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## AZ chief, Mesa like year-round schools

**JJ Hensley**  
The Arizona Republic  
Jun. 17, 2005 12:00 AM

Mesa's only year-around school has gotten the OK to continue its operation for a third year, keeping Mesa's Longfellow Elementary on a list of about 45 Arizona public schools and districts that offer year-round calendars.

If state school Superintendent Tom Horne has his way, that number will only go up.

The summer break is too long, Horne said, and districts need to sell parents on the idea of keeping their kids in school throughout the year, with schedules that offer the same number of days off as a traditional school calendar. But all Horne can do is promote the idea.

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"I use the pulpit to encourage it," Horne said. "But (school districts) have to persuade the parents first."

Administrators persuaded parents at Longfellow to give it a try two years ago.

As the only school in Mesa with a modified year-round schedule, activity is a constant at Longfellow, and parents and teachers want to

keep it that way.

Shortly after 8 a.m. June 8, Kathleen Orquiz had to move a group of kids out of the way so she could get into her classroom. Many were there as part of the school's summer reading program designed for students who need extra help. Others were there simply because they wanted to be.

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"Five of those kids out there aren't even supposed to be in summer school," Orquiz said. "Once they get here, they don't want to be anywhere else."

That's the reaction most students and parents have had to Longfellow's modified year-round schedule, Principal Dave Christensen said.

Mesa Public Schools conducted a survey last fall that shows that more than 90 percent of parents were satisfied with the schedule, which gives students two-week breaks every nine weeks and time off during July.

All Chandler schools have been on a modified year-round calendar since 1997, and parental support mirrors that at Longfellow, said district spokesman Terry Locke, with 92 percent of families in favor of the nine-week-on, two-week-off system in place at Longfellow.

The schedule is in place until 2010, Locke said, and should remain in effect long after that.

Longfellow offers 180 days in the classroom like any other school in Mesa. Teachers also select students for extra help during the two-week intersession and throughout June, although, like the children outside Orquiz's class on Wednesday, others often show up.

"We have more demand than what we can supply," Christensen said.

Studies show test scores are about the same between year-round and regular schools, Christensen said, but he likes the extra help Longfellow can give students who are a little behind.

Longfellow started on its modified year-round calendar at the request of administrators, who sold parents on it.

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