

## The year-round mess

By Billee Bussard

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Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it. A country without memory is a country of madmen.

[Editor's Note: At the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, Chicago has 13 year-round elementary schools. Almost all of them were located in the overcrowded areas of the southwest side of the city. The number of year-round schools in Chicago had decreased since 1999, and nationwide the number has also levelled off. Recent news reports indicate that powerful politicians and their corporate backers are promoting expansion of year-round schools in Chicago. The following article, written for Substance, is from one of the nation's leading critics of year-round schools. ]

[The original article submitted to Substance was extensively documented, with more than 40 footnotes. For space reasons and because of problems with the computer program reproducing footnotes, we have eliminated them from the following document. Readers who wish to receive this complete text, with all footnotes, should contact Substance via e-mail at [Csubstance @ aol.com](mailto:Csubstance@aol.com). Readers can learn more about sorting the hype from the reality of year-round schools at [www.SummerMatters.com](http://www.SummerMatters.com)].

On October 11, during the dedication of the new Little Village High School in Chicago, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley delivered a speech promoting, again, year-round schooling. Daley's proposal was to increase the number of year-round schools because, he said, we need to become more globally competitive.

As with most important educational policies, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (above) ignores decades of research showing that year-round school programs do not work. As this article shows, they often prove discriminatory against minority children and disruptive of their families. Daley's recent speech promoting more year-round schooling for Chicago follows a typical pattern. On a major policy question, Daley reads from a business script, ignoring key facts and most research. His comments are then repeated uncritically in most press reports, while his staff moves to turn words into policy regardless of the long-term consequences for children and public schools. Substance photo by George N. Schmidt.

"Daley said it's 'ridiculous' for Chicago Public Schools students to continue to take two months off in the summer when their competition for jobs in a global economy — students in China and India — are in school far longer," the Chicago Sun-Times reported on October 12. The Associated Press reported the same day: "A group of Hispanic lawmakers plan to introduce a bill to extend the school year for the entire state, said state Sen. Martin Sandoval of Cicero." According to the Sun-Times, Sandoval's bill would gradually increase the number of required school days in Illinois.

As thousands of Chicagoans know, the city already has year-round schools, and their results are not any different from the failed experiments in other parts of the country.

**Surely Chicago policy makers who propose a year-round calendar to address school overcrowding in fast-growing**

neighborhoods — especially those serving minorities and Latinos — have not seen the testimony from the Williams v. California lawsuit, a case recently settled out of court that documents the calendar's numerous education inequities.

Nor must they be familiar with the history of year-round school in Illinois. The year-round calendar has been tried and dropped or studied and rejected over the last 30 years by many Illinois districts, its growth curtailed at various times as studies emerged to show the calendar has no academic or economic redeeming value and/or proves disruptive to family life.

It is difficult to fathom any informed Chicago public official suggesting a multi-track calendar for any of its 140 overcrowded city schools if he/she had read the sworn testimony from the California lawsuit about the calendar's associated segregation effects, declines in academic performance and deterioration of the learning environment. The learning environment deterioration in California year-round schools includes infestations of roaches and rats due to poor maintenance because school facilities and classrooms are always occupied.

### The lessons of litigation in California

The California lawsuit, brought by a coalition representing minority children, provides the most conclusive and damning evidence to date against the multi-track year-round calendar, which expands school capacity by staggering school breaks, shrinking the summer vacation, and forcing children to attend school in the dog days of summer.

Chicago officials also must be unaware California public officials testified that classrooms with peeling paint, mold and ceilings caving in are not uncommon in year-round schools and that wear and tear on school building heating and air-conditioning from constant use leaves classrooms either too cold or too hot. And unaware of the parade of other expert witnesses who testified multi-track schools:

- Segregate students by socio-economic and racial groups. ("There are also clear racial or ethnic group, family income, and ELL status differences among students across attendance tracks within multi-track year-round schools.")
- Score worse on performance tests than traditional calendar schools or even single-track year-round schools. (Even California officials acknowledged the educational inferiority of the multi-track calendar when it made allowances in the State's Academic Performance Index for schools using a multi-track calendar.)
- Widen the achievement gap.
- Create inequities in education opportunity within the school. (All courses and educational programs are not offered on all tracks.)
- Offer no guarantees of cost savings. (Especially true in an era of uncertain and fluctuating energy costs for cooling summer classrooms that can significantly wreak havoc on school budgets.)

