

DEVELOPING FLEXIBLE

THE long summer vacation is often decried as a "relic of the horse and buggy days." Many mothers are greatly relieved when their children finally go back to school in September after being around the house all summer needing to be supervised and wanting to be entertained. Many a superintendent has been told, "If I ran my business like you run your school I would go broke." City officials and many citizens have learned to dread the hot summer days when the youth are on the streets with little to do except to get into trouble. Perhaps the youth, themselves, dread these wasteful, uncomfortable times most of all.

In spite of all this, the leading proponents of year-round education unanimously adopted a qualifying position paper last April at the Second National Seminar on Year-Round Education. This statement recognized that, although the standard 180-day school year as it now prevails in most schools is not universally satisfactory, no operating model for year-round education has yet proved to be universally acceptable. It held that the programs which seem to be most acceptable are those providing flexibility or optional attendance, and made the following points:

1. That every individual is unique, and if each is to learn what he needs to know at his own best rate, the school curriculum must be individualized;

2. That the time schedules of individuals and families are continuing to become more diverse and that a student's time in school must be adaptable to this changing situation;

3. That financial resources of any community, state, and the nation are limited and must be allocated on a priority basis, and that educational programs, including the school calendar, must be designed to obtain optimum economic efficiency.

The position paper therefore recommended that local school systems consider ways, including year-round education, in which the educational program can be improved in terms of (a) providing quality education with equality in educational opportunity; (b) adapting to the community and family living patterns; and (c) attaining optimum economic efficiency. It also wisely recommended that such planning be done by those who would be affected by the changes in the school schedule, including teachers, parents, students, and other interested groups, and that the public be provided with adequate information about any proposed plan of change before it is adopted as mandatory.

Effects of Change

What a local community learns as it attempts to develop a year-round schedule is that any change affects different people in different ways and that people react according to how they are affected and how they value the situation. They want quality education for the children but will make some "sacrifices" for economy and convenience. They want economy but are willing to pay extra for convenience and quality education.

ALL-YEAR SCHOOLS

JOHN McLAIN*

They want the school schedule to meet their convenience but will give up some convenience for quality education and economy. Our society's reactions to these value-oriented questions give "shape" to the American public school and the school calendar.

Two basic changes have been taking place over a period of time in regard to the length of the school year which are not generally considered "all year school" plans. The length of the school year has gradually increased from only a few short weeks or months to a "standard" 120 days after World War I, to a "standard" 160 days during the Great Depression, to a "standard" 180 days after World War II, and now longer school years are common.

The idea of having "summer school" as a separate program has prevailed as an "opportunity" to make up required courses or to obtain remedial instruction, as "enrichment" or special classes for the "gifted," and as recreational activity. The summer also serves as a "safe" time to try out new ideas before they are introduced into the regular school program. Summer school is usually optional but sometimes the threat of failure is used to "encourage" attendance.

Various Plans

One of the common plans for year-round education, the *Eleven-Month Plan*, is to increase the length of the school year to eleven months, leaving a one-month vacation. This plan was recommended for consideration by

the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors in 1969 primarily as a result of the influence of the Lieutenant Governor of New York. The State of New York spent five years and a considerable amount of money studying the feasibility of a plan to "speed up" the educational process by having students go to school longer each year, thus graduating earlier. The general reaction seemed to be that students do not need or want "more of the same" in a year's time; most students would not benefit by graduating earlier, and a rigid eleven-month schedule interferes with other summer plans for many people. Moreover, a change from a nine-month to an eleven-month schedule requires a substantial increase in budget the first several years before the "financial benefits" are achieved.

Probably the most frequently considered idea is the *Four-Quarter Plan*. In this plan, students are divided into four sections and the school is operated on a four-quarter basis. Each section of students is in school three of the four quarters of the year and the sections are rotated in such a way that only three are in attendance each quarter, thus limiting attendance at any one time to 75 percent of the total enrollment.

The major reason this plan has been given consideration is to avoid or limit new construction and to cut operating expenses. Construction can be avoided but most school

* John McLain, Director, Research-Learning Center, Clarion State College, Clarion, Pennsylvania

districts which have carefully analyzed costs find little if any savings in the operating budget. The inconvenience of the staggered vacation usually causes parents to favor the increased taxes for needed new buildings. This is vividly illustrated in the comprehensive study completed in July 1970 by the Utica Community Schools, Utica, Michigan. This study indicates that a *mandated* four-quarter plan could save the school district nearly \$100,000,000 in the next ten years in construction costs. The study also indicated that such a program would alienate 88 percent of their voters.

