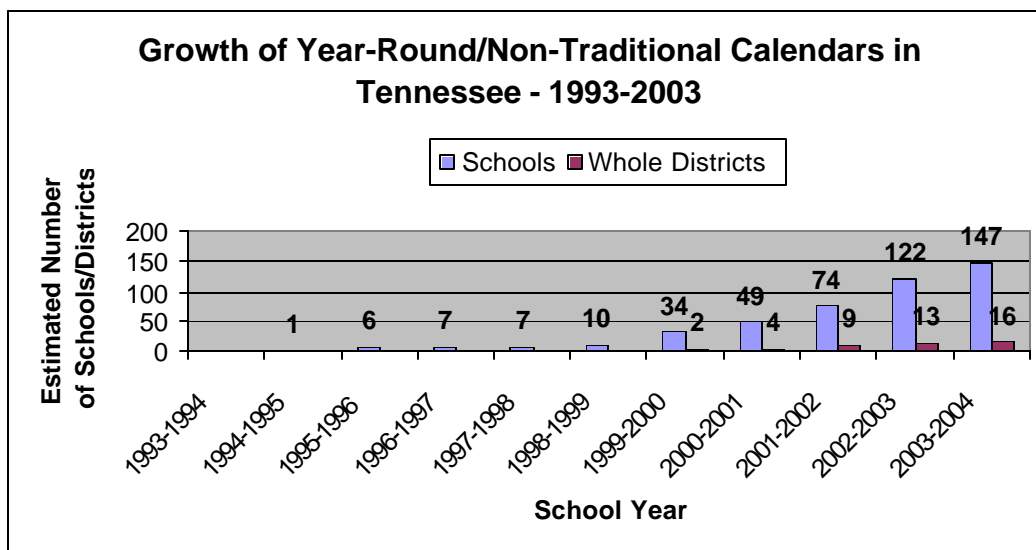
<sup>10</sup> National Association for Year-Round Education, “Statistical Summaries of Year-Round Education Programs: 2002-2003.”

## How many year-round/non-traditional calendar schools are in Tennessee?

As of March 2003, Office of Education Accountability staff estimate that Tennessee will have 147 schools in 27 districts operating on some form of the year-round/non-traditional calendar for the 2003-04 school year. Office of Education Accountability staff can only estimate the number of year-round/non-traditional schools and districts in Tennessee because the Tennessee Department of Education's list of modified calendars is incomplete, although the Department does collect data on school calendars through the Education Information System (EIS). However, because the Department of Education's EIS calendar data entry row has only two mutually exclusive choices, "year-round" and "traditional," and schools and districts use various terms for the calendar, some schools and districts operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar identify their calendar as "traditional."

With no schools operating on the calendar in 1993, Tennessee has seen a remarkable increase over the past decade, as demonstrated in Exhibit 5. Recently, several school systems converted all their schools to a year-round/non-traditional calendar. DeKalb, Dickson, Overton, and Putnam County Schools began the 2002-03 school year on a year-round/non-traditional calendar, and Clay, Maury, and Wilson County Schools will convert to a year-round/non-traditional calendar beginning with the 2003-04 school year. (See Appendix A for a list of the year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee for 2003-04).

**Exhibit 5**



*Source: Author's contact with year-round/non-traditional calendar schools and districts in Tennessee.*

With other traditional calendar schools and districts studying a modification of their calendars, the number of year-round/non-traditional schools in Tennessee may increase further still. (See Appendix B for a list of schools and districts considering the year-round/non-traditional calendar.) Two states bordering Tennessee have also seen dramatic growth in the number of schools operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar. North Carolina, which only had one

such school in 1989, now has 113. Kentucky, which had no schools in 1989, now has 237 public schools operating on different forms of the calendar.<sup>11</sup>

## What are intersessions?

Intersessions are the vacations between instructional periods on a year-round/non-traditional calendar. Depending on the schedule, intersessions may last from two to four weeks and may or may not include remedial, enrichment, or accelerated activities for students. If the intersessions include academic programming, the year-round/non-traditional calendar school provides supplemental instructional and learning time for attending students and, in effect, extends the school year. If a school does not provide academic programming during the intersession periods, the break between instructional periods serves as a vacation. Although Tennessee schools do not mandate intersession attendance, school officials do encourage struggling students to attend remediation programs.

One of the primary academic advantages of a year-round/non-traditional calendar is that intersession programming can provide remediation before a student has fallen too far behind. An intersession period with remediation allows teachers to address students' needs long before summer school and enables students to receive remediation assistance within the school year.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, for students with average or above average achievement, intersessions may also include accelerated and enrichment activities to enhance student learning opportunities.

Remediation activities may differ according to grade level. For example, Tullahoma City Schools provides a variety of intersession remediation and enrichment activities at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. At the elementary level, intersession activities focus on reinforcing math and reading skills, remediation of deficiencies, and enrichment activities. At the middle and high school levels, intersession activities focus on the successful completion of coursework, providing students with the opportunity to raise a failing grade to a passing one. In the fall of 2002, intersession programming allowed more than 80 percent of the high school students attending to improve their grade to passing in certain subjects.<sup>13</sup>

Schools may also provide enrichment activities during the intersession periods. Examples at the elementary level include:<sup>14</sup>

- Police Academy Programming in which students learn about careers in local, state, and federal law enforcement, including trips to the local police department;
- Computer classes in which students learn how to build a technology portfolio and create their own webpage;
- Historical Period classes in which students study a particular historical era's customs, dress, and ideas;

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<sup>11</sup> National Association for Year-Round Education, "Statistical Summaries of Year-Round Education Programs: 2002-2003."

<sup>12</sup> Charles Ballinger, "Prisoners No More," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 53, No. 3, November 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Telephone interview with Dan Lawson, Superintendent of Tullahoma City Schools, January 24, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> These activities are samples of intersession programs offered at Fort Craig Elementary in the Maryville City school system, Highland Elementary in the Greeneville City school system, Willow Brook Elementary in the Oak Ridge City school system, and Cason Lane Academy in the Murfreesboro City school system.

