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Year-Round Education and Its Effect on Student Achievement: A Study Based on William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School

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Abstract

Many years ago, discussions involving moving from a traditional agrarian calendar to a year-round educational system began to take place. Since then the idea of a year-round calendar has become more popular, and some schools have converted to a type of the year-round schedule. This paper examines the differences between the two calendars and the various types of year-round schedules. The transition from one calendar to another requires the consideration of many factors, with the educational pros and cons needing special attention. William Marvin Bass Elementary School in Lynchburg, Virginia, and Woodrow Wilson Elementary in Danville, Virginia, have both converted from a traditional calendar to the year-round calendar; this study looks at the results of this change. Both of these schools are located in small urban locales. The research shows that the switch to a year-round program has been to the educational benefit of the students at both schools, so it would be in the best interest of other urban school divisions to look closely at the data and take implementing a year-round calendar into consideration.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Some school calendars are changing from the traditional agrarian schedule to the year-round educational system. This study explores how the transformation may have affected the academic achievement of the students in these schools. It examines both William Marvin Bass Elementary School in Lynchburg, Virginia and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Danville, Virginia. Lynchburg and Danville, Virginia are both small urban locales. Both of these schools originally ran on the traditional agrarian calendar but have changed over to a year-round schedule. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as required under No Child Left Behind (currently Race to the Top), for both schools had not been met during their use of the agrarian calendar. According to the "Accountability Guide 2010-2011" from the Virginia Department of Education, AYP is described as:

> A school's federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) rating indicates the progress being made toward the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This federal law requires states to set annual achievement benchmarks in reading and mathematics leading to 100 percent proficiency by 2014. The law also requires testing in science at least once in elementary, middle and high school. Schools and school divisions that meet or exceed all annual benchmarks are rated as having made AYP. States also receive AYP ratings (Office).

AYP is a bar that is moved higher every year and failure to achieve this goal yearly does not go unnoticed. Schools are sanctioned for not meeting AYP and placed under increasing degrees of improvement plans.

Schools are also assigned a yearly accreditation status, which is different from AYP. The standard for achievement in order to obtain accreditation is the same every year. These ratings are state processes that "are based on overall student achievement in all major content areas" (Office). Not only did neither Woodrow Wilson Elementary School nor William Marvin Bass Elementary School achieve AYP, they did not earn full accreditation by the Commonwealth of

Virginia. Accreditation has various degrees, and, as with AYP, if schools do not achieve full accreditation, consequences involving improvement plans will be set in place.

School success and student achievement are measured through AYP and accreditation statuses; this study looks into these factors as well as the tests of the schools broken down by demographics. It compares the achievement scores of the schools before and after the calendar transition to determine whether the calendar switch was beneficial for student academics. The study observes the test scores of students eight to ten years after the implementation of the new schedules, suggesting the effects of the change on the sustainability of long-term academic achievement of the students at these schools.

Many studies, articles, and books are dedicated to the subject of year-round education. The subject is of interest to school and board administrators who may be seeking ways to improve their schools as well as to families and communities who may become involved in the year-round educational system. The information from this study may provide teachers and administrators with a better understanding of some educational options. It may also help in the understanding of some of the reasons behind varying levels of academic achievement in schools.

Current scholarly debates challenge whether the year-round school calendar can improve the academic achievement of students. This study looks at the debate based on the experiences of William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, which are two elementary schools located in small urban locales. The use of two public Virginia elementary schools as specific examples of schools that have converted from the traditional calendar to the year-round calendar makes this study unique. Also, both of the schools comprise students of similar economic backgrounds. This research will fit into the broader study of year-round schools by providing a study of specific schools and the impact of the calendar change on

the academic achievement of the students. It will also provide information on the sustainability of the academic success of the year-round school program.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review reveals several theories behind year-round schools guiding the research: summer learning loss, intersession remediation, and the influence of homogenized socioeconomic backgrounds. The summer learning loss theory poses that the extended time off that students spend away from school during "summer" in the agrarian calendar results in "summer learning loss" which then requires too much time to be spent on review once students return to school in the fall. The intersession remediation theory maintains that the time built into the year-round schedule is more effective in providing help for students than is an agrarian summer school remediation: the multiple opportunities throughout the course of a year-round school calendar are more beneficial than a few weeks during the summer. The influence of homogenized socioeconomic backgrounds for students may be a reason for the success of year-round schooling in certain areas. This suggests that students who are from more affluent families are more able and likely to participate in summertime clubs, camps, and other activities. Students from less affluent families are unable and less likely to participate in these types of activities. The lack of involvement that students from less affluent families have in activities in the summer correlates to less retention of academic material learned throughout the year and an absence of new material learned over the course of the summer.