As Ross Mitchell, who did a comprehensive study of year-round schools, summed it: "The utilization of the multi-track year-round calendar in California schools results in unequal educational opportunities for some, if not all, students in these schools compared to students who attend traditional/single-track year-round schools."

Then there are the hidden consequences and dangers. For example, Los Angeles officials who monitor gang activity note the parallel growth in gang membership and the growth of the year-round calendar. They suspect the large number and steady supply of latchkey kids created by the stop-and-start school calendar with its frequent breaks leaves unattended children from working class families easy target for recruitment by street thugs.

In a deposition, Los Angeles Assistant Superintendent Gordon Wohlers candidly said Los Angeles school policy makers for years "have, in effect, perpetuated a fraud on the children of Los Angeles. Year-round education is not, in fact, a swell way to keep kids learning all year, as district officials originally claimed. Instead, the schedule as practiced here has hurt students badly."

Millions of dollars in legal fees later, the entire state of California is retreating from the year-round calendar. As part of the settlement agreement, California, which has housed the lion's share of year-round schools since the 1970s and as much as 80 percent of the national total, is expected to phase out the multi-track calendar within the next seven years, according to a July 13, 2004 Los Angeles Daily News story, "Trend turns toward traditional schedule," by Joe Tone.

"The latest trend indicates once overcrowding is under control, schools quickly return to the traditional calendar," the story said. "Since 1998, the number of year-round public schools statewide has fallen from 1,517 to 1,486, according to the California Department of Education."

In fact, Los Angeles, for decades the nation's largest year-round school district, began this 2005-06 school year to return its schools to a traditional school calendar. A \$9.2 billion school building program underway that will add 160 new schools enabled 22 public schools and one charter to open this year on a September-to-June schedule. When construction of 32 other new schools is complete sometime this school year, more will return to a traditional calendar. Meanwhile, another 208 of LA's 800 campuses must remain on a multi-track (240 schools were using a year-round calendar 2002-03 school year), but the massive school construction program is expected to return all schools to a traditional, 180-day school year by 2012. The district is spending many billions more for the delayed school construction.

"Just to have the continuity of all the teachers and kids within the same system creates a better learning environment," said Jesus Angulo, a high school principal. "No matter how hard you tried, there was always one track that got shortchanged," he said, adding the traditional single-track school year will maximize learning and predicting "a reduced number of dropouts and more kids entering universities."

#### Valley View: An Illinois example of year-round failure

But Chicago policy makers could also have found damning evidence merely by researching the state's own history with a year-round calendar, and especially the experiment in the Valley View school district during the 1970s, which ended after 11 years. Valley View was instrumental in the revival of the year-round school movement. The suburban Chicago school district made national headlines when in 1970 it became the first to use a year-round calendar district wide. By 1980, however, the district decided to drop it. Among the many reasons cited: higher utility costs. And that's no small consideration in these days of escalating and erratic oil prices. School administrators also found no academic advantage to the calendar, said Emmie Dunn, administrative assistant to the superintendent. "As one of our administrators said when the schedule ended, 'After 10 years of year-round school, you're just plain tired,' " Dunn told one reporter.

Among those Illinois districts that have found the year-round school concept wanting are: Bloomington, Carlinville, Community Consolidated School District, Peoria, Quincy, Rockford, Valley View, Wesclin and Woodland.

Even Illinois parochial schools have shelved the idea. In 1998, a task force of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Peoria concluded the calendar would “unnecessarily complicate the lives of those who would participate in the educational change without sufficient benefit.”