- Cooking intersession in which students tour restaurants and meet with professional chefs and cooking professionals;
- Military Camp intersession in which students learn about careers in the different branches of military service and meet with military specialists from each branch;
- Animal Kingdom intersession in which students study animals and visit with veterinarians;
- Junior Firefighters and other City Safety Training in which students attend a fire station, learn how to investigate a fire, recognize fire hazards, recognize electrical safety, and learn about bike and traffic safety; and
- Legal Eagles intersession in which students learn about the legal system and participate in a mock trial.

Although schools in Tennessee providing intersession usually do so in the fall and spring, some school districts in the Southeast region provide up to four intersession periods. For example, the Bardstown Kentucky Independent School District operates four intersession periods during the school year—fall, early January, spring, and one following the conclusion of the school year.<sup>15</sup>

### **How do schools convert to a year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee?**

Tennessee state law requires school districts to maintain a school term of at least 200 days; however, the organization of these days is a decision made by the local school board.<sup>16</sup> Most of the schools and districts considering the calendar research the topic, survey the community and school personnel, and then determine whether to convert to the calendar, adopt a pilot program, or remain on a traditional calendar. For example, Greeneville City Schools, which has operated one year-round/non-traditional school for seven years, is considering whether to convert the district to the calendar. Besides having one school in the district as a pilot program to study, the steering committee responsible for the study is examining the external impact of a change in the calendar on business and industry, family life, childcare and extracurricular activities, and coordination of the calendar with the county school system.<sup>17</sup>

The alteration of the school calendar appears to be the most successful when it involves local decision making and follows an inclusive and informative process. Unlike overcrowded school systems in California, Texas, and Florida, which have mandated year-round/non-traditional calendar conversions, most Tennessee school systems have followed a measured and deliberative process in the transition to a year-round/non-traditional calendar, often using pilot programs before converting the entire district. For example, Alcoa City Schools first implemented a dual-track calendar at Alcoa Elementary to pilot the year-round/non-traditional calendar and ensure the community would support the change. W.A. Wright Elementary in Wilson County served as a pilot for four years before the entire school system decided to convert to the calendar for the 2003-04 school year.

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<sup>15</sup> Telephone interview with Robert Smotherman, Superintendent of Bardstown Independent School District, January 31, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> T.C.A 49-6-3004 outlines the required 200 days, which include 180 days for class instruction, 10 days for vacation with pay, five days for in-service education, one day for teacher-parent conferences, and four other days as recommended by the local board of education.

<sup>17</sup> Greeneville City Schools website, <http://www.gcschools.net/AltCalStudy.htm>. Accessed January 20, 2003.



Both Putnam and Dickson County Schools operated a pilot school (Capshaw Elementary and the Discovery School) before making their district-wide conversions. In contrast, cases where the process has not included pilot programs and/or preparing the community for the calendar change, as in Blount County Schools, the transition has been unsuccessful.<sup>18</sup>

However, because there is no statewide source of information on year-round/non-traditional calendars, some schools and districts are unaware of model year-round/non-traditional calendar schools operating across the state. Although schools may obtain information from the National Association for Year-Round Education, surrounding states, and schools and districts in close proximity to them, the lack of a statewide source of information on the year-round/non-traditional calendar leaves Tennessee schools and districts without a central repository of Tennessee-specific information and data on the year-round/non-traditional calendar.

## **Are there academic benefits with a year-round/non-traditional calendar?**

Proponents of the calendar argue that:

- Continuous education reduces the amount of material students forget over the summer vacation;
- Intersessions make it possible for schools to offer enrichment opportunities and remedial help for students during the school year rather than waiting for summer school;
- Intersessions allow teachers additional planning time throughout the school year when it is needed most; and
- Student attendance improves and teacher and student burnout decreases.

Opponents of the calendar argue that:

- Research shows no difference between year-round and traditional calendar test scores;
- The shortened summer break reduces time for summer learning and recreational activities; and
- Organizations with a direct financial stake in year-round education publish many of the studies supporting the year-round calendar.

Research to evaluate the academic effects of the year-round/non-traditional calendar has produced varying results.

- A comprehensive review of the year-round education literature and studies by researchers from the University of Minnesota concluded that students attending year-round schools are likely to perform as well as if not better than traditional calendar schools, especially at the upper elementary school level.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Telephone interview with David Cook, Assistant Superintendent of Blount County Schools, January 31, 2003. *Note: Cook stated that if the school system had piloted the calendar in one or two schools before making a district-wide transition and gradually made the transition to the calendar, the transition would have met with more success. Cook also noted the demographic differences between a large county school system and a small city school system in terms of transportation costs.*

<sup>19</sup> Elisabeth A. Palmer and Amy E. Bemis, *Year-Round Education*, University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1999. See [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu).

- The Education Commission of the States found that current research, as a whole, is inconclusive regarding the degree to which year-round schools affect student achievement.<sup>20</sup>
- An analysis of a study on year-round schools by the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research shows a slight but not overwhelming advantage for year-round students in learning basic content.<sup>21</sup>
- A five-year evaluation of student performance at the University School, a K-12 laboratory school for East Tennessee State University's College of Education, found students outperformed their traditional calendar cohorts in ACT scores, while TCAP scores, although positive, favored the year-round schedule less.<sup>22</sup>
- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction conducted a statewide evaluation of academic achievement differences between year-round and traditional calendar schools. The study found achievement in year-round schools was no higher than in traditional calendar schools and that differential effects for certain student subgroups, although statistically significant in some cases, were not of practical significance.<sup>23</sup>

While the results of studies on the academic effects of the year-round/non-traditional calendar are not definitive, there is some consensus on summer learning loss, which the year-round/non-traditional calendar seeks to ameliorate. Summer learning loss refers to the decline in academic achievement among “at-risk” children during the summer. Several research studies document the phenomenon:

- The New York Board of Regents conducted a seven-year longitudinal study on student retention of information over the summer. Students were tested at the end of school and the beginning of school three months later. Results of the study showed that economically disadvantaged children fell behind on test indicators during the summer while other students continued to gain. Researchers attributed the difference in achievement scores to the lack of a stimulating home environment for economically disadvantaged children.<sup>24</sup>
- Researchers from John Hopkins University divided elementary students into three groups based on socioeconomic status and administered the California

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<sup>20</sup> Todd Ziebarth, *Scheduling: Year-Round School*, Education Commission of the States, June 1997.