The review of literature for this study includes books and journal articles dedicated to the subject as well as a variety of reliable websites including those for the schools in the study, the Virginia Department of Education, and the National Association for Year Round Education. The literature review also relies on information from interviews with the principals from William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School.

The Year-Round School System: The Use of Intersession Remediation

The research for this study began with gaining an understanding of what the year-round calendar is and how it works when implemented in a school system. Websites of William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School both display information about the school calendar, their programs, and a faculty and staff directory. The calendar information is the most useful to this study because it shows how the school year is structured and when the intersessions are scheduled. However, the websites do not offer other information pertinent to this study. Neither website says enough about the year-round program and its pros and cons to be able to calculate the varied effects of the implementation.

However, a resource used in this study that does provide information regarding the way the year-round program has impacted the schools and the students' academic achievement is the *Virginia Department of Education Online*. The website provides information, data, and news for the state about the educational standards, procedures, and opportunities. The website is particularly useful for viewing the school report cards, the accreditation, and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status information for both schools. The information from the school report cards and achievement statuses indicates the schools' productivity and improvement or decline in success. The data used from this website is taken from the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment data and is not biased. The information is purely factual and therefore an accurate representation of the academic success of the schools. This data shows the test scores for the two schools divided by demographics.

The website *NAYRE: Specialists in Time and Learning* is for the National Association of Year Round Education (NAYRE) says that the purpose of NAYRE is to encourage maximum learning time through the extension of the school calendar. The website provides information as

well as studies, speeches, and articles that provide background information as to what a year-round school is and what the benefits of the programs may be. As an advocate for year-round education, the NAYRE supports the hypothesis that the extended calendar can improve the academic achievement of students. However, because of the obvious advocacy that the website displays, even though the accessible information is research based, it is biased. This must be taken into consideration when garnering information.

In addition to the NAYRE website, the book School Calendar Reform: Learning in All Seasons by Charles Ballenger and Carolyn Kneese assisted in finding basic information about the year-round education program. The book examines financial, social, family, and educational impacts, reasons to make the calendar change, and evaluations of the program. It provides descriptions of year-round calendar tracks and intersessions. The information from the text School Calendar Reform: Learning in All Seasons is all pertinent, but like the NAYRE, this book advocates for the year-round calendar, which supports the main hypothesis of this study. Therefore, because of the lack of critique of the program in the book, the biases in the information may hinder its usefulness. Some of the information includes discussion on the focus on intersessions when schools choose to convert to the year-round calendar for the purpose of increasing student achievement:

> Intersession is the term applied to the time students are on scheduled vacations from school. Intersession means, literally, between sessions, which has been expanded to mean scheduled learning between sessions or learning blocks of time. During intersession, schools can offer remedial and/or enrichment classes, if space and financing are available, as a way of improving overall student achievement...Since these classes are available during out-of-school (i.e., vacation) time, they can be thought of as summer school rescheduled and ordinarily are optional in attendance (Ballenger Kneese 70-71).

The length of an intersession is eight weeks or less according to Ballenger and Kneese (52). However, during a school year, the length of an intersession may be different from one school to

the next, or even within the same school's calendar. Schools also exist that have different numbers of intersessions dispersed throughout the school year. The phrase "year-round education" does not apply to a single calendar schedule. This source cites single-track, multi-track, and extended year systems that all fall under the category of "year-round education." Also, various schedules fall under the categories of single-track, multi-track, and extended year.

A multi-track calendar involves more than one school schedule being used. When one set of classes is in school, the other is on intersession. When the first goes to intersession, the second returns to being in school. This rotation takes place throughout the school year, and often with more than two tracks. This type of year-round schedule is primarily implemented as a way of reducing overcrowding in the school because a single classroom can be used for two or more different classes if they attend on different days (Ballenger Kneese 61-63).

The year-round calendar can "offer students up to 220 days of instruction" but most "offer a basic year of 200 instructional days" as opposed to the traditional 180 (Ballenger Kneese 69). Besides simply incorporating more than 180 instructional days into the school year, these calendars tend to differ from the traditional calendar by focusing on full-day summer school (Ballenger Kneese 69).

A single-track school can utilize many different schedules, but the four main schedules in use are the 45/15 Plan, 60/20 Plan, 60/15 Plan, and the 90/30 Plan. The first number in the name of the plan is the number of days in school, which is then followed by the number of days spent on intersession. For example, under the 45/15 Plan, a school would be in regular session for 45 days and then spend 15 days on intersession before returning to school for another set of 45 regular school days (Ballenger, and Kneese 53-54).