A three-year evaluation study released in 1998 by Delwyn Harnish, a former professor of educational psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, found no significant improvement in test scores at Kenwood Elementary, Champaign. He also found a significant jump in utility bills at Kenwood — from \$27,580 the year prior to \$41,537 after the calendar change. And this was during a time of relatively stable energy prices. It was a particularly embarrassing study for the year-round school movement in the state because the principal at that school, Les Huddle, was then vice president of the Illinois Association For Year-Round Education. The Kenwood study reflected earlier findings in Peoria, which dropped a pilot year-round school program in 1993 after three years of disappointing test scores.

Shortly thereafter, a study by a Bradley University economist warned one school district that mandating year-round school would result in a flight of families from those schools.

The year-round school movement has a long history of failure. Research by The Nation Education Association in a 1958 report found that every school system that had attempted a 12-month calendar up to that point eventually abandoned it. Valley View school officials who were among the founders of an organization that promotes school calendar change admit in a book that through 1968 every community which had either tried a year-round calendar or thoroughly investigated the idea had rejected it. The reasons communities dumped it decades ago are the same reasons they dump year-round school today: disruptive to family life, little or no academic benefit and little or no cost savings for schools—and it can even cost much more! Just recently, in neighboring Indiana, the Lafayette school district switched back to a traditional calendar after nine years of test scores revealed no significant academic value associated with a year-round calendar.

A flood of stories in the national media in the 1970s about Valley View using a year-round calendar to answer serious school overcrowding problems sparked a wave of interest in the scheduling concept. Valley View School District 96, which includes Romeoville and Bolingbrook, was the first in the country to respond to booming enrollments by placing the entire school district on a rotating school calendar. In a 15-year period, the school district grew from 89 students to nearly 5,000 and was anticipated to swell to 7,000 by 1970s.

The media attention given Valley View resulted in a long line of consulting jobs in other school districts for Kenneth L. Hermansen, the school superintendent, and his assistant school superintendent, James Gove. Illinois State Chamber of Commerce officials and Republican Gov. Richard B. Ogilvie championed the school district for what seemed at first to be a way to avoid and reduce the bricks and mortar costs of educating children. These two Valley View educators would be instrumental in the formation of the National Council on Year-Round Education, forerunner organization of the National Association FOR Year-Round Education, the San Diego-based advocacy group that markets the year-round school concept to school districts today.

Though Valley View was the first entire district to go year-round, at the same time there had been other school districts around the country using a year-round calendar or had a pilot program underway, prompted in some cases by demands of businesses — automotive-related industries in particular — for a school calendar that would better accommodate their labor needs. The demand for more skilled autoworkers to run industrial equipment made it increasingly more difficult to rely on unskilled laborers to fill in for workers who wanted to take vacations when their children were off in the summer.

The year-round school movement was actually foundering in the late 1970s, about the time Valley View school district was frantically building schools so it could return to a traditional school calendar. Between 1977-79, the number of year-round programs nationwide dropped from a peak of 28 states with at least one year-round school to just 17, according to a reference directory published by what was then the National Council on Year-Round Education, the forerunner

organization of the National Association For Year-Round Education.

Even California, which led the nation in year-round schools from 1970 to 1980 (about 62 school districts), saw year-round numbers drop by a third, to just 40 districts. About a third of the 196,000 students on a year-round calendar in 1979-80 school year were located in three communities: Jefferson County, CO, Valley View, IL, and Prince William County, VA. All three districts, the big success stories of the time, would eventually drop the calendar. "The eleven years of Valley View existence proves beyond doubt that the concept can work at all levels of education," the 1979-80 NAYRE directory said prematurely.

Aggressive marketing despite the facts

Declining numbers did not discourage the aggressive year-round school marketers. The Introduction to the Seventh Annual National Reference Directory of Year-Round Education Programs says: "The eighties will bring a renewal of interest in and growth of year-round education as societies begin a period of rapid transition and transformation leading toward the year 2000 and beyond, and the consideration of alternative global futures."

The timing for expansion was perfect with the release in 1983 of *A Nation At Risk*, a federal report produced under President Reagan, which set in motion an unprecedented era of criticism of public education in America and a frenzy of activity to find ways to improve education.