<sup>21</sup> North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, *Center Urges State to Provide Data on Student Performance in Year-Round Schools*, May 30, 1997. See <http://www.ncinsider.com/nccppr/yrsnews.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> James McLean and Robin Adams, *An Evaluation of the Transition to Year-Round School of the University School*, East Tennessee State University, July 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Bradley McMillen, “A Statewide Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Year-Round Schools,” *The Journal of Education Research*, Vol. 95, No. 2, November/December 2001.

<sup>24</sup> New York State Department of Education and the University of the State of New York, *Learning, retention and forgetting*. Albany, NY: Technical Report No. 5 for the Board of Regents of the State University of New York, 1978.

Achievement Test at the beginning and end of each school year.<sup>25</sup> Results of the study showed that during the school year test score gains were similar between the high-SES and low-SES groups; however, during the summer months, children from low-SES families lost ground while children from high-SES families gained ground.

- Researchers from the University of Missouri and Tennessee State University found in a review of 39 studies that achievement test scores for some students decline over summer vacation. The study found middle-class students appeared to gain on reading recognition tests over the summer while lower-class students lost on them.<sup>26</sup>

Since year-round/non-traditional calendar schools redistribute the summer vacation block into shorter, more frequent breaks throughout the year, they can eliminate the long vacation period common to the traditional school calendar and, in theory, reduce summer learning loss. Although research shows a slight correlation between the year-round/non-traditional calendar and test scores, it is difficult to attribute a gain in test scores solely to the calendar used. Schools operating on a year-round/non-traditional calendar may adopt a new curriculum or changes in policy, encourage parental participation and community involvement, or make other alterations that may have a positive or negative effect separate from the school calendar. A failure to control for these factors compromises the findings of many studies of the calendar. In addition, many studies comparing the academic achievement scores of year-round/non-traditional and traditional calendar schools fail to account for:

- the track used by the school (single-track, multi-track, or extended year)
- the schedule used by the school (45-10, 45-15, or other configurations)
- the content, amount, and attendance of intersession programming

While the year-round/non-traditional calendar may or may not deliver significant academic benefits in the form of higher test scores, other factors related to academic performance, such as attendance and discipline referrals, show significant improvements in some Tennessee schools. Tullahoma City Schools documented a drop in discipline referrals of 30 percent at Tullahoma High School following the adoption of a year-round/non-traditional calendar, although other variables such as a changing student population and changes in building level discipline procedures may have also played a role.<sup>27</sup> Trenton Special School District in Gibson County saw a 22 percent decrease in the total number of suspensions at all schools and a 30 percent decrease in the number of sick and personal leave days taken by teachers the year following the adoption of the year-round/non-traditional calendar, although officials say it is too early to identify a

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<sup>25</sup> Doris Entwistle, Karl Alexander, and Linda Steffel Olson, *Children, Schools, and Inequality*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Harris Cooper, Barbara Nye, Kelly Charlton, James Lindsay, and Scott Greathouse, "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review," *The Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Telephone interview with Dan Lawson, Superintendent of Tullahoma City Schools, January 24, 2003.

trend.<sup>28</sup> Following a district-wide conversion to a year-round/non-traditional calendar in 1995, the Bardstown Kentucky Independent School District saw its dropout rate cut almost in half, a 16 percent decrease in discipline referrals, and improved grades and ACT scores, although the superintendent of the district does not attribute these improvements entirely to the school calendar.<sup>29</sup>

While these school district snapshots provide some evidence that the calendar can positively impact student achievement, the Department of Education has not conducted a comprehensive evaluation of year-round/non-traditional calendars. Since the majority of Tennessee schools and districts have adopted the calendar during the past two years, it is too early to come to any definitive conclusions about the academic benefits of the year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee, although there are some positive developments.

## **What are the cost differences on a year-round/non-traditional calendar?**

A comprehensive evaluation of the cost of the year-round/non-traditional calendar should consider many factors on different administrative levels, including:

- Single-track vs. Multi-track costs
- Funding of remedial, accelerated, and enrichment intersession programs, if offered
- Operational costs (utility costs, educational materials costs, custodial, teacher, and administrative salaries and transportation funding)
- Capital costs (acquisition of land and erection of new school buildings and facilities)

### ***Single-track design***

The costs of operating a school on a single-track design will most likely be the same as the traditional calendar without intersession programming; however, with the addition of intersession programming, the single-track design may cost more than a traditional calendar school depending upon the school or district situation. A 1998 report on alternative calendars commissioned by the Minnesota State Legislature found that single-track designs are likely to cost as much or more than traditional calendar schools.<sup>30</sup>

Possible cost increases on a single-track design may occur in the areas of transportation and utilities. For example, one school district in East Tennessee found student intersession attendance so low that it became difficult to justify the increased bus transportation costs incurred during intersession periods.<sup>31</sup> Blount County Schools, which adopted a year-round/non-traditional calendar in 1999, averaged \$15,000 in transportation costs per intersession with only 10 percent

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<sup>28</sup> Telephone interview with Sandra Harper, Trenton Special School District Supervisor of Instruction/Special Education, January 31, 2003. Note: Figures exclude maternity leave days for both school years.