Remediation and loss prevention are not the only aspects that make intersessions effective. Most year-round schools also incorporate enrichment activities into their intersession programs (Ballinger Kneese 110). According to Ballinger and Kneese, "Intersession enrichment classes throughout the year strengthen the learning progress of students by building experiential background useful in understanding the approaching unit of subject matter" (Ballinger Kneese 110).

The Theory of Summer Learning Loss

A helpful resource that provides unbiased background information for the study is "Year-Round Schools" in the *CQ Researcher* (1996) by R. L. Worsnop, a regular *CQ Researcher* contributor. This article provides a history of the calendar change as well as a list of key terms, and most importantly, an unbiased view of information on both sides of the issue. The article neither supports nor rejects the hypothesis but provides adequate background material. Worsnop's article supports the theory of summer learning loss, saying that "a forthcoming review of 39 studies on the effect of a traditional summer vacation on achievement test scores found that scores did in fact generally decline," showing that the lack of continuous learning creates a retention problem (438). Worsnop's article also quotes the study, "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores," saying "The effect of summer break was more detrimental for math than for reading and most detrimental for math computation and spelling" (as quoted in Worsnop 438).

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), an organization dedicated to promoting the need for academic activities in the summer, cites that according to research reviewed for its website, "Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in

mathematical computation skills over the summer months" (NSLA, 2009). The NSLA website also says that from information that they have reviewed "Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer" (NSLA, 2009). In a 2007 interview on National Public Radio (NPR), the host of "News & Notes," Tony Cox, says that "On average, students who break for summer lose more than two and a half months of math skills from the previous year" and former executive director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning, Ron Fairchild says that "if kids aren't engaged in ongoing learning activities, they lose ground academically" (Cox, 2007). The long gap of time between school years in the summer undoes the work the children have done throughout the year. Mr. Fairchild then compares learning academic material with the practice of learning other skills, saying "everyone would expect an athlete's or a musician's performance to suffer if they didn't practice, and the same is true for our nation's young people" (Cox, 2007).

Further, in an article in Baltimore's *The Examiner*, Fairchild says "The hard-fought victories teachers achieve during the school year erode during the summer months . . . If kids aren't engaged in learning activities, they lose ground academically" (Volkmann). The learning loss also affects the next year's education by making review a necessity. According to the article, "Teachers then have to spend four to six weeks in the fall re-teaching forgotten material" (Volkmann). The time at the beginning of the year is for "reintroducing school routines and past teachings that students have forgotten over the summer. This situation curtails instructional time for introduction of new material" (Ballinger Kneese 113). Students are losing more and more material each year, by forgetting what they have learned in the previous year and limiting time for new material in the fall.

The year-round calendar works to minimize the summer learning loss by providing a shorter summer break, which, in turn, minimizes the amount of time necessary for review in the fall and maximizes the time that can be spent on new material. The vacation time in the summer is still typically longer than other breaks throughout the year. However, the National Association for Year-Round Education (NAYRE) specifies the year-round calendar as having a summer of eight weeks or less (Ballinger Kneese 124). The definition that NAYRE gives for year-round education says that "It does not eliminate the summer vacation, but reduces it and redistributes it as vacation or intersession time during the school year" (Ballinger and Pepper).

In Worsnop's article, former Albuquerque school board member Don Patterson agrees that there may be learning loss for students during the summer. However, he argues that the length of the summer is not the problem and that adding more frequent breaks will only intensify the learning loss, saying that "Studies show that the only discernible summer loss occurs in the first two or three weeks" (439). This point, though, becomes moot with the use of intersessions in the year-round calendar. Although the calendar does incorporate more breaks throughout the year, not all of the breaks are for vacation time. During breaks, students come to the school for what is typically a half day. Teachers use this time for remediation, much like what is done in summer school, and take measures to assure that students have mastered the previously taught material and are not forgetting what they have learned. These reinforcement efforts throughout the year solidify the students' learning, and, when coupled with a summer that is roughly half as long as the typical school year's, the danger of losing learning over the longer break is minimized as well (Ballinger Kneese 110).

"The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores" by K. Charlton, H. Cooper, S. Greathouse, J. Lindsay, and B. Nye as well as the book Balancing the School

Calendar: Perspectives From the Public and Stakeholders by Charles Ballenger and Carolyn Kneese both focus on the ways that the year-round program can affect the academic achievement of students. Both sources include data from studies that show test scores for schools that have implemented the program. These studies support the idea that the extended time that students spend away from school during the summer is detrimental to the retention of knowledge learned during the school year.

