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## Case of Year Round Education in Two Georgia Elementary Schools

Rodney James Backman

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# A CASE STUDY OF YEAR ROUND EDUCATION IN TWO GEORGIA

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

RODNEY JAMES BACKMAN

(Under the Direction of Walter Polka)

### ABSTRACT

This researcher looked at two elementary schools using a year round education calendar and provided a descriptive account of their experience. A case study format was used. Quantitative data on standardized test scores, discipline, and attendance were collected. Interviews and focus group sessions were conducted at each site. The overarching research question for this study was: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? A cross site analysis of the major issues showed that both schools agreed on five areas in which the year round education schedule had a positive impact. These areas were: student achievement/motivation, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and facility maintenance/cleanliness. Lemonds County Elementary School (pseudonym) also identified discipline as an area positively impacted by the current school calendar. West City Elementary School (pseudonym) listed teacher acquisition/retention as an item positively affected by the current school calendar. The two elementary schools both indicated two issues to be neutral with respect to the schedule. These were: attendance and community/after school activities. The two schools both identified summer break as an area negatively impacted by the YRE schedule. The researcher concluded that year round education is effective in elementary

schools that are part of small Georgia school systems, however, it cannot completely overcome the challenges inherent in the educational setting where a vast majority of the students reside in families from the low socioeconomic category. The researcher also found that the keys to successful implementation of this educational delivery option were: to conduct considerable research prior to implementation, to develop a very detailed implementation plan at a very early point in the process, to involve key stakeholders in the implementation process, and to communicate implementation efforts to stakeholders at all phases of the implementation process. The results of this study largely supported earlier research in this area.

**INDEX WORDS:** Year round education, Balanced schedule, Intercession, Student achievement, Student discipline, Student attendance, School climate, Summer break, Stakeholder communications, After School activities, Facility maintenance, Teacher retention, Case study, Focus groups

A CASE STUDY OF YEAR ROUND EDUCATION IN TWO GEORGIA  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandson, Jacob Ryan Willoughby. His youthful enthusiasm and unconditional love have brought new joy to my life. He has also reminded me of the important responsibility teachers have in the education of our children.

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I want to give a special thanks to Dr. Cordelia Zinskie. Her patient guidance and practical advice have helped me on numerous occasions in my efforts to complete not only this dissertation but my Specialists Degree at Georgia Southern University. I am also very grateful for the help I got from Dr. Jim Burnham who got me started on this challenging task.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
LIST OF TABLES.....	12
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	13
A. Allocation of Time .....	14
B. Decision Making Concerning Scheduling.....	15
1. Environmental Settings .....	15
2. Advantages and Disadvantage.....	16
C. Leadership.....	17
1. Administrator’s Role .....	17
2. Teacher’s Role.....	19
3. Parental Role .....	19
D. Statement of the Problem .....	20
E. Research Question .....	21
F. Significance of the Study .....	21
G. Procedures .....	23
H. Definition of Terms .....	25
I. Summary .....	25

2	REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE .....	27
	A. Student Achievement/Motivation.....	27
	1. Studies Endorsing YRE.....	27
	2. Studies Critical of YRE.....	30
	3. Studies that were Inconclusive on Achievement in YRE.....	31
	B. Discipline.....	33
	C. Attendance .....	34
	D. School Climate .....	35
	E. Intercession .....	37
	F. Summer Break.....	38
	G. Stakeholder Perceptions/Communciations.....	40
	H. Implementation.....	41
	I. Summary .....	43
3	METHODOLGY .....	46
	A. The Research Question.....	46
	B. Research Design .....	46
	C. Research Setting .....	47
	D. Participants .....	48
	E. Sampling Procedures .....	49
	F. Instrumentation .....	50
	G. Validation .....	51
	H. Data Collection.....	53
	I. Data Analysis.....	55

	10
J. Reporting the Data .....	56
K. Summary.....	57
4 REPORTING THE DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	58
A. Research Design .....	58
B. Findings .....	60
1. Lemonds County Elementary School.....	60
2. West City Elementary School .....	72
3. Cross Site Analysis.....	85
D. Summary.....	89
5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS .....	92
A. Summary.....	92
B. Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings .....	93
C. Conclusions.....	101
D. Implications .....	103
E. Recommendations.....	104
1. Recommendations for Implementing the Results of this Study .....	104
2. Recommendations for Future Research .....	104
REFERENCES .....	105
APPENDICES .....	115
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS.....	115
B INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS .....	117
C INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENT FOCUS GROUPS.....	120
D. INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS.....	123

E. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .....125

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Data Collection Matrix .....	55
Table 2: Demographic and Academic Achievement Data at Lemonds County Elementary School .....	63
Table 3: Demographic and Academic Achievement Data at West City Elementary School .....	75
Table 4: Issues Examined .....	86

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The most widely used school calendar today is a calendar that was first established when the United States was primarily an agrarian society. In the 1800s children went to school to learn the skills they needed for life. Students in the vast rural areas only went to school for five or six months. This was the time between the last harvest in the fall and the first planting in the spring. However, at the same time, children in urban areas went to school eleven or twelve months of the year. Then in 1847 there was a national move to offer a standard curriculum. The rural schools added days to their calendar and the urban areas reduced their schedule. This resulted in the traditional agrarian school calendar of nine months in school with a three month vacation (Shields & Oberg, 2000).

In the early 1900s we started to see a population shift to the urban areas. This population shift was accompanied by a movement toward year round education (YRE) (Consolie, 1999). Prior to World War II year round schools existed in small numbers. The earliest examples were not concentrated in any one geographic area but rather appeared in varied contexts in locations such as: Bluffton, Indiana in 1904, Newark, New Jersey in 1912, Minot, North Dakota in 1917, Omaha, Nebraska in 1925, and Nashville, Tennessee in 1926. These schools were disbanded during World War II when women and children were needed in the factories to support the war effort. Consolie noted that in the late 1960s YRE experienced a rebirth in four states, California, Illinois, Minnesota, and

Missouri, primarily to alleviate over-crowding problems. In recent years other political and social issues have further enhanced the adoption of the year round calendar. These issues included the increase in the number of families in which both parents work, the demand for high stakes testing, and the push for additional instructional hours (Metzker, 2002).

#### Allocation of Time

The YRE schedule is just one of many suggested changes to the traditional school calendar. As mayor of New York City, Rudolph Gulliani proposed Saturday classes and the governor of New York suggested longer school days. While serving as governor of California, Gray Davis recommended adding 30 days to the middle school calendar to address academic deficiencies (Metzker, 2002). However, the most common deviation from the traditional school calendar is the YRE schedule.