<sup>29</sup> Telephone interview with Robert Smotherman, Superintendent of Bardstown Independent School District, January 31, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Minnesota Working Group on Alternative Calendars, *Alternative Calendars Report*, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Telephone interview with Alvin Hord, Superintendent of Blount County Schools, November 25, 2002.

of students attending the programming. As a result, the school system is switching off the year-round/non-traditional calendar for the 2003-04 school year.<sup>32</sup>

Utility costs may also increase under the single-track, year-round/non-traditional calendar, although Tennessee schools usually did not identify this as a significant cost increase. For example, utility costs at Obion County Schools increased after the adoption of the year-round/non-traditional calendar; however, this increase was not just because of the new calendar, according to an administrative official in the school system.<sup>33</sup> Utility costs increased because of a two percent increase in power rates by the local electric company at the same time the system adopted the calendar. Moreover, the school system operates air-conditioning in the summer months regardless of the calendar to prevent mold from forming. According to the Obion County Assistant Director of Schools, mold problems resulting from a lack of air-conditioning in the summer months forced the school system to shut down one high school last year.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Intersessions***

Other costs associated with the calendar, such as supplies and administrative staffing for intersessions, may also increase. Schools use a variety of funding streams to provide intersession programming, including:

- Reorganization of summer school funding
- Extended contract money for teacher pay
- Student participation fees, although these may be waived for remediation classes and low-income students participating in enrichment activities
- Title I funding for teacher and administrative positions
- Other sources (corporate grants, community support)

Tennessee schools offering intersession programming usually finance it through student fees coupled with the use of extended contract money to pay for teacher staffing. According to a 2002 report on summer schools by the Southern Regional Education Board, Tennessee, along with Alabama, Mississippi, and Oklahoma, has no state funding earmarked specifically for summer school or other programs to help struggling students.<sup>35</sup> For example, Kentucky's Extended School Services Program provides schools with funds for "at-risk" students that can be used for funding summer school or remedial intersession programming.<sup>36</sup> Although Tennessee does not have state funding earmarked specifically for extended school services as a whole, extended contract funds do provide Tennessee schools with a way to pay teachers for work outside normal school hours. Extended contract funds totaled \$28,210,100 for FY2002, and are usually used by traditional and year-round/non-traditional schools for remedial purposes (i.e., after-school programs, summer school, weekend classes, and intersession programming).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Telephone interview with David Cook, Assistant Superintendent of Blount County Schools, January 31, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Telephone interview with Lonnie Grady, Assistant Director of Schools, Director of Budget and Finance, and Attendance Supervisor, Obion County Schools, January 31, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, *Summer School: Unfulfilled Promise*, 2002. See <http://www.sreb.org>. Note: Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas have programs to provide schools with funds for "at-risk" students and summer school.

<sup>36</sup> Telephone interview with Robert Smotherman, Superintendent of Bardstown Independent School District, January 31, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Telephone interview with Kim Buck, Education Consultant, Tennessee Department of Education, March 4, 2003.

Although costs at some schools may increase following the adoption of the calendar, other schools may realize cost savings through increased teacher attendance and a reduction in student referrals for disciplinary action. Larry Neas, Principal of Highland Elementary in Greeneville City Schools, found a considerable decrease in teacher absences and student discipline referrals and suspensions following the adoption of the calendar. After examining leave reports from past years, Neas found teacher absences decreased approximately 60 percent, which reduced the amount of district funds used to pay for substitute teachers.<sup>38</sup> Another school system also found cost savings after converting to the calendar. According to the Superintendent of Putnam County Schools, the school system is on track to realize a savings of \$88,000 to \$100,000 dollars for 2002-03 through the reduction of teacher absenteeism.<sup>39</sup>

Although these examples demonstrate the cost increases and savings possible on a year-round/non-traditional calendar, researchers have found that cost differences (i.e., transportation and utility costs, student and teacher attendance, discipline) vary among schools and do not clearly correlate with modifications to the calendar.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Multi-track design***

Though schools switching to a single-track design may or may not see a rise in expenses, schools operating on a multi-track design can realize significant cost savings. The cost savings possible include reduced capital expenditures for new facilities, a reduction in debt service used to finance new school and facility construction, and savings on personnel expenses. In addition, the design may also reduce building design, engineering, construction, and furnishing, as well as infrastructure (streets, sewer, water, utilities, and furniture) costs.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, multi-track designs also may serve as an adjustment to handle temporary increases in enrollment without the construction of new buildings.<sup>42</sup>

The Wake County Public School System in North Carolina utilizes a multi-track design in some of its schools to relieve overcrowding and expand school capacity. One Wake County educator estimated the calendar saved the county \$7 million in construction costs, according to the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research.<sup>43</sup> The Oxnard California Unified School District estimated new building cost savings of \$16 million over a 13-year period. Furthermore, the Douglas County Colorado School District, the fastest growing county in the United States, estimates a cost savings of \$75 million dollars in construction and interest expenses since the introduction of multi-track, year-round calendars in 1985.<sup>44</sup>

While these examples demonstrate the cost savings possible on a multi-track design, schools must operate above full student capacity to take advantage of them. According to the National

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<sup>38</sup> Telephone interview with Larry Neas, Principal of Highland Elementary, November 8, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Telephone interview with Michael Martin, Superintendent of Putnam County Schools, November 22, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Carolyn M. Shields and Steven Lynn Oberg, *Year-Round Schooling: Promises and Pitfalls*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Morton Inger, *Year-Round Education: A Strategy for Overcrowded Schools*, ERIC/CUE Digest 103, 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, *Center Urges State to Provide Data on Student Performance in Year-Round Schools*, May 30, 1997. See <http://www.ncinsider.com/nccppr/yrsnews.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Douglas County School District website. See <http://www.dcsd.k12.co.us/district/general/yearround.html>

Association for Year-Round Education, a multi-track school must operate at 112 percent or above student capacity to realize cost savings.<sup>45</sup> For schools operating at less than 112 percent capacity, education facilities such as portable classrooms and annexes could be cheaper. However, school districts with low or fluctuating enrollments may be unable to realize cost savings on a multi-track design and can incur additional expenses as enrollment declines.<sup>46</sup>

When considering the cost-effectiveness of the multi-track design, it is important to distinguish between the operation costs of a particular school and the capital outlays of the school district. Operating costs include utility costs, educational materials, and custodial, teacher, and administrative salaries. Capital costs include the acquisition of land and erection of school buildings and facilities. Furthermore, schools may also incur transitional costs through readying the facility and planning and implementing the year-round program.<sup>47</sup> Because the instructional days at a school increase on a multi-track design, the operating costs of the school will increase; however, the district as a whole would realize savings through the avoidance or postponing of the building, equipping, and staffing of new schools.