For schools that do not face the problem of overcrowding, academic achievement improvement is typically the key reason for implementing the year-round education program. Schools that make the change for this reason often feel that the extended time off students spend away from school during the agrarian calendar summer results in "summer learning loss." This learning loss then requires too much time to be spent on review once students return to school in the fall. The traditional agrarian school calendar was developed as a way for farming communities to survive with the help of school-age children. It is said that "In agricultural areas it was typical for children to attend school for only 5 or 6 months so that they were free to participate in the farming economy...The present 9-month calendar, under which schools are closed in summer, emerged as the norm when 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture" (Charlton, Cooper, Greathouse, Lindsay, and Nye 228). With the mechanization of the agricultural industry, this calendar is no longer necessary or relevant and changes can be made to limit the learning loss that occurs over three months away from school (Charlton, Cooper, Greathouse, Lindsay, and Nye 228).

Both "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores" and Balancing the School Calendar: Perspectives From the Public and Stakeholders also support the idea that summer learning loss is detrimental to students' test scores. Ballenger and Kneese's book is a

selection of studies that support the year-round program though, and very little critical information is provided, making the book a biased source. The Charlton article, however, presents research collected by the authors, making the information provided in the text data based and more useful to this research. However, the article was written over ten years ago, which diminishes some of the credibility of the source. The book, on the other hand, was published within the last year.

The other source that is a study of a particular school system is Shelly Gismondi Haser and Ilham Nasser's book Year-Round Education: Change and Choice for Schools and Teachers. The study is similar to McMillen's in nature, except that the schools included in the study are from Fairfax, Virginia. This book is written in support of the year-round program after having studied the effects of the calendar on several schools in Fairfax, Virginia. The authors, Shelly Haser and Ilham Nasser, write the following under the heading 'Student Benefits:' "The shorter summer vacation yielded a reduction in learning loss, which benefited both students and teachers. Teachers especially noted the decrease in English language loss when students had shorter breaks away from school" (Haser Nasser 81). The book not only provides information on the schools and the impact of year-round education, it also discusses the reasoning behind schools' conversions to the year-round calendar. It mentions why some schools choose to convert back to the traditional calendar, showing lack of bias. Also, the majority of the studies included in this book focus on the impact on teachers and administration rather than academic achievement, which is not the primary concern of this study, resulting in limited usefulness.

The Influence of a Homogenized Socioeconomic Background

Two of the sources in this study address issues specific to particular schools. The article "A statewide evaluation of academic achievement in year-round schools" by Bradley J. McMillen (2001) compares and contrasts the achievement of some traditional schools with those on a year-round calendar in North Carolina. McMillen's study concludes that the school calendar, whether traditional or year-round, does not make a significant impact on the students' achievement. This article, while disproving the original hypothesis that year-round education can make a significant impact on the improvement of academic achievement, provides reason for further research focusing on the effects of socioeconomics as a positive, negative, or insignificant effect of the year-round calendar. The article has limited bias because of its factual nature and field study. It also provides an oppositional view to the NAYRE and other sources that support the year-round educational program, which helps to provide a rationale for this study.

As mentioned, this study is also working to support the hypothesis that the year-round calendar is primarily beneficial for schools comprised of students from lesser affluent backgrounds. Both of the schools in this study are identified as Title I schools because of the economics of the students and families at the school. A better understanding of the Title I program and how it affects the schools in this study is offered in the source *Evaluation Brief: Provision of Title I Services: Recent Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey of Schools* was reviewed. This source includes data and discussion in regards to the changes that Title I made in schools and student learning, including extended learning time with the year-round calendar. The information from this source is factual and credible, and very applicable to this study for background information on the dynamics of the schools included.

Another source that is useful for this study's focus on the economic influence in student achievement is the "Fixing Urban Schools" by Marcia Clemmitt, which cites the differences in education in schools of various economic levels and the ways that the No Child Left Behind Act has impacted learning. Both of the schools in this study are low-income schools in urban settings, making the article applicable. It provides information that supports low-income, urban schools having students with lower success rates and needing a type of intervention (possibly the implementation of a year-round calendar) in order to increase the academic achievement of students.

