

March 2003

Poll Says Floridians Willing to Accept Year-Round Schools

Potential Net Savings

Year-round education (YRE) came about at the turn of the nineteenth century when America, predominately an agrarian society, needed to allow children the summer off so they could help plant and harvest crops. Like many old habits that are hard to break, public education continues to interrupt childrens' schooling despite the original rationale no longer applying. More recently, however, due to fiscal belt-tightening and some experimentation and rethinking of the issue in public education, Florida TaxWatch thinks that it is time to take a new look at YRE.

Notably, as early as the early-1990s, Partners in Productivity, a public/private initiative sponsored by Florida TaxWatch, the Florida Council of 100 and the State of Florida reported on cost savings that could be realized from full implementation of YRE—at that time, estimated to be up to \$2.9 billion over five years. In 1993-94, a total of 106 out of 2,500 schools statewide operated as year-round schools using a modified school calendar. However, most of these schools were on single-track schedules that did not increase capacity. The Florida Department of Education not only supported Florida school district efforts to establish YRE as a cost saving strategy, but also as an improved learning strategy as long as it was determined to meet local needs.

YRE, depending on how it is implemented—there are numerous models—could afford some relief from the fiscal challenges posed by Amendment 9. To cite just one example, research by Standard & Poor's shows that increasing the utilization of school facilities by operating a multi-track YRE calendar will considerably reduce capital expenditures related to the new construction and the expansion of existing buildings required by Amendment 9.¹ By dividing students into four groups, staggering their instructional blocks and vacations, thereby using school facilities for 240 rather than the traditional 180 days, the capacity of a school could be expanded by 33%. Such a reduction by one-third of the capital expenditures required to expand school facilities across the state could result in enormous savings statewide.

Florida “Likely Voters” Qualified Response To Year-Round School

In December 2002, McLaughlin and Associates, a public survey research firm, conducted a multi-faceted, statewide telephone survey among a random sample of “likely” Florida voters that included the question, “*Would you approve or disapprove of having school year around for public school students if it would reduce classroom size without raising any state taxes?*” Because this was the only question among a wide range of questions asked that focused on education, the response

¹ Creditweek, Standard & Poor's, March 21, 1994.

provides only a snapshot of how Floridians feel about YRE. Ideally, the survey also would have tapped into how voters feel about supporting YRE in the event that it would result in funding reductions for other service deliverables and entitlements. Nonetheless, given the state’s current and potential fiscal constraints, compounded as they are by Amendment 9 funding requirements, it is important to know how Floridians feel about YRE should it not result in increased taxes.

Overall, some 64% of the McLaughlin survey respondents strongly approve of YRE while only 31.3% disapprove (See Table 1). Notably, response percentages are largest among those who strongly or somewhat approve (43.8% and 20.2% respectively), and more than twice that of respondents who strongly or somewhat disapprove YRE (22.8% and 8.5% respectively). The McLaughlin survey concludes, therefore, that there is good support of YRE if it would reduce class sizes while not raising taxes.

Table 1
Year-Round Education:
Approval versus Disapproval

	Overall	Southern	Central	Northern
Approve	64.0%	65.8%	62.2%	64.6%
Strongly Approve	43.8%	45.3%	40.8%	47.8%
Somewhat Approve	20.2%	20.4%	21.4%	16.8%
Disapprove	31.3%	28.9%	28.9%	31.9%
Somewhat Disapprove	8.5%	8.4%	8.8%	8.0%
Strongly Disapprove	22.8%	20.4%	24.4%	23.9%

Table 1 also shows that responses by state regions generally vary only slightly within the YRE approval/disapproval categories. Whereas more respondents from the North Florida region (47.5%), (where more public school districts have passed School Capital Outlay Taxes and there are relatively fewer class size problems) than from South Florida (45.3%) (where school crowding is higher) strongly approve of YRE, the differences are too small to be significant. On the other hand, by implication, the relative degree of school crowding may affect how people feel about YRE.