Though Tennessee has no schools operating on a multi-track design, a recently released study of the Memphis City Schools recommended the district convert up to 12 elementary schools and four middle schools to multi-track, year-round calendars. According to the study released by MGT of America, Inc., the implementation of this recommendation over a five-year period would eliminate the need to construct up to three new elementary schools and one new middle school and could result in savings of \$69 million or more.<sup>48</sup> Although this report identified cost savings with the multi-track design, school systems with a high degree of student transience, such as Memphis City Schools, may encounter problems with the design. For example, the Virginia Beach City School System, which piloted a multi-track, year-round calendar for two years in the 1970s, identified the transient nature of the student population as a major weakness of the multi-track program.<sup>49</sup> Because the multi-track design divides students into staggered instructional and vacation schedules, school systems with a high degree of transience can encounter difficulty in ensuring transient students have instructional continuity.

### ***State funding of year-round/non-traditional calendar programs***

To help fund the cost of intersessions and the conversion of schools to a year-round/non-traditional calendar, some states provide grant incentives and appropriations. For example, Virginia's 2000-01 state budget included a \$400,000 grants incentive for year-round school initiatives addressing at-risk students. The Virginia Department of Education managed the grants incentive fund and awarded approximately \$340,000 to 25 schools for intersession costs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Telephone interview with Marilyn Stenvall, Executive Director, National Association for Year-Round Education, January 31, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Jay Riley, "What is Year-Round Education?," *Year-Round Educator*, Winter/Spring 1997. See <http://www.dcsd.k12.co.us/district/general/yreducator.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Carolyn M. Shields and Steven Lynn Oberg, *Year-Round Schooling: Promises and Pitfalls*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> MGT of America, Inc., Report on the Memphis City Schools System, January 9, 2003, pp. 9-22.

<sup>49</sup> 1998 analysis of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools Year-Round School Pilot Program, 1973-1975 by the School Board of Virginia Beach. See <http://www.vbschools.com/yrspp.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Minutes from the Virginia SJR 385 Commission on Education Accountability, August 7, 2001, Richmond. See <http://dls.state.va.us/pubs/legisrec/2001/sjr385b.htm>.

The Socorro Independent School District in Texas partially funds its intersessions through a special line-item appropriation established by the state for districts implementing year-round calendars. Socorro draws on a variety of funds to operate its calendar, including categorical federal funds (Title I, bilingual education, and migrant education funds), general funds from the state and district, the special line-item appropriation (which resulted in \$1.5 million appropriated for a two-year period across the state or \$300,000 for the Socorro district), and increases in school budgets because of increased average daily attendance.<sup>51</sup>

Faced with severe overcrowding and inadequate fiscal revenues, some states have mandated conversion to a multi-track, year-round calendar or made continued levels of school funding contingent upon calendar modification. For example, Florida mandated that schools in certain districts exceeding their student capacity by at least 20 percent convert to a multi-track, year-round calendar the following year.<sup>52</sup>

Tennessee's year-round/non-traditional calendar schools do not receive special state appropriations or grant incentives for their programs, although Tennessee state law stipulates that any LEA in which schools are on a year-round schedule shall not face diminished financial support.<sup>53</sup> While Tennessee state law authorizes the commissioner of education, subject to approval by the state board of education, to award grants to individual school systems of up to \$50,000 dollars for planning and implementation of an alternative education plan, no schools operating on the year-round/non-traditional calendar schedule have received state funding under this section of the code.<sup>54</sup> Because of a lack of funding, several Tennessee schools do not offer intersession programming. Without the inclusion of intersession programming, these schools are unable to utilize this primary advantage of the calendar. According to the National Association for Year-Round Education, the inclusion of intersession programming greatly enhances the academic benefits of the year-round/non-traditional calendar. The association cautions, however, that converting to the year-round/non-traditional calendar without reconsidering instructional time and without the inclusion of intersession programming may result in a superficial modification of the traditional calendar.<sup>55</sup>

## **How do year-round programs integrate within the community?**

While research shows that involved parties view the calendar more favorably after a year or more of experience with it, initial, and sometimes continuing, concerns often voiced by parents, teachers, community members and groups, and school administrators about the year-round/non-traditional calendar include:

- The availability of childcare

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<sup>51</sup> "Extended Learning Time for Disadvantaged Students – Profiles of Promising Practices," *Year-Round Education with Intersession Programs*, Vol. 2, 1995. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Extending/vol2/prof8.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Carolyn M. Shields and Steven Lynn Oberg, *Year-Round Schooling: Promises and Pitfalls*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> TCA 49-3-317.

<sup>54</sup> TCA 49-1-207 authorizes the commissioner of education to authorize up to eight school systems or any part thereof to operate as alternative education programs. Interview with Jeff Roberts, former Deputy Commissioner of Education, January 27, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Telephone interview with Marilyn Stenvall, Executive Director, National Association for Year-Round Education, January 31, 2003.



- Families with children attending both a traditional and a non-traditional calendar school
- Scheduling of sports and extracurricular activities
- Continuing education for teachers
- Facility maintenance
- Test scheduling
- Loss of the traditional summer break and student employment

A review of literature on the year-round/non-traditional calendar and interviews with Tennessee school officials show that factors unique to certain communities, and the degree to which school officials coordinate the calendar with community and family activities, determine the degree to which these issues are challenges.