Clemmitt writes that "Most middle-class families with children have moved to the suburbs, leaving urban schools today overwhelmingly populated by low-income, African-American and Hispanic students" and that "Only 5 percent of white students attend such high-poverty schools (363)," which are demographics that also apply to the schools in this study. Clemmitt writes about the influence of low-income families on the education of the students, saying that "poor families in poor communities require much more intense interventions than middle-class students" (364). Clemmitt explains that the number of students who need extra help is higher in urban areas but that the amount of help offered to them is the same as that in a suburban area, where the need is less (365). Clemmitt cites an article from *The New York Times Magazine* that explains part of the reason for the struggles of students from low-income families: "Professional parents speak to their young children about two-and-a-half more times in an hour than poor parents do and encourage them verbally about six times more often than they discourage them; low-income parents discourage their children about three times as often as they encourage them" (376). The article also says that "the manner in which [poor children] are raised puts them at a disadvantage' in a school culture" (376). The lack of support that students

receive at home is evident in their performance: "The majority of urban school districts continue to score below state averages on fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics assessments" (Clark). In the year-round system, the extra help needed by poor students is able to be offered with the use of intersessions. The extra time in a positive learning environment is beneficial for the students not only by allowing for more academic time, but by providing more time for them to be engaged and encouraged.

For students of less affluent backgrounds, the summer learning loss is said to be greater. Researchers at Johns Hopkins say that "By fifth grade, this summer slide causes low-income children to fall as much as 2 ½ years behind their richer peers in reading" (Volkmann). So what is it that causes this big difference in learning and knowledge retention when schools aren't even in session? Students from more affluent backgrounds are more likely and more able to continue learning throughout the summer with the help of educational camps and other activities. Students whose families are unable to fund camps or vacations are more likely to be idle in the summer or taking part in activities that lack educational value while their peers are involved in activities that are helping them review and retain information as well as learn new things (Worsnop). Researchers say that "65 percent of the achievement gap between poor ninth-graders and their more advantaged peers was due to wasted summers that lacked stimulation and learning" (Volkmann).

In School Calendar Reform: Learning in All Seasons, Ballinger and Kneese write that "only about 15% of the nation's children go to camp" during the summer months, which leaves that majority of students sitting at home, inactive (Ballinger Kneese 97). In fact, two of the reasons that schools implement a year-round calendar are "lack of parental/community support of the student for independent learning over the long summer vacation" and "lack of community

resources for students living in impoverished neighborhoods to grow academically and emotionally over the long summer" (Ballinger Kneese 125). These disparities in available activities can be remedied. By shortening the summer break, the amount of time that students spend idle is greatly decreased. Some students are still able to attend camps or take trips but this way, disadvantaged students are not left hanging out while the others participate in activities. The students who need or want to can attend summer intersessions and enrichment, and even if students do not take advantage of these increased opportunities, they will not be without educational stimulation for the typical length of the traditional summer.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The implementation of the year-round educational system is gradually increasing. The two main reasons for this increase are efforts to handle the problem of overcrowding in schools and the academic improvement of students and schools. This study looks at the potential benefits that the year-round calendar can have for the academic achievement of students and schools in an elementary setting.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the academic achievement of elementary students is measured by the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests that students take in grades three, four, and five. The percentage of students passing these tests is required to meet a certain level in order for the school to meet the annual Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and to make the necessary accreditation ratings. AYP is a federal rating that "indicates the progress being made toward the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" (Office). Under the Obama administration, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is known as Race to the Top. AYP achievement levels change every year whereas accreditation standards are the same annually. Accreditation is a state process rather than federal (Office).

A school's achievement of AYP is based on the reading, math, and science SOL tests. The school "must meet or exceed 29 benchmarks for student achievement and participation in statewide testing. Missing a single benchmark may result in a school, a school division or the state not making AYP" (Office). Currently, the schools must achieve passing rates of 81 and 79 percent of students for reading and math, respectively. These pass rates are merely a target, though, and in order to make AYP, the targets must be exceeded (Office). For example, a school with a pass rate of 81.1 percent for reading during 2009-2010 would meet the target for reading

while a school with a pass rate of 81 percent would not" (Office). A school either achieves AYP or it does not.

However, the accreditation status of a school is given in ratings. If a school achieves the highest level of accreditation, it is considered Fully Accredited. The following ratings, in order from highest to lowest, may also be given: Accredited with Warning, Accreditation Denied, and Conditionally Accredited (Office). According to *Virginia Department of Education Online*, "School accreditation ratings...are based on student achievement on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests and other tests in English, mathematics, history/social science, and science" (Office). These ratings may also be given based on the combination of the last three years' scores in a subject area, the remediation of previously failing students, and/or recent enrollment in a Virginia school with limited mastery of the English language (Office). In order to achieve a Fully Accredited status, the pass rate for grades four and five for the subjects of history, science, and mathematics is 70 percent (Office). The English pass rate for grades three, four, and five is 75 percent (Office). The grade three pass rate for mathematics is 70 percent and for science and history it is 50 percent (Office).