The YRE schedule is implemented in two forms, the single track or the multi-track schedule. The single track schedule is one in which all of the students in a school are on the same schedule. This schedule is usually a 45-15 schedule or a 60-20 schedule. A student assigned to a 45-15 schedule goes to school for 45 days and then gets a 15 day vacation (the same explanation applies for the 60-20 schedule). On a 45-15 schedule this cycle is repeated four times during the year (60-20 repeats three times) with the students having slightly longer breaks at Christmas and in the summer. Neither of these schedules adds days to the normal 180 school days mandated in most states. Also, during vacation periods, remedial or exploratory classes, called intercession classes are offered. These classes usually are not mandatory, but do allow students who are struggling to have added instructional days in hopes of remaining on track (Shields & Oberg, 2000). The

multi-track YRE schedule is identical except in one aspect. The student body is divided into groups (usually four groups) and the schedules of each group are staggered so that one group is always on vacation and three groups are in school. This schedule increases the carrying capacity of a school building by 25% and is used to alleviate an overcrowding situation without any capital expenditures for new buildings (Kneese, 2000).

Some schools have adopted a modified year round schedule called a balanced calendar. A balanced calendar has both a fall and spring break and a summer break of less than 10 weeks. This is the type of schedule used by the schools in this study.

#### Decision Making Concerning Scheduling

The most often stated reason for changing to a year round schedule has been to increase student achievement. This is, however, only one aspect of the change process. Several researchers have detailed the key components of the YRE schedule decision.

#### *Environmental Settings*

Year round education schedules have been implemented more extensively in urban and in suburban settings, than in rural settings, although for different reasons. In suburban settings YRE is most often implemented to help handle the significant increases in population (Consolie, 1999). However, YRE has also been implemented in urban settings because the intercessions serve the two-fold purpose of keeping students off the streets and giving disadvantaged youth the extra instruction they need to remain on grade level. In rural settings, on the other hand, very little pressure exists to stray from the traditional calendar that was originally designed to support an agrarian society. This is especially true for migrant workers who are dependent on the additional summer income earned by their children working the fields (Donato, 1996).



### *Advantages and Disadvantages*

The most compelling educational reason to switch to a YRE schedule would be to increase student achievement (Shields & Oberg, 2000). Several researchers have indicated a positive impact on student achievement after implementation of the YRE schedule (Haenn, 1996; Kneese, 2000; Marks, 2006; Ramos, 2006; Varner, 2003). Some researchers have found the YRE schedule to be instrumental in closing the achievement gap between poor and affluent children (Korth, 2005; Moore, 2002). However other researchers have found no statistically significant difference in student achievement between the two schedules (Alcott-Lutz, 2002; Espinosa, 2000; Fritts-Scott, 2005; Heaberlin, 2000; Helton, 2001; Muench, 2001; Sexton, 2003). Also, some researchers reported inconclusive results when studying the impact of the YRE schedule in closing the achievement gap (Benton, 1999; McMillan, 2005).

Several other advantages to YRE education have been identified. Some researchers have found higher student attendance numbers with the YRE schedule (Aldridge-Morris, 1998; Thomas, 2002). Shields and Oberg (2000) found that teacher attendance improved with a YRE schedule. Shields and Oberg also found that there were fewer discipline problems after transition to a YRE schedule. School climate has also been found to improve with the YRE schedule (Adams, 2001; Fritts-Scott, 2005; Helton, 2001; Kinsey-Baker, 2000; Prohm & Baenen, 1996). Researchers in a study at John Hopkins University studied achievement gaps between high SES and low SES students as they entered the ninth grade. Collecting data on these students back to their entry into the first grade they were able to pinpoint achievement gaps as being the result of differential learning during the summer breaks (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). A YRE

schedule reduces the opportunity for this summer learning differential to occur. Joan Hamilton is principal at Roberta Bonder Public School in Toronto, Ontario, a K-8 school that serves mostly first generation immigrant families. Intercession classes used under a YRE schedule have been successful in keeping struggling students on track with their peers (Hamilton, 2006).

Researchers have also found disadvantages to YRE. Some researchers have found the YRE schedule to have a negative impact on student achievement (Cole, 2001; Shepherd, 2000). Administrator burnout occurred because some principals did not like to take time off while their schools were in session (Wildman et al., 1999). The lack of summer downtime creates a challenge for the completion of major building maintenance projects (Holt & Karr-Kidwell, 1998). It also leaves little time between school years for administrators to work out student class schedules (Vanessa, 2007). Teacher staff development was also found to be a problem because teachers could no longer enroll in the traditional university summer courses (Holt & Karr-Kidwell, 1998).

### Leadership

All stakeholders play an important role in the YRE implementation and execution decision. This process is dependent on the talents and motivated engagement of key players from all constituencies involved.

#### *Administrator's Role*

Administrators play a key role in the successful implementation of a YRE schedule. The superintendent and school principals must lay the groundwork for implementation. Then, they must convince the local community of the advantages of YRE (Davies & Kerry, 1999). Once the YRE schedule has been adopted, the

responsibility for productive implementation of this schedule falls on the shoulders of the school principal. This is a demanding task and can result in administrator burnout (Borba, 2000; Prohm & Baenen, 1996; Wildman et al., 1999). Borba found this burden can be ameliorated to some degree by additional assignments of assistant principals, mandatory vacations for principals and increased autonomy at YRE sites.

Successful implementation of a YRE schedule requires that the school principal understand the change process and engage in key practices of the change process. Davies and Kerry (1999) had some suggestions for any administrator who finds himself/herself in this position. First of all, they pointed out the necessity of involving the wider community from the beginning. Schools impact many aspects of their environment beyond the students and their parents. Second, principals must be sensitive to false information that is designed to denigrate the change and be ready to challenge this information. Third, the principal is also encouraged to go slowly, allow considerable planning time and include a substantial amount of time to educate the public on the proposed change. Fourth, a school/community team of all involved parties was recommended to ensure that all possible problems had been discussed and addressed. Finally, in concert with the superintendent and the board of education, alternatives should be provided within a geographic area. Davies and Kerry noted that resistance to a YRE schedule may be too difficult to overcome if a large number of families were forced into this change because of strict attendance zone requirements.

### *Teacher's Role*

The teacher's role in the success of a YRE schedule is absolutely vital. The YRE schedule has some inherent characteristics that enhance the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. First it increases the number of breaks throughout the year. These regular breaks allow teachers to be reflective practitioners, engage in quality planning and make needed changes to their lesson plans (Kneese, 2000). Haser and Nasser (2003) found that it allows teachers that have taken time off to raise young children, an opportunity to return to the classroom gradually by just working the intercession classes. Barber (1996) noted that by using the best teachers for intercessions and encouraging creative teaching in these intercession classes, teachers were able to realize significant increases in student achievement. Teacher's have recognized some of the advantages to a year round schedule and have sought to work in this environment. Kanaka Creek Elementary School in Maple Ridge, British Columbia received 120 employment applications for five vacant teacher positions soon after switching to a YRE schedule (Hunter, 1998).

### *Parental Role*

Success of any educational delivery schedule requires parental support. Inger (1994) found that parents were initially opposed to such a radical change, that it created inconveniencies for families with children on different schedules, and that the chief concern of parents was childcare. However, several studies have found that after exposure to the YRE schedule parental support was strong (Haenn, 1996; Prohm & Baenen, 1996; Venable, 1997). Vadenais (2000) found that parents of students at a YRE school became more active in their child's education after this schedule was adopted.