### ***Childcare availability***

Although securing childcare can be a problem regardless of the composition of the school calendar, the availability of childcare during intersession periods can be an area of concern for parents. For example, DeKalb County Schools, which converted to a year-round/non-traditional calendar for the 2002-03 school year, initially had some concern over potential problems with childcare; however, problems with childcare availability have not materialized, as providers have accommodated the new demand during intersession periods. According to school officials, some parents are happy with a school calendar that allows them to more evenly distribute childcare payments throughout the year.<sup>56</sup> Other schools provide before- and after-school care or utilize community agencies to provide childcare. Putnam County Schools, which also identified childcare as a possible issue in their conversion to a new school calendar, promised parents to continue to provide before- and after-school care during the intersession periods.<sup>57</sup> The YMCA provides intersession childcare in the Trenton Special School District during intersession.<sup>58</sup> Schools in other states, such as Kentucky's Bardstown Independent School District, run a cost-recovery intersession childcare program at schools for 10 to 15 percent less than private childcare providers.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Families with children attending both a traditional and a non-traditional calendar school***

Another common concern raised about the impact of the year-round/non-traditional calendar involves children from the same family attending schools with different calendars (i.e., one child attending a traditional calendar school and another child attending a school on a year-round/non-traditional calendar). The degree to which this phenomenon is a problem in communities often depends upon the situation and viewpoint of the parents. Some parents may find family life and scheduling more complicated with different children on vacation periods at different times while other parents may enjoy the ability to spend separate time with children on different vacation schedules. School systems in Tennessee that are or will be operating district-wide on a year-

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<sup>56</sup> Telephone interview with Jim McCormick, Superintendent of DeKalb County Schools, November 25, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Telephone interview with Michael Martin, Superintendent of Putnam County Schools, November 22, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Telephone interview with Sandra Harper, Supervisor of Instruction/Special Education, Trenton Special School District, January 31, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Telephone interview with Robert Smotherman, Superintendent of Bardstown Independent School District, January 31, 2003.

round/non-traditional calendar eliminate this problem through the unification of the district schedule. However, for those systems in which the majority of schools operate on a traditional calendar schedule, this can be a problem. Interviews with schools on a year-round/non-traditional calendar in a traditional calendar district mentioned this as one of the primary challenges of the schedule.

### ***Sports and other extracurricular activities***

Tennessee schools and districts report differing problem levels in relation to sports and extracurricular activities. For example, Dyer County, Overton County, and Alcoa City Schools report little or no problems with high school football scheduling, while Tullahoma City Schools, although not identified as an insurmountable challenge, notes that the coordination of football and band is a challenge.<sup>60</sup> Although Alcoa City Schools reports little or no problems with sports scheduling, the school system did find band attendance during intersession can suffer with students on vacation.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Continuing education for teachers***

Interviews with district officials reveal that many schools coordinate continuing education schedules with community colleges and universities located in their area. For example, some schools in the Middle Tennessee region coordinate the continuing education needs of their teachers with the higher education institutions in the region, such as Middle Tennessee State University and Tennessee Technological University.<sup>62</sup> One school district in Tennessee uses its intersession periods to provide continuing education for teachers interested in administration. Tullahoma City Schools allows teachers to serve as administrators during intersession.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Facility maintenance***

Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools often must have year-round facility maintenance and cleaning. Because the summer vacation period is shortened by the non-traditional calendar, maintenance activities must be rescheduled and often take on a year-round quality, as repairs and cleaning can be done during the intersession periods. One advantage of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in the area of facility maintenance is that repairs may be done during the intersession periods and addressed earlier than they would be on a traditional calendar in which repairs may be done during the winter break or postponed until the summer break.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Test scheduling***

Test scheduling is another issue several school systems have had to address and alter. Since schools administer the TCAP tests in April, year-round/non-traditional calendar schools may have to adjust their spring schedules to avoid an intersession period in the weeks before the test. For example, Putnam County Schools start the school year earlier to ensure maximum instructional time before Gateway testing. Bobby Ray Memorial, a K-5 school in Warren County, has also had to adjust its calendar to maximize instructional time before the TCAP tests.

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<sup>60</sup> Telephone interview with Dan Lawson, Superintendent of Tullahoma City Schools, January 24, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Telephone interview with Jane Qualls, Superintendent of Alcoa City Schools, November 26, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Telephone interviews with officials in Tullahoma City Schools, Overton County Schools, and Murfreesboro City Schools.

<sup>63</sup> Telephone interview with Dan Lawson, Superintendent of Tullahoma City Schools, January 24, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Telephone interview with Jane Qualls, Superintendent of Alcoa City Schools, November 26, 2002.

Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Murfreesboro City Schools adjusted their spring schedules to better accommodate TCAP testing. The schools continue to have a three-week intersession in the spring, but two weeks of this break fall after the TCAP tests instead of before them. Furthermore, the increase in high stakes testing, an increase in test-based accountability, and a need by schools to maximize instructional time before TCAPs and other standardized tests does not only impact year-round/non-traditional calendar schools. Traditional calendar schools are also trying to maximize instructional time before standardized tests by opening earlier in August.

### ***Loss of the traditional summer break and student employment***

Opposition groups to the year-round/non-traditional calendar often cite the shortened summer break and its effect on student summer employment.<sup>65</sup> However, approximately 76 percent of the year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee are either K-5, K-8, or middle schools; thus, the school schedule's effect on summer employment is less of a concern for the majority of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee.<sup>66</sup> For example, a "9-3" calendar, such as Fort Craig Elementary in Maryville City Schools, which designated July 19<sup>th</sup> as the first school day for students in 2002-03, can mean a significant decrease in traditional summer break length; however, the "9-2" calendar used by most of the year-round/non-traditional schools in Tennessee, and used by all the high schools in Tennessee, does not substantially redistribute the summer vacation within the school year. With some slight variations, the "9-2" schools in Tennessee begin approximately one week earlier and end one week later than traditional calendar schools.<sup>67</sup> For these "9-2" schools, student summer employment may or may not be a concern. The superintendents of Putnam and Overton County Schools note that the year-round/non-traditional calendar can reduce summer employment by about two weeks compared to the traditional calendar.<sup>68</sup> However, the superintendent of Dickson County Schools noted that more and more students are working year-round and may have more time for work during the two-week intersession periods on a year-round/non-traditional calendar.<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion, Tennessee has seen a remarkable increase in the number of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools over the past decade. With no schools or districts operating on the calendar in 1993, Office of Education Accountability staff estimate that Tennessee will have 147 schools in 27 districts operating on some form of the calendar for 2003-04, with several others considering adoption of the year-round/non-traditional calendar. As schools and districts continue to evaluate the academic and financial results of the calendar change, lawmakers, educators, and citizens may assess more accurately the success of year-round/non-traditional calendars in Tennessee.

