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ABSTRACT

Recent research shows no significant educational benefits from providing summer schools, extended school years, or year-round schooling to disadvantaged students. However, the severe educational difficulties faced by these students, combined with the many practical reasons for deviating from the traditional school year, are strong reasons why educators continue to hope for improvements in student achievement from these programs. While it is unfair to expect such improvements without a clear picture of how students learn over time, it is also clear that the programs themselves are in need of improvement. Program management problems associated with summer school include the following: (1) short duration; (2) loose organization; (3) little time for advance planning; (4) low academic expectations; (5) emphasis on "fun"; (6) discontinuity between the curriculum of the regular year and summer school; (7) time lost to establishment of teacher-student relationships; (8) teacher fatigue; (9) low attendance rate; and (10) homogeneous classes. Problems associated with year-round schooling include the following: (1) curriculum changes when schools switch from 9-month to year-round; (2) lack of support and assistance to teachers in adapting to the change; (3) insufficient provision for teacher fatigue; (4) administrative complexity of staggered schedules in secondary schools; and (5) parent objections. Additional research is needed on both student learning and the effects of various program components. A list of 10 references is included. (Author/FMW)

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SUMMER SCHOOL, EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR, AND YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLING FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

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SUMMER SCHOOL, EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR, AND YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLING FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Educators are interested in summer school, year-round schooling, and extended school years for both educational and practical reasons. Educationally, summer school has been advocated as a strategy to improve achievement, increase attendance, (Ballinger, 1987), reduce the number of students who must repeat a grade (Dougherty, 1981) and lower the dropout rate (Heyns, 1986). By law, summer school can now be part of the individualized programs of compensatory and handicapped education students, since, according to the argument of specialists in the field, summer is a time to stem losses, remedy deficiencies, and accelerate achievement (Heyns, 1986). Similarly, year-round schooling—whether or not it adds to the total number of days of school—eliminates summer vacations, when many students lose ground, therefore, it too has been advocated as a means to eliminate these summer losses (Merino, 1983). Extended school years, which offer additional days of schooling, have also been advocated by several commissions that cite research suggesting that increasing time-on-task can raise student achievement.

In addition, summer schools, extended school years, and year-round schooling are also often instituted as solutions to one or more of the following practical problems: the need to ease overcrowding, increase school building efficiency, raise teachers' salaries, decrease instructional costs, and provide supervision for children of working parents (Merino, 1983).

There is evidence, however, that, at best, increasing school time results in only modest improvements in achievement, and that the costs of this extension are disproportionate to any instructional gains (Mazzarella, 1984). Several schools around the nation, having tried year-round schooling (with and without additional total days), have abandoned it because the savings were negligible, student achievement didn't differ, and it was unpopular with parents and students (Merino, 1983). At the same time, students who attend summer school programs (whether they are retainees, compensatory education students, or regular students) generally do no better afterwards than those who did not attend (Heyns, 1986).

Summer Learning

The common educational rationale for adding on school days through summer school or extended school years is that the more time a student spends in the class the better. Yet surprisingly little classroom time is well-used for learning under ordinary circumstances, and extending class time does not necessarily increase the time students spend learning (Blai, 1986). Moreover, there are variations in students' effort over time, as well as spurts and hiatuses in learning, that have not yet been differentiated from apparent results of different school schedules or increased schooling (Heynes, 1978).

Research on summer learning is surprisingly scarce, and focused mainly on elementary students, nevertheless, several points emerge: First, although the learning rates of children from advantaged families decrease somewhat during the summer, disadvantaged students lose ground dramatically during the summer (Heyns, 1986, 1978). Second, adding days or instituting extended school years or summer school programs does not necessarily increase learning. In fact, schools maintaining a nine-month schedule may actually have an edge over year-round schooling that creates shorter vacation periods without adding to instructional time (Merino, 1983). Nor do disadvantaged students receive clear benefits from attending compensatory summer school programs (Carter, 1984).

So far we know almost nothing about summer programs for disadvantaged middle and high school students. One intensive, experimental summer high school program, STEP, which combines academic learning, life skills, and employment has had somewhat beneficial results during its two years in existence, both staying achievement losses and producing slight gains (Sipe, Grossman & Milliner, 1987).

Finally, as Heyns (1986) points out, without a valid expected growth curve against which to measure summer achievement, it is not clear whether the effectiveness of any summer school should be measured as "gains" or as "arrested losses" for either advantaged or disadvantaged children.

Program Management

Given the desperate needs of disadvantaged students, many educators believe that the poor achievement gains resulting from summer school, extended school year, and year-round programs cannot be used as a reason to abandon these programs. Instead, they point out that these poor results can be at least partly attributed to the current programs themselves. As Curtis, Doss, & Totusek (1982) note, *summer schools* currently suffer from:

- short duration—usually four hours or less day, for 3-6 weeks;
- loose organization;
- little time for advance planning;
- low academic expectations by both teachers and students;
- more emphasis on "fun" than during the regular year;
- discontinuity between the curriculum of the regular year and summer school,
- time wasted as new teachers assess, get to know, and establish expectations with students;
- teacher fatigue from the regular school year;
- low student attendance rate;
- homogeneous classes, largely composed of low-income, low-achieving students, which is known to correlate with low achievement.

Similarly, *year-round* programs may be generating low achievement results, compared with nine-month programs, because of such factors as:

- curriculum changes when schools switch from nine-month to year-round programs;
- lack of support and assistance to teachers in adapting to the change;
- insufficient provisions for teacher fatigue;
- the administrative complexity of staggered schedules in secondary schools;
- parent objections to year-round programs, which may, or may not, be solvable through better publicity and planning.

Need For Research

Recent research shows no significant educational benefits from providing summer schools, extended school years, or year-round schooling to disadvantaged students. However, the severe educational difficulties faced by these students, combined with the many practical reasons for deviating from the traditional school year, are strong reasons why educators continue to hope for improvements in student achievement from these programs. While it is unfair to expect such improvements without a clear picture of how students learn over time, it is also clear that the programs themselves might justifiably be improved. Thus, additional research is needed on both student learning and the effects of various components of summer school, extended school year, and year-round schooling.

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