### Statement of the Problem

The continued demand for high stakes testing and the push for adjustments in instructional hours have forced educators to examine alternative schedules such as the year round education schedule. Proponents of this schedule have pointed out that the United States is no longer an agrarian society in which students use their summer vacations to help plant or harvest the family crops. Therefore, schools' instructional schedules can be adjusted to meet new societal demands.

Year round education has been found to reduce discipline and absentee problems. Educators working under this schedule have also given YRE high marks because it gives them opportunities for frequent breaks as well as opportunities to earn extra money working within their discipline. On the other hand, some educators have objected to this schedule because they fear losing the opportunity to further their education in the summer. Some parents have objected because it can result in children from the same household being on different school schedules. This can be problematic because it interferes with the opportunity for older siblings to be available as after school caregivers for their younger brothers and sisters. It also limits the time in the summer when the whole family is available for a family summer vacation. Yet teachers and parents already using a YRE schedule have given this concept high ratings relative to school climate and instructional effectiveness. Little is known about the effectiveness of this instructional schedule in Georgia. The experiences of administrators, teachers, parents and students in these schools have not been closely examined. Little is known about why these schools have embraced YRE.

Therefore, in this study the researcher examined in detail the YRE experience of two Georgia elementary schools. These elementary schools are part of small Georgia school systems. In each case they are the only elementary school in their district. The researcher examined how the adoption of a modified YRE calendar impacted these schools. The researcher examined the experiences in these schools against the backdrop of contemporary research on year round education. The researcher focused on ten areas identified in the research and in the pilot study. The ten areas studied were: student achievement/motivation, discipline, attendance, school climate, intercession, summer break, stakeholder perceptions/communications, community/after school activities, facility maintenance and cleanliness, and teacher acquisition/retention. Implementation was also discussed.

#### Research Question

The research question used for this research was: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? This question was used to develop a descriptive account of the YRE experience at these two schools.

#### Significance of the Study

In this study, the researcher provided a detailed analysis of the YRE experience in two Georgia elementary schools that are part of small school systems. The use of a YRE schedule has been examined in numerous settings, but a comprehensive examination of the Georgia experience especially in small school systems does not exist. The researcher intended to fill that void. From this researcher's findings, it can be ascertained whether there are particular characteristics of a YRE schedule that are appealing and effective in

these schools that are part of small Georgia school systems. Examination of the experiences of these schools adds to the knowledge base available in considering a YRE schedule.

The researcher's findings are important to principals because they are critical change agents in education. If the YRE schedule has merit, then school principals will be responsible for building a consensus amongst the three constituencies (administrators, teachers and parents) and communicating this concept to their communities. This researcher provides principals with enlightening data which can be used to gain deeper insight into the use of a YRE schedule in a small school system setting. The researcher has identified and highlighted the perceived promises and pitfalls of a YRE schedule from the perspective of administrators, teachers and parents. He has provided data useful in the change process of converting to YRE. The researcher's intent was to focus administrators on the key issues to be addressed when considering the adoption of a YRE schedule in similar settings.

This researcher also provided information useful to teachers and parents contemplating the change to a YRE schedule. Teachers will have more detailed knowledge about how this schedule will impact their personal and professional lives. The pitfalls to avoid have been highlighted as well as aspects of this system on which they can focus that may enhance the education of their students. For those teachers considering employment in a YRE school, the researcher provided them with useful data in helping them make this career decision. For parents who are anxious about this new schedule, the researcher gave them relevant data that will alleviate some of their concerns about a YRE schedule, and arm them with enough knowledge to ask critical questions of

their school administrators. He also examined how students adapt to this schedule. Administrators, teachers, and parents will develop a more productive education experience for their children through reflective application of the researcher's findings.

This researcher experienced this type of schedule when his son attended the first grade at a year round school. This turned into a very traumatic family experience because of a family move at what would have been the normal completion date at a traditional school. However, this young boy still had several weeks of his first grade year to complete at the year round school when he was moved to another state. The next fall he began the second grade in a traditional school without the benefit of a complete first grade year. He struggled academically for an entire year to overcome this hurdle. It was not the quality of the education he was getting in the year round school but the timing of the family move that caused this problem.

This study highlighted some of these issues with a two-fold purpose. First, it gives parents some data to consider in timing their children's moves into and out of a YRE schedule. Second, it will give educational decision makers data to consider in trying to develop an effective fit between traditional and YRE schedules that will accommodate the smooth transition from one educational delivery schedule to another.

#### Procedures

This researcher conducted this study using a case study format. Merriam (1990) believes that case study research is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena. Merriam further explained that this form of research is undertaken when the researcher is seeking to describe a particular



phenomenon. Therefore this researcher used case study research to describe the YRE experience in these two elementary schools.

Case study research does not claim any particular methods for data collection (Merriam, 1990). Multiple methods of data collection were used by this researcher. Quantitative data on attendance, discipline, and standardized test scores were collected from data bases available through the Georgia Department of Education and from the schools being studied. Qualitative data were collected from interviews and from focus group sessions conducted on each campus.

Brown (1999) has found that when a researcher has the goal of capturing the ideas and opinions of multiple stakeholders, the focus group method is the logical choice. Since that was a goal of this research, focus groups were an important data collection method in this study. Focus group sessions were held at each of the schools participating in the study. Focus groups consisted of four to six members. Teacher focus groups and parent focus groups were held separately in order to allow members of each group to speak without feeling intimidated. All focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed. They were analyzed to identify the central themes that emerged.

Data were collected from site administrators using interviews. The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to examine an experience from another person's perspective (Patton, 2002). This interviewing allowed the researcher to gather unique data on YRE from the perspective of the school leadership.

## Definition of Terms

*Balanced calendar* is a modified year round education calendar that has a summer break of less than ten weeks. This calendar also must include both a fall break and a spring break.

*Intercession* is the 5 to 20 days between regular class sessions during which enrichment and remediation classes are taught.

*Multi-track YRE schedule* is a YRE schedule in which the starting dates for groups of students and teachers are staggered so that at no time are all the teachers and students in session.

*Single track YRE schedule* is a schedule in which all students in the school are on the same schedule.

*A small school district* is defined as a school district with a total enrollment of less than 2500 students.

*Year round education* is an educational delivery method in which the school calendar is adjusted to eliminate the long summer break. Typical YRE calendars work on a schedule of 45 days in class and 15 days off or a 60 day session followed by a 20 day break.

## Summary

The implementation of a year round education schedule across the nation is gaining momentum as a school calendar that better fits the lifestyles and needs of the communities served by the public school system. There is some indication that YRE will lessen the summer learning loss inherent in the traditional school calendar. The multi-track version of the YRE is also a vehicle for solving overcrowding situations without the tremendous capital outlay necessary to construct new buildings. Yet change in education

comes slowly. Only 19 public school systems in Georgia have schools using some form of a YRE calendar. This researcher looked at two elementary schools using a modified YRE calendar and provided a descriptive account of their experience.