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<sup>65</sup> Several year-round calendar opposition groups with websites exist in Tennessee, including Knoxville People Against Year-Round School, <http://www.geocities.com/knoxvillepays/>, and Save Our Summer – Greeneville City Schools, <http://pages.preferred.com/~ikenmt/GreenevilleAgainstYRS.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Author bases 76 percent figure on the best estimate of the number of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee.

<sup>67</sup> Note: Some school systems, such as Coffee County, Franklin County, and Moore County, have adopted a school calendar with week-long breaks in October and November.

<sup>68</sup> Telephone interviews with Overton and Putnam County School Superintendents.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Charles Daniel, Superintendent of Dickson County Schools, November 19, 2002.

## **Recommendations**

**The Department of Education should make available information on year-round/non-traditional alternatives to the traditional calendar to interested schools and districts throughout the state.** Because there is no central source of information in the state, schools and districts may be unaware of the number of Tennessee schools operating on and the potential of a year-round/non-traditional calendar. In addition, because multiple schedules and designs of the calendar exist, information and studies from other states may not be directly applicable to Tennessee. By disseminating information about the year-round/non-traditional calendar in Tennessee, the Department of Education could provide interested schools and districts with Tennessee-specific information on the opportunities and challenges of the calendar.

**The Department of Education should conduct an evaluation of year-round/non-traditional calendar schools in Tennessee.** Although individual schools and districts have gathered some school performance data and anecdotal information, an official evaluation and assessment of the calendar in Tennessee has not been done. By evaluating the calendar, the Department of Education could establish best practices for most effective school calendars. The Department of Education may wish to collaborate or contract with a higher education institution to conduct this evaluation and assessment.

**The Department of Education should modify the calendar data entry row on the Education Information System (EIS).** Because schools only have two choices to designate their calendar on the EIS and apply a variety of titles to calendars that reorganize the traditional school year, those operating on a non-traditional calendar may often check “traditional” rather than “year-round.” By modifying the calendar data entry row on the EIS, the Department of Education will be able to better track the year-round/non-traditional calendar trend in Tennessee.

## Appendix A: Schools and Districts Operating on a Year-Round/ Non-Traditional Calendar for 2003-04

School System	Schools operating on Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar	Date of Conversion	Schedule	Interession Programming for 2002-03
Alcoa City	Entire District	1999	9-2	Yes
Clay County	Maple Grove K-8, Entire District in 2003-04	1999	9-2	No
Cocke County	Northwest Elementary	2002	9-2	No
DeKalb County	Entire District	2002	9-2	No
Dickson County	Entire District	2002	9-2	Yes
Dyer County	Entire District	2000	9-2	Yes
Dyersburg City	Entire District	2000	9-2	Yes
Franklin Special School	Poplar Grove K-4 & 5-8	2000	9-3	Yes
Greeneville City	Highland Elementary	1995	9-3	Yes
Johnson City	Southside Elementary & Woodland Elementary	2002	9-2, 9-3 customized	Yes
Lebanon Special School District	Entire District	2003	9-2	Yes (2003-04)
Manchester City	Entire District	2001	9-2	Yes
Maryville City	Fort Craig Elementary	1995	9-3	Yes
Maury County	Entire District	2003	9-2	Yes (2003-04)
Memphis City	Caldwell Elementary & Rozelle Elementary	Caldwell 1995 Rozelle 2000	Customized Schedule	No, extension of school year
Murfreesboro City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cason Lane Elementary</li> <li>• Bradley Elementary</li> <li>• Hobgood Elementary</li> <li>• Erma Siegel Elementary</li> </ul>	Cason Lane 1994 Bradley 1999 Hobgood 2000 Erma Siegel 1998	9-2, 9-3 customized	Yes
Oak Ridge City	Willow Brook Elementary	1996	9-3	Yes

<b>School System</b>	<b>Schools operating on Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar</b>	<b>Date of Conversion</b>	<b>Schedule</b>	<b>Intersession Programming for 2002-03</b>
Obion County	Entire District	2001	9-2	Yes
Overton County	Entire District	2002	9-2	No
Pickett County	Entire District	2001	9-2	No
Putnam County	Entire District	2002	9-2	No
Sumner County	Union Elementary	2002	9-2, 9-3 customized	No, may begin for 2003-04
Trenton Special School	Entire District	2000	9-2	Yes
Tullahoma City	Entire District	2001	9-2	Yes
Warren County	Bobby Ray Memorial	2000	9-3	Yes
Washington County	University School	1996	9-3	Yes
Wilson County	W.A. Wright Elementary, Entire District in 2003-04	1999	9-2	Yes

**Appendix B: Schools and Districts Considering the Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar – Schools and Districts that have Switched Back to a Traditional Calendar**

<b>Tennessee schools and districts considering the year-round/non-traditional calendar</b>
Carroll County
Cheatham County
Franklin Special School
Greeneville City
Humboldt City
Jackson County
Johnson City
Knox County
Macon County
Murfreesboro City (select schools)
Oak Ridge Preschool
Robertson County
Sumner County
Warren County
Williamson County (Crockett Elementary)
<b>Year-round/non-traditional calendar schools and districts that have switched back to a traditional calendar</b>
Blount County Schools
Siegel Middle School and Cedar Grove Elementary (Rutherford County) in 2003-04
Cherokee Elementary (Johnson City Schools)

