

Introduction

What will it take to reshape our care-worn system? Money, talent, and time. To do the job . . . will require year-round learning, which requires year-round teaching, which means, in turn, year-round schools.

—Lloyd H. Elliott

Education has come a long way in America. Early in our nation's history a primary function of school was to enhance religious instruction. At one time it was a crime, according to law, to teach the enslaved to read and write. At another time, it was deemed acceptable for students to be segregated into separate, unequal schools. Over the years, there has been a persistent effort to reform and improve America's system of education, and that endeavor continues.

Today, there is a multiplicity of efforts to reform and restructure K–12 education. In his book *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (1999), Frederick M. Hess marvels that so much recent reform effort has produced so little change, in effect maintaining a status quo. He remarks that no entity is reforming more, and changing less, than urban public schools, an assessment with which some may agree. If so, why has there been little change? Is there not enough reform, or not the correct reforms, or simply too much reform with little focus? More importantly, what type of reform is needed?

There is a big difference between *school* reform and *educational* reform (Sizer, 1994), a differentiation, which, properly understood, aids in the restructuring of the educational enterprise. *School reform* refers to extensive systemic and structural change, which, to date, has not yet been adequately addressed. *Educational reform*, consisting of multiple teaching and learning innovations, has been introduced into the educational system in a chaotic and disorganized fashion. Conse-

quently, strategies for significant structural change have been almost impossible to implement and sustain.

Successful school reform will come from a clear understanding of *what it is that we want our children to know*. Subsequently, consideration about *how much time is needed* for students to learn and how that time is structured is required. Learning time will differ for different students. For example, those not proficient in English may require a different time structure than others. After considering what our students need to know and how much time it will take, only then can *decisions about financial resources* be made. Once the goals, time, and money required are known, educational reforms can be layered atop.

Reform, however, does require time for results. Until now, most change, such as that of restructuring the school calendar, has been considered in some circles a “quick fix”—a Band-Aid, if you will. The reader is asked to consider the proposition that restructuring the school calendar can be a basis for school reform, a view similarly advanced in 1994 by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning in its report *Prisoners of Time*. The commissioners wrote that an unacknowledged design flaw in American education is the structure of time in schools.

The purpose of this book is to review all aspects of restructuring the school-year calendar and the concepts and pertinent research pertaining to the impact of time on learning, as well as to take a fresh look at education year-round, in order that the general public, educators, and policy makers might comprehend the issues surrounding calendar reform and reflect upon the educational dialogue that such change merits.

The majority of this country’s adults work 12 months of the year, with a small portion of that time for vacation. In contrast, students K–12 attend a school year of approximately 9 months, conforming to a calendar that was once a strategy fundamental for accommodating child labor, which seems quite unrealistic and unreasonable in today’s economic and social environment. This school calendar, termed the traditional calendar, was never designed to be an educational calendar.

Increasing access to learning opportunities is imperative, for evidence indicates students need to learn more in order to attain the high standards that America demands. More likely than not, if students need

to learn more, more time—and quality time at that—will be needed. Because the long summer vacation associated with yesterday's school calendar is known to be harmful to retention of information, most educators feel that the school year should be modified. In his study of 57 school districts, Hess (1999) selected five major reforms as the focus of his research, one being day and time measures. The most common responses from school districts were extending the day and moving to a year-round schedule. The authors are responding, therefore, to this recent interest in school calendar modification.

PART I: THE CONCEPT OF YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION AND CALENDAR MODIFICATION

This book contains two major sections. In the first part the merit of modifying the school calendar for educating students year-round is discussed, as well as the particulars that contribute to restructuring the school calendar. Chapter 1 is an overview of the various types of year-round education—balanced (single-track), multi-track, and extended year. Definitions of commonly-used terminology and a rationale for calendar modification are offered. Chapter 2 is a survey of the historical background, recent developments, and probable future of year-round education. The organizational context of the three types of year-round education, including commonly-used calendar designs, is presented in chapter 3. And finally, in chapter 4, responses to frequently asked questions pertinent to stakeholders are presented.

PART II: EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

In chapter 5 of this book current research and evaluation of restructuring the school calendar are reviewed, and would be particularly of interest to practitioners and school district professionals. Program evaluation and indicators of school quality are explained. Subsequently, research findings for student academic performance on the three types of modified calendars—balanced/single-track, multi-track, and extended year—from across the nation are reviewed.

Chapter 6 includes a discussion of the broad context of the American

educational system, with implications for policy. In this chapter current issues in public and private schools that necessitate consideration of school reform are examined. Another consideration is whether or not the agenda of the schools—to provide efficiency, excellence, and equity for all—is being met in schools that have modified their calendars and whether, indeed, year-round education, also known as YRE, holds promise as a possible solution to meet these criteria. Finally, there is a summary in which the authors urge discourse about the efficacy of calendar modification as a basis for systemic reform in education. While the final decision is left to the stakeholders (the public, school district professionals, and policy decision makers), it is the intent of the authors to describe the issues that call for school calendar reform and to present expert opinions and data from educators who have been involved with and researched the effect of modified time on learning over many years.