The two schools in this study, William Marvin Bass Elementary School of Lynchburg, Virginia, and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School of Danville, Virginia, were both unable to achieve the Fully Accredited rating or to make AYP when they were employing the traditional school year calendar. Both of the schools in this study now operate on a single-track calendar, with only one set of classes rotating through the year. Woodrow Wilson Elementary School and William Marvin Bass Elementary School have adjusted their schedules so that the amount of days in school and on intersession better fit the needs of their students.

William Marvin Bass Elementary School starts the second week in July and ends for the year at the end of May, making the summer break about six weeks (Lynchburg City Schools). Throughout the year the school has four intersessions with three that are five days in length and one that is ten days (Lynchburg City Schools). Two intersessions are in the fall and two are in the spring; the longest is at the end of February (Lynchburg City Schools). The school calendar also incorporates traditional holidays, professional development days, a spring break, and a four week long winter break (Lynchburg City Schools). Woodrow Wilson Elementary School starts the first week in August and ends mid-June, making the summer break about six weeks (Parris). The school has three intersessions built into the calendar (Parris). A ten day intersession is scheduled at the beginning of October with a five day intersession in mid-February and mid-April (Paris). The school calendar also incorporates traditional holidays, professional development days, a spring break, and a two week long winter break (Parris). Woodrow Wilson Elementary School has operated on a year-round schedule since the fall of 2001; William Marvin Bass Elementary school has since 2003 (Ms. Fitzgerald, Mr. Marshall). Both of the current principals of the schools were the principals of the schools at the time of the implementation of the program and beforehand (Ms. Fitzgerald, Mr. Marshall).

The design for this project is that of a descriptive study. The research done is considered qualitative research because it is "research that relies on narrative data" (Merlter Charles 27). It is also a nonexperimental study because it is "used to depict people, events, situations, conditions, and relationships as they currently exist or once existed" (Mertler Charles 28). The data for this study was compiled by accessing SOL testing scores and AYP and accreditation achievement for the two schools involved. This information came from researching the Virginia

Department of Education website as well as from the Assistant Superintendent for Danville Public Schools and the former Assistant Superintendent for Lynchburg City Schools.

The review of literature for this study as well as the information garnered from the websites for William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School provided information that helped to tailor the focus of this study to the critical elements of year-round schools. After reviewing the material used in this study, a list of 31 questions was compiled to be used as a basis for the interviews with Mr. Laverne Marshall and Ms. Jocelyn Fitzgerald, the principals of William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, respectively. The questions were related to the schools' reasons for transitioning to the year-round schedule, the success of the program, and the individual details of how the year-round calendar worked in that particular school. The questions from this study are listed below:

Interview Questions

- When did this school make the transition from the traditional calendar to the year-round calendar?
- How much time was spent in deliberation from the time the idea was proposed to the first year of implementation?
- What was the main reason for switching the school's calendar?
- What were some other influential reasons?
- Were you involved in the implementation of the program?
- How long have you been principal of this school/division?
- Have you worked at a school(s) that were not year-round? If so, can you talk about some differences you notice? Student/parent/community interest and support, morale and behavior of students, classroom involvement, students needing remediation.

- What has been the greatest advantage to the school being on a year-round calendar? The greatest disadvantage?
- How has having a year-round calendar affected class size?
- Has the student attendance rate been affected by the switch?
- What programs does the school provide during intersessions?
- Who participates in intersessions? Can anyone? Is it based on academic need? If so, what qualifies students for intersessions? Does it cost to participate?
- What makes intersessions different from summer school classes?
- Why are some intersessions longer than others? Are the programs during these times different?
- Do you feel as though the year-round calendar has been to the benefit of this school and the student achievement within? What data supports your answer?
- What are some factors that may have contributed to the school's improvement other than the change to a year-round calendar?
- What programs does the school have to assist in the remediation of students in addition to intersession activities?
- What programs are available for gifted and accelerated students? Do they participate in intersessions as well?

Questions Adjusted from the Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership Survey

- What changes were made to the curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment because of the calendar change?
- What strategies and tools were used to ensure that classroom instruction focused on the SOLs?
- Describe the process used to measure student learning against the standards of learning.

Final Question

- Is there any other information that we have not discussed that you feel would be important to this study?