The researcher used a case study format. He used data on standardized test scores, discipline and attendance. He also conducted interviews and focus group sessions at each site. The overarching research question for this study was: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? This research can be useful to all constituencies associated with public education. Administrators are critical change agents in education and need access to data that details the YRE experience. Teachers and parents that are contemplating a change to a YRE schedule will also find this data useful. The impact of the YRE calendar on students is the key factor and one of importance to all stakeholders in public education.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter the researcher reviewed previous studies that have examined the use of a year round education (YRE) schedule. The overarching question for this study is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? This researcher conducted a thorough literature review of academic studies of the YRE scheduling concept pertinent to the context of this study. Studies examined were categorized into the following areas: student achievement/motivation, discipline, attendance, school climate, intercession, summer break, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and implementation. In two of the areas studied the review of literature did not produce any significant studies. These were community/after school activities as well as facility maintenance and cleanliness.

#### Student Achievement/Motivation

The most often studied issue when examining a YRE scheduling format has been the issue of its impact on student achievement. In these studies, researchers have arrived at a wide range of conclusions. These conclusions range from strong support of YRE to rejection of its value as a scheduling format. These studies are grouped according to the results reported by the researchers.

#### *Studies Endorsing YRE*

Kneese (1996) conducted a meta-analytic research study that focused on fifteen studies comparing YRE calendars to traditional calendars. The results of these studies found YRE to have a small positive effect. Kneese further noted that single track schools were more successful at raising student achievement than multi-track schools and that the

YRE format benefited males more than females. Kneese also found that the positive impact diminished over time and recommended that additional longitudinal studies be conducted to determine if the positive results were in part due to the Hawthorne effect.

Several studies of elementary age students found YRE to have a positive impact on student achievement. Varner (2003) studied the lesson plans of third grade teachers in a YRE school paired with a traditional school to determine if the pacing was the same for each school. Varner found that year round teachers did move through the basic reading and mathematics textbooks at a quicker pace. Marks (2006) reported that an examination of sixth graders with a three year record of Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Scores performed better at a statistically significant level after converting to the year round calendar. Nine elementary schools in Maury County were included in this study. Ramos (2006) reported that year round calendar fifth grade students outperformed traditional calendar students in mathematics in the school-within-a-school setting that was the focus of her research. Prohm and Baenen (1996) studied students in grades three through five using a multi-track format in Wake County, North Carolina. They found that the YRE students increased their scores nine points in reading and 14 points in mathematics on average while the district as a whole only increased their scores by one point on average in each of these areas. Shields and Oberg (1999) conducted a six year longitudinal study of fifth grade students. These researchers found that the academic achievement of fifth graders was enhanced under a YRE calendar. Another quantitative study using standardized test scores of three YRE schools matched with three demographically equivalent traditional schools was conducted by Kneese (2000). Kneese found that YRE students outperformed the traditional students with the greatest gains being in

mathematics. Kneese also noted the students from higher SES categories showed greater gains under the YRE calendar. Moore (2002) studied students from both the traditional and YRE programs within the same school. This author found the YRE format had a statistically significant positive impact on the history/social sciences and mathematics tests. Moore also found YRE to be instrumental in closing the gap between poor and affluent children. Thigpen (2004) studied students from low SES categories in the Mississippi Delta. Thigpen found YRE elementary students in grades K through 5 to outperform their counterparts in one area, language. In another study of at-risk students in grades 3 through 5 the researchers found the YRE students that used the intercession for remediation outperformed traditional school students that used summer school for remediation (Jacobson et al., 2002). Korth (2005) used standardized test scores from elementary schools across California to determine the impact of YRE on elementary students from low SES and/or limited English proficiency families. Data were collected over a three year period and YRE students significantly outperformed traditional students. Data from this study demonstrated that traditional students increased their Academic Performance Index (API) by 65 points while YRE students increased their scores by 93 points. This gain occurred despite the fact that YRE schools continued to show a greater gain in the number of low income students enrolled.

Studies have also been conducted at private schools in the area of student achievement and motivation. Alcott-Lutz (2002) included stakeholder perceptions in the findings of a study of Catholic schools in the United States and Guam. YRE was perceived by stakeholders to increase student motivation, particularly in readiness for instruction. In another study, Aldridge-Morris (1998) examined students in grades four

through six attending Roman Catholic elementary schools. She found that YRE students outperformed traditional students in all areas, with the greatest gains being in mathematics.

Another study was conducted of the impact on the physical education of YRE students at the elementary level. This quantitative study used survey data collected from 32 physical education teachers in Texas who had taught at least one year under each format. This author found that the YRE schedule improved affective behaviors; interest and participation (63%), sportsmanship and cooperation (56%) and discipline (66%). However, no change in motor skill development was noted (Kanipe, 1998).

#### *Studies Critical of YRE*

Shepherd (2000) conducted a quantitative study of students in a Midwestern city in grades 4 through 6. Comparisons were made on 48 items captured by state test data. In 41 of these items there were no statistically significant differences between YRE students and traditional students. However, on seven other items the traditional students did better. On only one item were YRE students found to excel at a statistically significant level. In another study an extensive multiple regression analysis was conducted of students taking the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The TAAS results showed that YRE students had lower mean scores in mathematics (Cole, 2001). Thigpen (2004) studied the impact of YRE in reading, language and mathematics achievement on 118 students from low SES in the Mississippi Delta. The data from this study showed that traditional students outperformed the YRE counterparts in reading and mathematics. Only in language achievement did the YRE students score higher. Mitchell and Mitchell (2005) found that multi-track YRE schools led to intra-school

segregation by track. Over time the tracks started to show substantial segregation by SES with the more popular track schedules attracting the best teachers and the best students. These researchers found that the combination of teacher and student segregation accounted for 95% of the achievement difference between tracks. Mitchell and Mitchell found this segregation occurred because returning students were allowed to pick their track for the next school year and parents started to self segregate by community, forming distinct schools within a school.

#### *Studies That Were Inconclusive on Achievement in YRE*

Several researchers have examined test score data and reported inconclusive results with respect to the impact of a YRE schedule. In a study of Catholic schools in the United States and Guam principals and teachers were questioned about the impact of YRE on the standardized test scores of their students. The participants in this survey noted no significant impact in the standardized test scores of their students after implementation of the YRE schedule (Alcott-Lutz, 2002). Helton (2001) used data from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and a questionnaire sent to 528 respondents to compare 23 single-track year round schools with 23 matched traditional schools. The examination of the statewide test data did not indicate any statistical differences in achievement. Fritts-Scott (2005) used data from the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program given to fourth grade students during School Year 2002-2003. The participants in this study were students on a single track schedule and a demographically matched traditional school. This researcher reported no significant differences in mathematics and literary achievement as a result of calendar type. Another researcher used Virginia's Standards of Learning data at an urban middle



school to measure academic achievement. The study involved 87 year round students and 26 traditional students from one campus. No significant achievement differences were noted (Sexton, 2003). Espinoza (2000) used ITBS data in his study of student achievement in ten Chicago elementary schools. Traditional schools were paired with YRE schools on the 60-20 plan. No significant test score differences in either reading or mathematics were noted. Stenvall and Stenvall (2000) conducted an extensive analysis of Academic Performance Index (API) scores at all levels and they reported inconclusive results. They did find that single track schools outperformed all other school calendar formats. However, they also found that schools on a four track multi-track schedule did not improve as much as traditional calendar students.

