

## More Iowa schools go year-round

### Urbandale's entry this month puts 18 in state on the extended calendar

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**Indianola, Ia.** — Where else would a 6-year-old rather be on a warm July morning than waiting in line with his flippers at the swimming pool?

How about waiting in line with his lunch box for class to begin?

Max Haddox, an Indianola second-grader, is among a growing number of Iowa children who attend classes on a year-round schedule, which supporters say helps them retain what they've learned and avoid the traditional summer brain drain. Max goes to Indianola's Irving Elementary School, which kicked off its 11th year Wednesday as a year-round school. Enrollment in the program increased this year to 373, up from 314, Principal Craig Sexton said.

"I really like the schedule," first-grade teacher Shannon Kløver said Wednesday. "When you get the three-week break in the fall and the three-week break in March, it's absolutely rejuvenating. You come back ready to go."

An Urbandale school launches a year-round schedule later this month, which will put at least 18 Iowa schools on the extended calendar. The list includes four in Des Moines, eight in Davenport and two in Cedar Rapids. Iowa Department of Education officials don't track the number of year-round schools in the state.

Year-round schools trade an abbreviated summer vacation for extra time off in the fall and spring. Critics say the idea causes scheduling headaches, and the jury is still out on whether year-round students do better than their traditional counterparts on standardized tests.

"We're seeing a lot of interest, especially in the Midwest," said Sam Pepper, executive director for the National Association for Year-Round Education. "With high-stakes testing going on, everybody's looking at maximizing the time they have."

Nationwide, about 3,045 public, charter and private schools in 47 states were on year-round schedules in 2005-06, down from 3,206 the year before, according to the association. The number decreased, in part, because it no longer includes schools that have more than eight weeks of summer vacation, Pepper said. California schools have also abandoned their year-round model, which featured longer days but only 163 instead of 180 days in the school year.

States such as Illinois, Ohio and Michigan have taken interest in the concept as they try to be more competitive academically, Pepper said. Hawaii will begin its statewide year-round school calendar July 27, and has seen the number of year-round schools increase from 185 to 280.

Melissa Green of Indianola said she's thankful her daughter Abby, who began first grade Wednesday, will not have another five weeks away from classes.

"At the end of kindergarten, she was ready to read and was getting excited about it," Green, a former teacher, said. "I'm glad she's going to be back in a school setting to continue that progress."

Sexton, the Indianola principal, said he likes the extra instruction his son receives at Irving, where students can attend optional classes during breaks in the fall and spring.

"From a parent's standpoint, I'm stealing 20 days of school for my son," he said. "For me, it's a win-win."

Three of Des Moines' year-round schools - River Woods, Capitol View and Moulton - begin classes next Thursday. Cedar Rapids' Polk and Taylor schools begin July 27, while classes at Urbandale's Rolling Green Elementary start July 31.

The impact of year-round schools on student test scores is unclear. Initial data from Irving Elementary in 1997 showed that students performed better on standardized tests. Des Moines' year-round schools have shown improvements in some areas and declines in others. Meanwhile, Davenport saw three schools taken off the federal "schools in need of assistance" list for low-performers after a change to the year-round schedule, district spokeswoman Karen Farley said.

Indianola school board member Dee Allen, principal at Irving for 10 years, said she noticed other benefits.

"I got a lot fewer discipline referrals from those classes," she said. "If you know your vacation is coming, you could handle



**RODNEY WHITE/THE REGISTER**

Irving Elementary first-grade teacher Shannon Kløver leads her class in a discussion Wednesday morning during their first day at the Indianola school. Year-round school helps students retain learning, backers say, but critics say the jury is still out on standardized test results.

#### Iowa year-round schools

**BETTENDORF:** Neil Armstrong Elementary begins Aug. 14.

**CEDAR RAPIDS:** Polk and Taylor schools start July 27.

**DAVENPORT:** Buchanan, Fillmore, Hayes, Madison, Monroe, Truman, Washington and Jefferson Edison schools start Aug. 9. The Children's Village preschool is year-round and does not have a start date.

**DES MOINES:** Capitol View, River Woods and Moulton schools start July 20. The Downtown School starts Aug. 14.

**INDIANOLA:** Irving Elementary started Wednesday.

**URBANDALE:** Rolling Green Elementary starts July 31.

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One drawback to a year-round calendar some districts face is the summer heat. Davenport's year-round schools lack air conditioning, a problem district officials plan to fix by next year. Some parents also have children of different ages on more than one school calendar, which can make scheduling family activities more difficult.

Students who have always been on the year-round system don't know any different, parents said. Those who lined up in Indianola on Wednesday appeared excited to be there. One brought flowers for the teacher; another brought baskets of apples and bananas.

Max Haddox waited Wednesday with his blue and gray lunchbox. He assessed the outlook for a full year of second grade.

"A little scared, but pretty fun, too," he said. "I don't know if I'm going to be bad or good."  
test

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