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA

In individual interviews with the principals of the schools in this study, both cited that the main reasons for the implementation of the new calendar was due to efforts to improve the academic success of the school and the students (Fitzgerald Marshall). Marshall said that the new schedule for William Marvin Bass Elementary School was to rectify the summer learning loss problem as well as a way to help the school achieve AYP and accreditation, which it had been previously unable to do. Fitzgerald said that the change for Woodrow Wilson Elementary School was to "assist with the academic needs of the school" and to improve "low performance on State mandated tests" because the school was "at risk of being taken over by the State Department of Education," which is a consequence of not achieving AYP and accreditation.

The intersession programs at the two schools in this study are both designed to help the students that need the most help with remediation. At William Marvin Bass Elementary School, those students who do not pass the six week benchmarks with at least a 70 percent attend the intersessions (Marshall). The students who attend the intersessions may change throughout the year; if a student attends an intersession and then passes the next benchmark, he or she does not need to attend the next intersession (Marshall). During intersessions, students spend the time between 9:00 am and 12:00 noon working on math, reading, or writing skills (Marshall). Some intersessions are more days than others because of impending SOL testing, such as William Marvin Bass's February intersession. This intersession is 10 days long rather than the typical 5 because some SOL tests take place in early March (Marshall).

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School runs their intersession program a little differently. The day runs from 8 am to 1:20 pm. Fitzgerald says that all students at the school are allowed to attend intersessions, but it is based on academic need, so "the group in which you are assigned is

left up to the principal and the classroom teacher" (Fitzgerald). The lengths of intersessions at this school are based "on the development of the district calendar, holidays, and breaks" (Fitzgerald).

Both of the elementary schools in this study incorporate enrichment programs into their intersessions. In an interview with Ms. Jocelyn Fitzgerald, the principal of Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, when describing intersession activities, said that "Academic need is the primary focus; however, enrichment activities are provided as well" (Fitzergald). In an interview with Mr. Laverne Marshall, the principal of William Marvin Bass Elementary School, Marshall said that golf, dance, and drumming are examples of some of the intersession enrichment programs offered by the school (Marshall). The incorporation of these extra opportunities contradict the arguments that say that year-round schooling inhibits students' abilities to enjoy learning experiences outside the classroom during the summer. If anything, the enrichment programs allow chances for more students to enjoy these types of activities than a summer away from school could because the enrichment activities are paid for by the school, rather than the students' families.

One of the greatest benefits of the year-round school calendar is the amount of extra time and effort that can be put into helping students who need remediation throughout the year. Another advantage of the program is the shorter summer that helps prevent all students, but especially those on or below level, from forgetting information over the break. The students who are above level or considered gifted or accelerated are not forgotten. Woodrow Wilson Elementary School has a teacher specifically for gifted and talented development who "provides activities and learning experiences individually and in small group" (Fitzgerald). These students are also allowed to participate in intersessions. William Marvin Bass Elementary School cares

for gifted/accelerated students by providing them extracurricular activities such as plays (Marshall). The students are bused in for the play and given lunch, similar to the way enrichment activities are handled during intersessions for other students (Marshall).

The extra attention and time given to remediation and enrichment for these students has been beneficial to their academic performance, which, in turn, has improved the performance of the school as a whole. Since the implementation of the year-round program, both schools have been able to make AYP and achieve an accreditation rating of Fully Accredited. The schools have been able to maintain these improvements since the implementation of the year-round calendar.

This information supports the hypotheses of this study that says that year-round education is beneficial for the academic achievement of students and that the program is especially impacting to schools with students from similar, less affluent families.

Because of the schools' inability to make AYP and gain accreditation, changes had to be made. Implementing the year-round school calendar into the schools seemed the most likely way to make improvements in student achievement that would not only bring up test scores to get the schools to meet their benchmarks but that would make beneficial changes that would last. Both schools are considered "economically disadvantaged" and have been since before the implementation of the program. The following tables show the SOL test scores for Woodrow Wilson Elementary School and William Marvin Bass Elementary School for the year prior to the implementation of the year-round program as well as the 2009-2010 school year. The 2009-2010 is the year for which the most recent data is available. A third chart for each school details the 2009-2010 test scores by school, district, and state that are specifically for the students who are economically disadvantaged. The 2009-2010 school year was the ninth year of the year-

round calendar for Woodrow Wilson Elementary School and the seventh year of the program for William Marvin Bass Elementary School. The charts from the year prior to the program compare scores by subject by listing the percentage of passing scores. The charts that list the scores from 2009-2010 compare them by subject among the school, division, and state by listing the passing percentage.