Some studies that examined specific demographic segments of the student population have also been inconclusive. Benton (1999) studied student achievement of Hispanic students in Title I traditional schools to Hispanic students in Title I YRE schools. Fourth grade students at five Title I traditional schools were matched with fourth grade students at five YRE schools. The comparison was done using data from the Stanford 9 standardized test. There was no statistically significant difference in achievement. McMillan (2005) studied two schools in Middle Tennessee that were both classified as rural, high poverty and small enrollment. One school was on a traditional calendar and the other on a modified year round calendar. Three years of data from the Tennessee Comprehensive Examination were studied and no statistically significant academic performance was noted based on the type of calendar used.

Another researcher studied students at the beginning of their formal education to determine if YRE gave them a better start. This researcher examined kindergarten

students that had scored low on a screening test given before they began kindergarten. These students were put into one of three different programs: a 180 day traditional program, a 180 day YRE program, or a 200 day traditional program that included a 20 day Reach Out Program. No difference in achievement was noted between the two 180 day programs. The students that participated in the program with the Reach Out phase did have higher achievement scores at the end of their kindergarten experience (McGee, 1999).

Some researchers have conducted longitudinal studies and have also reported inconclusive results with respect to the impact of a YRE schedule on student achievement. Muench (2001) conducted a longitudinal study to determine at high school graduation whether students that attended a YRE elementary school differed significantly in academic achievement from those students that had attended a traditional elementary school. All students in the study shared a common secondary school experience. The researcher found no significant difference in high school achievement between these two groups. In another longitudinal study the researcher examined data from students in their last year of a traditional schedule and again after they had completed a year under the YRE schedule. No statistically significant academic achievement gains were noted after switching to a YRE schedule (Heaberlin, 2000).

#### Discipline

Some researchers have found a YRE schedule to have a positive impact on discipline. Beazley (2001) surveyed selected stakeholders at a suburban Arizona high school three years after implementation of the YRE schedule. The survey covered student achievement, school climate, student discipline, and stakeholder attitudes.

Discipline was the only aspect of student performance that was found to be impacted by this schedule change. Discipline showed a positive trend after the schedule change. Shields and Oberg (2000) collected discipline data at two Ontario elementary schools after their transition to a YRE schedule. They found disciplinary incidents fell by 66%. Heaberlin (2000), however, found no difference between elementary schools on each type of schedule when disaggregated by discipline referrals. Also, Sexton (2003) examined in-school and out of school suspensions for 113 students in grade 8 of a Virginia urban middle school. The study involved 87 year round students and 27 traditional students. No significant suspension differences were noted.

#### Attendance

A quantitative study using statewide reporting data matched demographically similar high schools under each type of instructional schedule. The YRE schools reported higher attendance rates than their traditional counterparts (Thomas, 2002). Yet in another study of Roman Catholic elementary schools the reported data indicated that traditional students were absent nearly twice as often (Aldridge-Morris, 1998). Marks (2006) examined the attendance records at nine elementary schools in Maury County, Tennessee over a 3 year period. Conversion to a year round calendar did not impact attendance at a statistically significant level. In a study of two demographically matched elementary schools, no statistically significant difference in attendance could be found based on the instructional delivery schedule used (Heaberlin, 2000). Sexton (2003) studied attendance data for 87 year round students and 26 traditional students from one urban middle school in southeastern Virginia. No significant differences in attendance were found based on the educational schedule. In another study, researchers looked at

the impact of YRE on teacher attendance. In two Ontario elementary schools, researchers found that the switch to YRE was accompanied by a dramatic increase in teacher attendance (Shields & Oberg, 2000).

In a very comprehensive study involving slightly over 100,000 California high school students, Culler (1998) looked at the impact of YRE on high school dropout rates. State reported data was used and was disaggregated by instructional schedule and type of area served. The researcher reported that YRE schools had lower dropout rates in urban and suburban areas while traditional schools had lower dropout rates in rural areas.

### School Climate

Several studies have quantified school climate using some sort of questionnaire to collect their data. Helton (2001) studied 23 matched pairs of schools in Florida using a questionnaire sent to 528 respondents teaching in these schools. An analysis of the questionnaire data indicated a perceived benefit in school climate. Respondents believed YRE made their schools better in academic achievement, attitude and continuity factors. Fritts-Scott (2005) administered the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire to teachers and staff at an Arkansas elementary school on a single track schedule and to a demographically matched school on a traditional calendar. Fritts-Scott reported statistically significant differences in favor of the year round school. In another study students and teachers in a rural Tennessee school district that had experience with both traditional and year round calendars were surveyed as to the perceived benefits and satisfaction with a year round calendar. There was a statistically significant preference for the year round calendar (Lasater, 2005). Prohm and Baenen (1996) studied the transition of three elementary schools in Wake County, North Carolina to a YRE

schedule. They reported that in a survey of school climate taken after the transition to YRE the staff indicated a more positive attitude on 15 of 18 survey items. A corresponding survey of parent attitudes indicated a more positive attitude on 14 of 15 survey items.

Qualitative examinations of this issue have produced similar results. Participants in a study of the transition to YRE at a K-5 school indicated a positive impact on school climate after the schedule change. This school adopted a multi-track calendar. Study participants believed the multi-track calendar created a more collaborative organizational climate that enhanced the professional lives of the teachers. The complex room rotation and communication challenges forced teachers to think in terms of what was best for the entire school and to collaborate with their colleagues (Kinsey-Baker, 2000). Lowe (2002) studied the impact on fifth grade teachers and students after the transition to YRE. It was found that YRE positively impacted school climate because of the high level of academic success enjoyed by these students and the corresponding increase in self-esteem. Shields and Oberg (1999) studied three matched pairs of elementary schools in a large urban school district. Teachers interviewed indicated a positive change in the learning environment. Shields and Oberg (2000) also studied the transition to YRE at two elementary schools in Ontario. As an indicator of a positive school climate that school district reported that 30 teachers requested transfers to those schools after the transition to YRE. Adams (2001) looked at the implementation of YRE at a University School, a K-12 school located on the East Tennessee State University Campus. It was noted that school climate improved after YRE implementation as stakeholders became more positive about teaching and learning. Vadenais (2000) found that parents of

students at a YRE school became more active in their child's education after this schedule was adopted.

