

Mandating Year-round School Attendance in Wake County

Regarding the mandating of year-round school attendance in Wake County, there are those who just don't see what all of the uproar is about. Others are convinced that ignorance of the subject matter is causing parents to reject the notion. Still other well-meaning individuals tell of being won over to the year-round concept once they experienced it. Please allow me to shed some light on these observations.

First of all, let me emphasize once again that it is the *mandating* of year-round schools that has drawn most of the backlash. When discussing the subject, it is imperative that the media and the public always distinguish between *voluntary* year-round attendance and *forced* attendance. Failure to do so results in inaccurate polling data and in the misrepresentation of individual viewpoints.

Secondly, while it is true that first-hand experience with a year-round calendar has drawn its share of converts, the "try it, you'll like it" adage doesn't mean a thing to thousands, and arguably the majority, of opponents. You see, contrary to what some would have you believe, it is actually the vast *knowledge* of the subject matter that has caused many of us to take a stand against the massive forcing of year-round attendance.

Consider the following irrefutable *facts*:

1. According to data supplied by the National Association for Year-round Education, the number of year-round school districts in the U.S. has steadily declined over the past 5 years, bringing the 2005-06 count down to where it was 10 years ago.
2. From the same source, the number of year-round schools in N.C. declined 30% from the 2001-02 school year to 2005-06 (from 129 to 89)

Those of us who have conducted exhaustive research on school calendars are hoping to spare Wake County from the fate that has historically plagued school districts nationwide who have tried large-scale mandating of year-round school attendance. [Documentation abounds](#) on why these attempts have failed miserably.

The prevailing reasons cited include:

1) [INCREASED COSTS](#) due to transportation expenses, soaring utility bills, wear and tear on buildings that are constantly in use, maintenance services that have to be provided on weekends, and staff salaries and benefits. Also, research shows that when postponed construction eventually has to take place, the cost is much greater due to dramatic increases in construction expenses. Yet, Wake County citizens are being told that year-round conversion will be a cost-cutting initiative!

2) STAFFING PROBLEMS, including employee burnout and dissatisfaction. Because of the threat of a forced year-round calendar, [teachers have already left](#) Wake County and accepted jobs in neighboring school systems. Others have spoken out loud and clear that they absolutely cannot make that schedule work for their families, and that they will have no choice but to resign or retire early. Also, teachers from other systems are thinking twice about coming here to teach. This is not just my opinion. This is really happening. According to local news sources, on the first day of school this year, Wake County was short over 30 teachers. Based on information from individual teachers that I personally know, that number will be in the *hundreds* next fall if the year-round proposals become a reality. These are not just empty threats, either. Even though teachers are a special "breed" dedicated to helping all children, they will not sacrifice what is best for their own family in order to comply with a WCPSS agenda!

3) NO ACADEMIC ADVANTAGE to a year-round school calendar has been conclusively proven. Research is quite varied on the subject. In a 2000 Evaluation Brief, the NC Department of Public Instruction reported the results of their own study, entitled, "Year-round Schools and Achievement in North Carolina". I quote,

“the results reported here do not imply any clear advantage or disadvantage to year-round education with respect to student achievement in reading and math.”

If I stop and go no further, these *facts* alone should make it clear as to why the WCPSS proposal to convert any more schools to mandatory year-round is such a “big deal”, and a frightening prospect to so many citizens. Some people have accused opponents of being afraid of change. Believe me, after thirty years of experience with the WCPSS, either as a teacher, a volunteer, or a parent, I have lived through my share of changes. The only change I fear is one that will most certainly have a negative impact on my community. This brings me to the fourth most common reason for the failure of mandatory year-round schools--

4) DISRUPTION to family life has long-reaching negative consequences. I don't have room here to list all of the examples that belong in this category, but there are some major problems that other systems warn about. Picture, for example, the quagmire in our legal system when parents rush to have court-ordered custody dates changed to accommodate the year-round schedule. Count on many youth programs such as summer mission projects, life-changing camps that offer scholarships, and vacation Bible schools no longer being offered. Get ready for the demise of small neighborhood swim/tennis clubs as well. Oh, and be prepared for an increase in latchkey children whose parents have nowhere to put them during breaks scattered here and there. Some districts even saw a rise in gang activity that was attributed to the frequent breaks with little or no supervision. An increase in absenteeism has been noted in some instances, when parents pull their year-round student out of school so that he/she can participate in special activities with the rest of the family members. Add to this the emotional quotient that can't be measured in numbers, and you've got families who are being torn apart, literally and figuratively.

I am disappointed in the Wake County School Board for knowing this information, but still continuing on a path that will not succeed. Where are the success stories?? Even a Power Point presentation by the WCPSS Administration in February, 2005, listed the following findings on mandatory year-round schools:

- Mandatory year-round has not been successful in other districts; the districts who use year-round as a choice option are the most successful
- Siblings are not always able to be on the same track
- Increased transportation costs
- Forces a change in the family structure with vacations, family time, etc.
- Child care problematic
- Difficulty scheduling extra-curricular activities because one track is always out of school
- Huge reassignment plan necessary to fill all schools

Now, their tune has changed, and they are advocating the very concept that they found to be unsuccessful in other districts!

In closing, let me say to those who have had favorable experiences in year-round schools, and who favor their growth – that's fine, for you. There are some families that find the schedule more accommodating to their needs. There are other situations, however, whereby children will actually be harmed by being forced out of a traditional school calendar. Parents *must* be the ones to make that choice, or Wake County will find itself just another statistic on the long list of districts who failed. We have been warned by those districts. Will we listen? I hope and pray so, for the sake of every family in Wake County, and especially for the children, who are trusting adults with their future.

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To add your name to the list of over 2,500 signatures on a petition against the mandating of year-round schools, or to read more than 675 comments from parents, students, and teachers, visit http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?SOSWAKE1