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School 2000-2001	
Subject	**Passing Percentage**
English-Reading	18.9%
English-Writing	40%
Math	39.8%
Science	32.8%
History	34.3%

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School 2009-2010			
Subject	**School Passing Percentage**	**Division Passing Percentage**	**State Passing Percentage**
English	94%	84%	89%
Writing	96%	91%	90%
Math	97%	84%	88%
Science	100%	80%	90%
History	95%	85%	89%

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School 2009-2010 Economically Disadvantaged			
Subject	**School Passing Percentage**	**Division Passing Percentage**	**State Passing Percentage**
English	93%	81%	81%
Writing	96%	89%	83%
Math	96%	82%	80%
Science	100%	75%	82%
History	95%	81%	80%

William Marvin Bass Elementary School 2002-2003	
Subject	**Passing Percentage**
English	85%
Math	80%
Science	63%
History	70%

William Marvin Bass Elementary School 2009-2010			
Subject	**School Passing Percentage**	**Division Passing Percentage**	**State Passing Percentage**
English	94%	83%	89%
Writing	97%	88%	90%
Math	94%	80%	88%
Science	89%	87%	90%
History	81%	85%	89%

William Marvin Bass Elementary School 2009-2010 Economically Disadvantaged			
Subject	**School Passing Percentage**	**Division Passing Percentage**	**State Passing Percentage**
English	94%	76%	81%
Writing	96%	83%	83%
Math	94%	74%	80%
Science	86%	81%	82%
History	77%	79%	80%

The data charts show that both Woodrow Wilson Elementary School and William Marvin Bass Elementary School were both well below the expected passing rate before changing the schedule, which prevented the schools from meeting AYP and gaining accreditation. The charts from the 2009-2010 school year show great improvement in test scores with much higher passing rates. With these test scores the schools were able to meet their required benchmarks. The comparisons between school, division, and state show that Woodrow Wilson Elementary School's passing percentages for that year were higher than that of the other schools in their

division as well as the state. The same is true for William Marvin Bass Elementary School's scores from 2009-2010. History is the only subject in which William Marvin Bass Elementary School's scores did not top those of the other schools in the division and state.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is easy to see that the implementation of the year-round school program made for great improvement at William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. The schools were able to come from below the state standards and become wonderful schools, even winning awards for the education of their students. Since the transition to the year-round system, both schools have been able to meet AYP and be granted full accreditation status. These results show that not only has the year-round program greatly improved the academic performance of the students at these schools, but it has improved it so much so that the schools have come from behind and moved ahead of others.

Some schools, however, are not as successful with the year-round school program. The program does not appear to cause harm to the education of children, but many skeptics argue that the year-round school system does not have enough of a significant impact on students' academic achievement to merit it being implemented. Through this research it is demonstrated that a school comprised of students of homogenized socioeconomic backgrounds is influential in the impact of the year-round calendar. The two schools in this study are located in small urban cities: William Marvin Bass Elementary School in Lynchburg City and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Danville. The socioeconomic background of the students who attend these schools is low-income and less affluent than students of schools in the surrounding areas. Both of these schools have a large percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch. Students from backgrounds such as these struggle more with school work than those from more affluent backgrounds.

This study concludes that the implementation of the year-round school program has been successful for William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary

School. These two schools have found ways to make the program beneficial for all of their students. The change in calendar was not only initially successful but it has continued to be beneficial for the two schools after nine years for William Marvin Bass Elementary School and seven years for Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. Further research about these two schools to see the other impressions that the year-round calendar has made would include looking into other factors that are cornerstones of the schools. Research could include looking into the effects of the calendar on the school budget/budget distribution, student transportation, and the effect on faculty and staff. The use of intersessions for enrichment and remediation is a big part of the year-round calendar. However, the length of intersessions, the number of intersessions, and when the school year starts and ends varies from school to school. William Marvin Bass Elementary School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary School both have schedules that are fairly similar, but their starting and ending dates differ. Including the length and time of intersessions into research could be beneficial.

The principals of both schools cited before and after school remediation, quality teaching, and behavior accountability as additional reasons for academic improvement in their schools; additional research may include taking these factors into consideration. Further research about the effect that the year-round calendar has on student achievement could include expanding this study to include more schools with similarly homogenized lower socioeconomic backgrounds in and out of Virginia, as well as in cities of greater populations. Research could also include studying the effect that the year-round calendar has on academic achievement for students who are not from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The continuation of this research study would be beneficial to school systems that currently contain year-round schools or are considering the implementation of the year-round calendar.

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