### Intercession

Joan Hamilton is principal at Roberta Bonder Public School in Toronto, Ontario, a K-8 school that serves mostly first generation immigrant families. She reports that the YRE schedule allows her to provide four to six weeks of intercession remedial classes to meet the needs of this largely English as a second language population (Hamilton, 2006). Another example of the value of the intercessions was reported from the Visalia Unified School district in California. In that district 242 at risk students from two elementary schools were enrolled in an accelerated literacy program taught during the intercession periods. After two intercession periods 40% of these students had been dropped from this program because they were back on track (Jacobsen et al., 2002). Hood and Freeman (2000) studied the intercession component of the YRE schedule at a year round high school. They reported that participation by race was nearly equal. However, significantly more of the male population (49.8%) than female population (37.9%) participated in the intercessions. Intercessions designed for remediation were attended by more males and black students. White females and Asian Americans preferred intercession classes that sped up their completion of graduation requirements. Also, seniors took more intercession classes than other students. There was no statistically significant difference in grade point average based on participation in the intercessions. Mulligan (2005) surveyed teachers to determine whether intercessions produced positive outcomes for students. Intercession classes that promoted higher order thinking and had

small class sizes were among the components that led to positive outcomes for students that participated in them.

Some researchers found problems did develop as a result of the intercession schedule. Shields and Oberg( 2000) examined two Ontario elementary schools that had students on a YRE calendar and other students on a traditional calendar. The researchers found that problems developed in the intercessions as soon as students from both calendars were permitted to attend Intercessions also make it difficult for high schools to complete a normal music schedule that included performances at football games by an entire band as well as holiday concerts (Trinis, 2007).

#### Summer Break

Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse (1996) conducted a meta-analytical review of 39 studies. They found that the traditional summer break resulted in a one month loss in academic achievement on a grade level scale. The effect of summer break was more detrimental for math computation and spelling. This loss was explained by the differential availability of opportunities to practice different academic material over the summer (with reading being practiced more easily than mathematics). They also found fact and procedure based knowledge to be more susceptible to memory decay than conceptual knowledge. Varner (2001) examined how instructional time was spent at the conclusion of summer breaks to determine how much review time was needed. Varner did a one-on-one comparison of third grade classes in a YRE school and a traditional calendar school. Varner found that the traditional school teachers spent more time reviewing skills after summer break and after all other holidays as well. The short

summer break under a YRE schedule also leaves little time between school years for administrators to work out student class schedules (Vanessa, 2007).

Some studies of the summer break influence have looked at its impact on special groups of students. Broh (2003) researched achievement gaps by ethnicity from the beginning of kindergarten until the completion of their first grade year. The gap between black and white students was found to grow during the school year but remain constant during the summer break. Hispanic students were found to keep pace with white students in reading during the time studied. However, Hispanic students did lose ground to white students during the summer break. Asian students began kindergarten with higher achievement than white students but by the end of first grade had fallen behind white students in both reading and math. The relative losses of Asian students occurred during the school years but the Asian students did gain some ground during the summer breaks. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University took data collected on students as they entered the ninth grade. They then traced the achievement gains of these same students back to the first grade. They reported that the achievement gaps between high SES and low SES could be traced to differential learning that took place during the summer break (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007).

Two other summer break issues are the reduced employment opportunities for YRE students and professional development opportunities for teachers that wish to attend summer courses. Pickeral (2004) examined the first issue. Participants were 247 general managers of tourist attractions in the United States. Pickeral reported that 89.5% of the time tourist attractions will not hire workers for less than four weeks because of the cost to train a seasonal worker. Attendance at a year round school would eliminate this



employment opportunity for students. Teacher professional development was also found to be a problem because teachers could no longer enroll in the traditional university summer courses (Holt & Karr-Kidwell, 1998).

#### Stakeholder Perceptions/Communications

Several researchers examined perceptions of stakeholders towards their schools after the implementation of YRE had taken place. One researcher reported that when parents were polled after implementation of a YRE schedule 80.4% favored continuation of YRE. These parents indicated their children's enthusiasm about school improved. They also believed that YRE impacted the quality of instruction. YRE made planning family activities and arranging child care easier. In this same study 82.3% of school employees favored YRE after experiencing the change. This group reported that communication among employees improved, the amount of re-teaching was reduced, teachers were less fatigued, employee attendance improved, arranging personal activities was easier, and student achievement and conduct improved. Of the students polled in this study 75% favored the YRE schedule. The reasons cited by students were that this schedule improved their desire to attend school and gave them the chance to spend more quality time with their families (Dark, 1999). Skinner (1999) compared two schools' performance in the last year of a traditional calendar to their performance in the first year of a YRE calendar. After implementation, 70% of teachers preferred the YRE schedule and 75% of elementary school students preferred this new schedule. Morris (2002) completed a qualitative study of a large Virginia elementary school that had converted to a YRE schedule. Three administrators, four teachers, and seven parents were involved in the study. All stakeholders involved in this study were positive about YRE. However,

they did offer two recommendations for revising the intercessions; changing the multi-age grouping component, and providing a better means of communication between the school and parents. Varner (2001) studied third grade teachers in a Southern city school district. These teachers perceived less teacher and student burnout under a YRE schedule. They also believed they spent less time reviewing skills and were able to move at a quicker pace. Beazley (2001) noted a positive trend in stakeholder attitudes in a study of a single track YRE high school three years after implementation of the YRE schedule.

### Implementation

Several implementation studies identified the most critical issues for successful implementation. Scheurer (2001) studied the factors that facilitated the adoption of a YRE schedule at a middle school in the Reno, Nevada area. YRE was found to be a viable option if the implementation was properly planned and if communication channels between the school, parents and the community were used to convey the need for and the progress of YRE implementation. In this same study the author also surveyed YRE implementation at middle schools throughout the country. Scheurer found that the highest three items for effective YRE implantation were parental support (86%), school board support (85%) and central office support (83%). Walsh (1998) conducted a longitudinal study that looked at all phases of the implementation process. Walsh divided the process into three periods; pre-implementation, the implementation period, and the post implementation perspective. Walsh reported that political factors and the timing of implementation determined whether the community would accept the change. Another study queried 97 principals from 12 Florida schools districts that had implemented YRE.

The respondents in this study recommended that a smooth transition to YRE required a school to start the process early, introduce the subject to key stakeholders, conduct considerable staff development and hold many parental meetings during the implementation process (Pawlas, 1996). Lovett (2006) studied 13 principals in the Tulsa metropolitan area as they led the transition efforts to a year round calendar. Effective communications, public relations, staff collaboration, and professional development were important in achieving a successful transition.