Port Huron Area School District, another of the six school districts to undertake feasibility studies on year-round education under a special grant by the Michigan State Department of Education, also studied the mandated four-quarter plan. They estimated the plan would *increase* the operating budget 3.87 mills the first year and 2.5 mills in succeeding years. At the present time it would *avoid* the need to build new schools at a savings of 5.6 mills in construction and maintenance costs, thus resulting in an annual savings of approximately 3 mills. This study indicated such a program would be feasible if community acceptance and support were obtained, smaller schools were phased out, the curriculum were revised, state laws and regulations were revised, and staff acceptance were obtained.

Several school systems of Georgia, including Atlanta, Fulton County, and DeKalb County, are operating an *optional* four-quarter plan at the *secondary level*. The stated purpose of these programs is to increase the quality of education, not to save money. In each case the curriculum has been revised to provide a wider range of optional courses, and to occupy the students' time during the summer. This program is also being developed in Jefferson County Schools of Kentucky.

A modified form of the four-quarter plan was initiated in 1967 at the Park Elementary School in the Hayward Unified School District, Hayward, California. The school calendar consists of four quarters of approximately 50 days each, with three weeks between

quarters. One week of each break is devoted to parent conferences, teacher in-service education, and team planning. All students attend the same four quarters. The purpose of this program is to improve the quality of education. The operational costs are about 15 percent higher than the budget for standard operation in the district. An analysis of reactions by teachers, students, and parents is favorable.

The Becky-David Elementary School in St. Charles, Missouri, initiated a similar plan, called the *9-3 Plan*, in 1969, except that the students were divided into four sections. Each section attended classes for nine weeks then was off for three. Each section was off a different three weeks; thus the school was able to accommodate the increased enrollment, which is the reason the project was undertaken. After one year of operation it appears the schedule is acceptable to teachers, students, and parents.

This schedule was adopted in the Valley View School System, Lockport, Illinois, in 1970, and is called the *Valley View 45-15 Plan*. Valley View School District was confronted with a rapid increase in enrollment without an adequate tax base to provide the needed construction. It is estimated this plan will save the school district four to six million dollars in the next few years.

The All-Year Plan

The *Flexible All-Year School Plan* is designed to operate school the year round, continuously, like the bank, the store, and the service station, with no beginning or ending to a "school year." Both instruction and time in school are individualized. School operates in such a way that any child or teacher can take his vacation any time of year, for any length of time needed.

Wilson School at Mankato State College, Mankato, Minnesota, is operating a Flexible All-Year School with the curriculum centered around the interests of the individual learners, allowing them to pursue any study they choose.

A research-demonstration model of the Flexible All-Year School is being developed

at Clarion State College, Clarion, Pennsylvania, as a learning systems component of the Research-Learning Center. This school will begin operation in the summer of 1972, when the building now under construction is completed. It will provide for approximately 300 students ranging from nursery through secondary levels, with research and exploratory programs on a life-span range. Focus will be on environmental improvement and problem solving in the community as well as personal development.

With no beginning or ending to the school year, a child may enter school whenever he is "ready." He will not have to wait another year because he was born a few days too late, as some do now. A student cannot fail at the end of the year, because there is no end of the year, nor a beginning to be sent back to. Learning must be continuously forward. If illness, conflict with authority, or vacation causes a student to be out of school at any time, he can return when it is appropriate without the pressure either to "catch up" before school is out or to fail. The school will be the center of learning, but the community will be the classroom.

There will be no long summer vacations

when the students are dumped on the hot streets with nothing to do. Each student can take his vacation whenever he has something better to do; otherwise he can stay in school as long as he wants. He will not automatically remain in school 12 years, then be dumped on the labor market. He may leave school when he is able to do something more important or he may remain in school until he has something better to do; whether it is going to college, another training program, or work, the transition can be planned and orderly.

The Flexible All-Year School probably will emerge as the institution most capable of meeting the educational needs of a technologically advanced, rapidly changing society because it is designed to adapt to the needs of the individual and the changing society and because it is designed to make optimum use of time. In the long run such a school likely will be the most economically efficient as well.

We need to quit dabbling with minor and segmented "innovative ideas" and trying to patch up an obsolete system. It is time we clearly analyze the educational needs of our society and design the kinds of schools we need. □

ETHNIC MODIFICATION OF THE CURRICULUM

Maxine Dunfee *Professor of Education, Indiana University*

Report of an ASCD-sponsored conference which studied the need for immediate curriculum evaluation and revision in terms of a pluralistic society.

Americans long have prided themselves that widespread educational opportunity is a reality in the United States. It is shocking to learn through the bitter experiences of social unrest that large elements of society feel disowned and demeaned, and that the educational system has in fact contributed to these negative racial and ethnic attitudes.

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