## Appendix C: Opportunities and Challenges of the Single-Track, Year-Round/Non-Traditional Calendar

Opportunities	Challenges
Intersession provides students with remediation, enrichment, and acceleration opportunities within the school year	Availability of childcare
Intersession provides time for teacher planning and reflection during the school year	Conflicts with family traditions and scheduling for families with a child in a traditional and a non-traditional school
Improved student and teacher attendance and a reduction of disciplinary referrals	Scheduling conflicts with traditional calendar school districts
Intersession may be used to provide teachers with administrative experience	Facilitating building cleaning and repair
More efficient use of the school facility throughout the year	Scheduling of sports and extracurricular activities
Intersession provides students and teachers with relief from personal and interpersonal tensions	Inclusion of intersession programming and transportation can increase expenditures
Boosts teacher morale	Shortened summer break may interfere with student and teacher employment
Less boredom and unruly behavior by students during the summer	Test scheduling
Families may take vacations during the fall and spring seasons, taking advantage of cheaper rates and fewer crowds	Continuing education for teachers
Parents may more evenly distribute childcare expenses throughout the year	Poor intersession attendance may diminish benefits of the schedule
Cost savings may be realized through a reduction in teacher absences	Visitation scheduling for non-custodial parents



## **Appendix D: School Districts/Organizations/Persons Interviewed**

Alcoa City Schools

Jane Qualls, School Superintendent

Bardstown Independent School District (Kentucky)

Robert Smotherman, School Superintendent

Blount County Schools

Alvin Hord, School Superintendent

David Cook, Assistant Superintendent

DeKalb County Schools

Jim McCormick, School Superintendent

Dickson County Schools

Charles Daniel, School Superintendent

Dyer County Schools

Kaye Bane, Supervisor of Attendance

Dyersburg City Schools

Ed Eller, Curriculum Supervisor 6-8

Frankfort Independent School District (Kentucky)

Michael Oder, School Superintendent

Franklin Special School District

Poplar Grove K-4, 5-8, Christi Buell, Principal

Friendship Christian School

Becky Kegley, Principal of Academics

Greeneville City Schools

Highland Elementary, Larry Neas, Principal

Johnson City Schools

Cherokee Elementary, Barry Tolley, Principal

Kentucky Department of Education

Lisa Gross, Press Secretary

Lebanon Special School District

Tommy Hall, Assistant Superintendent

Maryville City Schools

Fort Craig Elementary, Pete Carter, Principal

Maury County Schools

Kip Reel, School Superintendent

Memphis City Schools

Caldwell Elementary, Lirah Sabir, Principal

Murfreesboro City Schools

Bradley Elementary, Lynn Miller, Principal  
Cason Lane Academy, Susan Gendrich-Cameron, Principal  
Erma Siegel Elementary, Marilyn Burnworth, Secretary  
Hobgood Elementary, Ray Butrum, Principal

National Association for Year-Round Education

Marilyn Stenvall, Executive Director

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Brad McMillen, Education Research and Evaluation Consultant, Accountability Services

Oak Ridge City Schools

Willow Brook Elementary, Bobbi Lussier, Principal

Obion County Schools

Lonnie Grady, Assistant Director of Schools, Director of Budget and Finance, and Attendance Supervisor

Overton County Schools

Mike Gilpatrick, Assistant Director of Schools

Pickett County Schools

Ronnie Tompkins, Assistant Superintendent

Putnam County Schools

Michael Martin, School Superintendent

Rutherford County Schools

Siegel Middle School, Tom Delbridge, Principal

Sumner County Schools

Union Elementary, Billy Nolen, Principal

Tennessee Department of Education

Donnie Jordan, Director of Accountability Projects  
Kim Buck, Education Consultant

Trenton Special School District

Sandra Harper, Supervisor of Instruction and Special Education

Tullahoma City Schools

Dan Lawson, School Superintendent

Warren County Schools

Bobby Ray Memorial, Bob Bonner, Principal

Wilson County Schools

W.A. Wright Elementary, Veronica Bender, Principal

## Appendix E: Commissioner of Education's response to report



**PHIL BREDESEN**  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
6<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER  
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

**LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.**  
COMMISSIONER

April 21, 2003

Ethel Detch, Director  
Office of Education Accountability  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor James K. Polk Building  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Dear Ms. Detch:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the executive summary of your recent report on year-round/non-traditional school calendars in Tennessee. You have made three recommendations for action by the Department of Education. These include providing information on year-round/non-traditional calendars to interested schools and districts around the state, conducting an evaluation of those schools already implementing year-round/non-traditional calendars, and modifying the EIS calendar data entry row to facilitate more accurate reporting of this data. The department is receptive to all three recommendations and will consider their implementation so far as resources allow.

Thank you for the effort that was put into this report. It will provide needed information to the school systems of Tennessee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Brewer".

Keith Brewer  
Deputy Commissioner

KB:jm

c: John Morgan  
Lana Seivers  
Ben Brown  
Lisa Cothron

# Offices of Research and Education Accountability Staff

## **Director**

◆ Ethel Detch

## **Assistant Director (Research)**

Douglas Wright

## **Assistant Director (Education Accountability)**

◆ Jason Walton

## **Principal Legislative Research Analysts**

◆ Phillip Doss

◆ Kim Potts

## **Senior Legislative Research Analysts**

Denise Denton

Margaret Rose

Greg Spradley

Emily Wilson

## **Associate Legislative Research Analysts**

Bonnie Adamson

Brian Doss

Richard Gurley

◆ Russell Moore

Alisa Palmisano

Melissa Jo Smith

## **Legislative Interns**

Jennifer Hause

Bintou Njie

## **Executive Secretary**

◆ Sherrill Murrell

◆ indicates staff who assisted with this project