Mannario (2003) published a qualitative study of administrators' perceptions of year round schools and responsibilities for implementation. Administrators found that they were not fully prepared for this task and had to rely heavily on colleagues, faculty and their own background experiences to complete the implementation tasks. Mannario reported, however, that administrators remained supportive despite some implementation difficulties. Lundquist (2001) studied the implementation of a YRE schedule at an elementary school in Iowa. In this study, Lundquist noted that physical plant and operational issues did not prove to be difficult. The largest transitional problems were emotional issues. Inger (1994) found that parents were initially opposed to such a radical change, that it created inconveniences for families with children on different schedules, and that the chief concern of parents was childcare. Smith (2002) examined the implementation experience from the perspective of the school principal and reported several findings about the experience of implementing the YRE schedule. First, Smith noted that only 67.1% of the respondents reported a positive implementation experience. The most often cited reason for implementing YRE was to improve academic achievement. Implementation was more successful in smaller schools (less than 1500

students). Smaller schools utilized more community meetings while larger schools used more staff development in the implementation process. Weatherford (2001) did an extensive study of stakeholders (school personnel, parents and community business leaders) that had experienced the implementation of a YRE schedule. Weatherford reported that YRE was more favorably accepted by families with higher education and higher income levels. Also, females were more strongly in favor of the YRE schedule. George (1999) examined the attitudes of administrators and teachers in Georgia schools that had implemented YRE. George reported a positive experience by both groups with teachers demonstrating a higher degree of satisfaction with the YRE schedule.

### Summary

An extensive review of research and related literature was conducted in the following areas: student achievement/motivation, discipline, attendance, school climate, intercession, summer break, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and implementation. In two of the areas studied the review of literature did not produce any significant studies. These were community/after school activities as well as facility maintenance and cleanliness. Results reported in the research are summarized here.

Student achievement has been the issue researchers studied most often. Researchers have reported results that were highly supportive of YRE while other researchers have detailed negative findings and still other researchers have indicated their studies were inconclusive on this issue. Researchers endorsing YRE mostly conducted their research at the elementary school level and the highest gains they reported were in mathematics. Some researchers also found YRE to be most effective for students of low SES or from families with limited English proficiency. However, some researchers were

critical of YRE. They found students on traditional schedules to outperform YRE, even in the low SES category. Researchers that conducted longitudinal studies reported inconclusive results indicating that YRE did not have a lasting impact on student achievement.

The examination of other issues has been conducted, however, not as extensively. In the area of discipline most researchers reported a positive trend in discipline referrals. In the area of attendance most researchers reported a positive trend after implementation of the YRE schedule. One researcher looked at teacher attendance and reported a dramatic increase in teacher attendance under the YRE schedule.

Most researchers found the adoption of YRE to have a positive impact on school climate. Several reasons were identified by these researchers as factors having a positive impact on school climate. These reasons included: a perceived increase in academic achievement, more collaboration between teachers in executing this schedule, and an increase in teacher requests to transfer into the YRE schools. Research on the use of intercessions found it to be particularly useful for at risk students and English as a second language students. No significant increase in student achievement was attributed to intercession participation. In a meta-analytical review of 39 studies researchers found that the traditional summer break resulted in a one month loss in student achievement on a grade level scale. In one study the researcher noted that in districts that are not completely on a YRE schedule, attendance of YRE students drops off during the traditional summer break period as families take children on this schedule out of school for family vacations.

Researchers studying stakeholder perceptions reported a positive trend in stakeholder perceptions under YRE. Stakeholders perceived less student and teacher burnout and students were found to be more ready for instruction.

YRE implementation was second only to student achievement in being examined by researchers. One researcher found that the key to a smooth implementation of YRE was for the school to start the process early, introduce the subject to key stakeholders, use considerable staff development and hold many parental meetings throughout the implementation process. A researcher studying the motivation for implementation reported the most often reported reason for implementing YRE was to improve academic achievement. This same researcher reported that implementation was most successful in small schools of less than 1500 students and that implementation was most favorably accepted by families with higher education and higher income levels. The most often reported factor necessary for a smooth transition to YRE was extensive communication with stakeholders throughout the implementation process.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the researcher detailed the methodology used in this research study. A case study format was used to examine the YRE experience in two schools. The researcher included sections on the research question, research design, research setting, participants in the study, sampling procedures, instrumentation, validation, data collection, data analysis and reporting the data.

#### The Research Question

The research question for this study is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? The researcher used this question to guide the development of a descriptive account of the YRE experience at these two schools.

#### Research Design

This researcher conducted descriptive research of the YRE educational delivery method in small school settings. Descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation are sought rather than cause and effect. It is used when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be isolated for study (Merriam, 1990). One of the forms of descriptive research is case study. This is the form of research design that the researcher relied on in this study. Merriam (1990) went on to define case study as an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. In this study the researcher examined the process known as YRE in elementary schools that are part of small school districts and developed a rich, deep description of these schools teaching under this

calendar. Yin (2003) concluded that case study research called for multiple data collection strategies, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements. This was the strategy pursued by this researcher.

The researcher did not attempt to develop a hypothesis or identify cause and effect relationships. The researcher did not attempt to isolate and manipulate independent variables. Quite the contrary, the researcher gathered and presented information in a wide variety of ways and from the viewpoints of different groups. Therefore a qualitative approach was deemed to be more appropriate than a quantitative design.

### Research Setting

Lemons County Elementary School (pseudonym) is a pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade school with 724 students. It is the only elementary school in Lemons County and they implemented their YRE schedule in school year 2001-2002. The student population is 10% White, 75% Black, 12% Hispanic and 3% other. The school is located in a rural setting with numerous cotton fields dotting the landscape around the school. The communities surrounding this school exhibit a strong faith in traditional values and in the historic roots of their communities. Permission to include Lemons County Elementary School was obtained through an on-site visit with the principal and through email correspondence with the superintendent.

West City Elementary School (pseudonym) is a school with grades 3 through 5 and a total of 389 students. It is also the only elementary school in its school district. Other schools in the district are a K-2 primary school and a combined middle/high school. The school adopted the YRE calendar in School Year 2002-2003. The student



population is 65% White, 28% Black, 2% Hispanic and 5% other. West City Elementary School is an old school constructed in 1958 and was built to educate black students through the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. A 1968 Federal court desegregation order resulted in this school being designated as an elementary school for all students in the West City School District. West City Elementary School still operates under this desegregation order. Permission to include this school in the study was received by a petition to the West City School Board. This petition was granted on December 9, 2004. Follow-up discussions were held with the principal and the system superintendent in July, 2007 to insure the field work could still be done on this campus.

### Participants

This researcher recruited participants from three constituencies: parents, teachers, and administrators, in these two elementary schools. The research question that drove this study required that all of these constituencies be well represented in this study. Furthermore, this researcher did not include participants that did not have sufficient exposure to the YRE experience to evaluate this educational delivery system. For the purpose of this study, parents and teachers were only selected if they had at least six months exposure to the YRE schedule in their school system. Brown (1999) has noted that the discussion of similarities and differences between members of a focus group produces multiple stories and diverse experiences. Every effort was made to insure that all constituencies were represented so that contrary opinions could be explored without any group feeling intimidated. The researcher assembled focus groups of four to six people at each school.

Participants were willing to participate because it gave them an opportunity to tell the YRE story, both the good and the bad. They had the opportunity to view this experience through the eyes of others as well as articulate their experience to others. The entire study was conducted in a professional manner in which all opinions were treated with respect. The YRE experience has impacted the lives of all participants and this study gave them a unique venue in which they could articulate this impact.