The survey results among those respondents who have children in school, whose children are too young to attend school, and who have no children in the home is surprising (Table 2). Having children in school or not having children makes little difference within approval/disapproval categories with regard to how survey participants respond. That those respondents having children in school or having children who someday will be in school support the concept of YRE (in the context of the phrasing of the question) suggests, other things being equal, that **the agrarian mindset that historically has not favored YRE could be waning.**

Table 2:
YRE Approval re: Children

	In School	Too Young	No Children
Approve	66.7%	52.6%	63.3%
Strongly Approve	44.2%	31.6%	44.5%
Somewhat Approve	22.5%	21.1%	18.8%
Disapprove	31.8%	42.1%	31.6%
Somewhat Disapprove	10.9%	10.5%	8.1%
Strongly Disapprove	20.9%	31.6%	23.4%

Conclusions

Year-Round Education (YRE) has been considered by a minority of the education community to be a viable scheduling mechanism since the early 1900's. The University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research in Educational Improvement recently undertook a comprehensive review of the YRE research literature published since 1980 to determine the impact of YRE.² While 27 of the analyzed studies indicated statistically significant positive effects on student achievement, 42 did not. Although some might focus on the studies showing no positive effect from YRE, it should be pointed out that even though there was considerable change undergone by students, families, teachers and administrators, no slippage of student achievement resulted.

The limited snapshot provided by the YRE data from the McLaughlin and Associates survey provides a clue, other things being equal, as to how likely Florida voters feel about YRE should it reduce class size and not result in increased state taxes. In light of the substantial fiscal challenges posed by Amendment 9 and the other fiscal constraints facing Florida, YRE should be on the table and seriously considered as an alternative to the traditional academic calendar.

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www.floridatxwctch.org where this *Briefing* was
initially released before being printed in hardcopy format.

² Palmer, E., and Bemis, E., *Alternative Calendars: Extended Learning and Year-Round Programs*, University of Minnesota, February 1999.

About Florida TaxWatch

Florida TaxWatch is the only statewide organization entirely devoted to protecting and promoting the political and economic freedoms of Floridians as well as the economic prosperity of our state. Since its inception in 1979, Florida TaxWatch has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. The nationally distributed *City and State* magazine (now *Governing* magazine) published a poll of the nation's statewide taxpayer research centers. Based on this poll, the publication cited Florida TaxWatch as one of the six most influential and respected government watchdogs and taxpayer research institutes in the nation.

In recent years, news stories about Florida TaxWatch have run in all Florida newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. In addition, Florida TaxWatch has been featured on the prestigious *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute supported by voluntary, tax-deductible membership contributions and philanthropic foundation grants. Membership is open to any organization or individual interested in helping to make Florida competitive, healthy and economically prosperous by supporting a credible research effort that promotes constructive taxpayer improvements. Members, through their loyal support, help Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by all types of taxpayers -- homeowners, small businesses, corporations, professional firms, labor unions, associations, individuals and philanthropic foundations -- representing a wide spectrum of Florida's citizens.

Florida TaxWatch's empirically sound research products recommend productivity enhancements and explain statewide impact of economic and tax and spend policies and practices. Without lobbying, Florida TaxWatch has worked diligently and effectively to build government efficiency and promote responsible, cost-effective improvements that add value and benefit taxpayers. This diligence has yielded impressive results: through the years, three-fourths of TaxWatch's cost-saving recommendations have been implemented, saving taxpayers over \$6.2 billion (according to an independent assessment by Florida State University). That translates to approximately \$1,067 in added value for every Florida family.

With your help, we will continue our diligence to make certain your tax investments are fair and beneficial to you, the taxpaying customer who supports Florida's government. Florida TaxWatch is ever present to ensure that taxes are equitable, not excessive, that their public benefits and costs are weighed, and that government agencies are more responsive and productive in the use of your hard-earned tax dollars.

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