The coup for the marketers of year-round education was the endorsement of the concept in *Time For Results*, a report of education reform recommendations issued in 1986 by the National Governors' Association. The governors' study was chaired by Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, a Republican (who would later become U.S. Education Secretary under President George H.W. Bush), and co-chaired by Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, a Democrat, (who would later become president).

Gov. Ted Schwinden, a Democrat, who headed the School Facility Use committee, confirmed the considerable influence the National Association of Year-Round Education had in its recommendation for school to switch to a year-round calendar. In remarks to a NAYRE convention Schwinden says: "All politicians like to claim credit when people adopt their recommendations and show progress. That will be difficult for the nation's governors in this case, since you [NAYRE] were promoting year-round education long before we came upon the idea. Nevertheless, you may hear one or more of us claim credit. Try not to think of it as piracy; it's really flattery.

Staff in Schwinden's office told a member of an Oregon year-round school task force that a NAYRE official essentially wrote the recommendation on year-round school in the widely publicized and circulated national governors' report.

Conditions were right for selling the year-round school concept in the 1970s and 1980s, a time in which the business sector clamored for more efficiency and better performance from schools.

First, schools were facing severe funding shortages as a result of taxpayer revolts inspired by the passage of Proposition 13 in California. California, with its high property prices and taxing restrictions that limit the financial ability to meet demands for classroom space, has housed the majority of the nation's year-round schools since the mid-1970s. California schools, not coincidentally, have also ranked near the bottom in reading and other measures of academic achievement of its students.

Second, the business community, hard hit by recessions in the 1970s and 1980s, was blaming the U.S. education system for its declining market share to overseas competitors. [The education system, however, got none of the credit for the booming economy of the 1990s.] A resulting plethora of study committees sought solutions to the education "crisis" and called for drastic reforms in schools to assure the nation could remain competitive. Education commissions were drafting new human resource systems with cradle-to-grave educational development strategies and data banks on the work skills of each citizen to help improve the productivity of American business and make it competitive in a global marketplace.

Third, pressures from the newly emerging technology companies and the venture capitalists who funded them were forcing schools to shift scarce education time and resources, as well as scarce classroom space, toward computer instruction to prepare children for the coming Information Age. The squeeze forced school districts to seek ways of using school buildings, instructional time and resources more efficiently. One Government Accounting Office report estimated placing computers in schools, as school reform reports demanded, would gobble up 25 percent of classroom seating capacity, a particular problem for many schools already stretched to capacity.

The year-round calendar appeared to be a promising solution to everything that ailed public education. The Business Roundtable and Bush President 41 made a longer school year, that would put schools on a year-round calendar, part of its education improvement strategy. But the history in Valley View, IL, California and elsewhere proves reshuffling the school year has little academic value. President Bush 43 knows this well. Under his watch as governor of Texas, the number of year - round schools in the state mushroomed, then rapidly declined following protests against a fractured school year by parents and educators. The Democratic Party, which encouraged experimenting with the year-round calendar in its 2000 platform, dropped it from its education recommendations in the 2004 platform.

For Chicago public officials to ignore or be ignorant of this history will doom its schoolchildren to the same kind of education and social problems that have plagued California, particularly large cities with large minority and Latino populations like Los Angeles. In the long run, using a multi-track year-round calendar will cost more. Chicago will pay twice: once for avoiding building new schools and eventually to build new schools later but at higher prices due to inflation.

Arizona State University researcher Gene Glass concluded: "Year-round schools are not the only, and are certainly not the least expensive, cost-cutting option for financially strapped, growing school districts. Cheaper measures include scheduling double sessions, and using temporary buildings. Redistributing the enrollment by busing and redrawing attendance boundaries can also relieve overcrowding. Before choosing year-round operation, school districts might also consider leasing space or services from neighboring districts or expanding existing buildings."

When a school district is faced with a serious overcrowding problem, it is very tempting to use the multi-track year-round calendar quick-fix. There are alternatives, some of which can be found at <http://www.summermatters.com/talking.htm>.

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