### Sampling Procedures

Non-probability sampling was used for each constituency studied. This researcher used purposeful sampling. Patton (as cited in Glesne, 1999) states; “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.”(p. 29). This procedure was followed by the researcher. Samples were taken from parents that were contacted while visiting the schools. This researcher sought to recruit parents that had in depth knowledge of YRE in their school and could provide information rich cases for this study. This researcher sought parents from each grade level. This goal was to have four to six participants in each focus group meeting.

The selection of teachers for the focus groups also involved purposeful sampling techniques. In the conducting of fieldwork the researcher often discovers an opportunity to gather data from an individual that can provide rich detailed data concerning the issue being studied (Patton, 2002). This researcher looked for teachers that had the most data concerning the YRE experience and those teachers were recruited for the focus groups. He looked for participants that had worked under both a traditional and a YRE calendar.

The researcher sought to include all grade levels. All administrators at each school were interviewed individually.

#### Instrumentation

Multiple methods of data collection were used by this researcher. Quantitative data on attendance, discipline, and standardized test scores were collected from the Georgia Department of Education web site and the school data bases. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with administrators and from focus group sessions conducted on each campus with parents and teachers.

An interview guide was developed for the focus group sessions. Brown (1999) detailed the essentials of developing an interview guide. Brown has recommended several essentials for an effective interview guide. First it must begin with a broad open ended question that defines the area of inquiry. Second it should begin with low emotional intensity issues and then move to higher emotional intensity issues. Third, as moderator, the researcher must have a list of probing questions ready in order to gain greater insight into the issues that are brought up in the focus group sessions. Fourth the interview guide should not be too rigid. A rigid guide may answer the research question but a less structured guide has the potential for the discovery of new ideas and insights not anticipated by the researcher. Finally, the interview guide needs to be reviewed for clarity and comprehensiveness by individuals familiar with the topic. These essentials were followed in the development of the interview guide for this study. This researcher solicited the help of YRE administrators not involved in this study to review this guide. This was done through a pilot study at another YRE school, Taliaferro County School. This interview guide began with broad questions designed to allow the participants to

identify the issues pertinent to their YRE experience. This was followed by some more specific questions to focus on the issues identified in the review of literature. A copy of this interview guide is included at Appendix D.

Focus group sessions were held at each site. One focus group of four to six parents was held at each site. Teacher focus groups were also held at each site. The power of focus groups resides in there being focused (Patton, 2002). Therefore this researcher developed very detailed interview guides based on the YRE issues identified in the literature review (see Appendices B and C). Parents in each focus group were given a list of open ended questions in advance of their focus group sessions (see Appendix A). This gave them an opportunity to contemplate the issues to be discussed. They could then be better prepared to provide detailed answers to the questions discussed. The focus group questions were also reviewed and refined by discussions with the parents and teachers at Taliaferro County School during the pilot study phase. These discussions centered on their focus group experience. Suggestions were sought from them on any needed refinements of the interview guides to make them better instruments for mining the essential data in describing the YRE experience.

#### Validation

The first step in producing a valid research study was to insure that the researcher had developed interview instruments that could effectively mine the data necessary to produce a deep and descriptively accurate snapshot of these two schools. This was accomplished by conducting a pilot study of these interview instruments. The pilot study was conducted at Taliaferro County School, another small school system that has adopted the YRE calendar. The administrator interview instrument was tested as well as the focus

group instruments. Each focus group in the pilot study consisted of at least two participants and was a convenience sample of knowledgeable participants that were available. Each pilot session concluded with a critique of the process to solicit suggestions from the participants to make the instruments more effective. One administrator was interviewed during the pilot study and she was then questioned on how to make the interview more effective.

This researcher wants this study to contribute knowledge that is believable and trustworthy. Therefore, the issues of internal validity, reliability, and external validity were addressed. The methods of insuring internal validity (the extent to which the findings are congruent with reality) suggested by Merriam (1990) are: checking interpretations with individuals interviewed, asking peers to comment on emerging findings and involving participants in all phases of the research. All of these methods were used. Copies of the findings, as they were developed, were sent to the schools for comment on the accuracy of the findings. Merriam found that reliability (the extent to which there is consistency in the findings) is best achieved in a qualitative study by leaving an audit trail that describes in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data. In this study the researcher provided very detailed explanations of both the methods used for data collection and for data analysis.

External validity (the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other situations) was also addressed. The concept of external validity used in this study was what Wilson (as cited in Merriam, 1990) termed reader or user generalizability. In other words, the reader of this study should be able to ask, "What is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation and what clearly does not apply?" Just as a lawyer or

medical doctor can look at previous cases and determine what applies to the case at hand, the educator that reads this study will be able to see what he/she can apply from the findings of this case study. This was accomplished by applying two techniques recommended by Merriam (1990): first the researcher provided a description of the sites used in this research study and second, the researcher conducted a cross-site analysis of the findings.

### Data Collection

The first step in the data collection process was to access the Georgia Department of Education web site and gather data on attendance and standardized test scores. Data collected were from School Year 2005-2006, the latest data published on the web site. On-site data collection visits were then coordinated with each principal. The first on-site data collection gave the researcher the opportunity to do three things: observe and take notes on the physical layout and activities taking place during the visit, interview the school administrators, and begin the recruitment process for the focus group participants. The researcher looked for parents that had at least six months exposure to YRE at their school. The parents that agreed to participate were given a short preliminary survey of open ended questions (Appendix A) to help them prepare to provide rich data at the focus group session. On the first visit to Lemons County Elementary School the researcher arrived on a day that the school was conducting an information session for parents. The researcher addressed this group and solicited volunteers for the focus groups that met his criteria. Sufficient volunteers were found to conduct the parent focus group soon after the conclusion of the parent information session. During this initial visit the researcher also began the preliminary steps in putting together a teacher focus group. Teachers were

sought from all grades and with experience in both traditional and YRE settings. The first visit at each campus concluded with the completion of both of the administrator interviews. Discipline data were also collected at Lemonds County Elementary School on the first visit. West City Elementary School provided the discipline data by email during the period between the first and second campus visits.

The second visit to each campus was for the purpose of completing the focus group sessions. It also gave the researcher the opportunity to gather more observation data on the school layout and school activities in progress. It was possible at Lemonds County Elementary School to gather six teachers that met the required criteria during one teacher planning period and conduct the focus group. Since the parent focus group had already been conducted at this campus it was only necessary to conduct this one focus group. Availability of the teachers at West City Elementary School required the researcher to amend his focus group strategy. In order to insure that teachers from all grade levels were able to provide data it was necessary to hold grade level focus groups. Therefore three teacher focus groups of five or six teachers were held on this campus. The data collection matrix displayed in Table 1 summarizes the data collection plan:

Table 1

*Data Collection Matrix*

Data Source	Participants	Timeline
Attendance records from the GDOE data	All students enrolled	Latest published data (2006 data gives snapshot on attendance)
Discipline records from the school data bases	All students enrolled	Data from 2006/2007 (to give snapshot on discipline)
Standardized test scores from the GDOE data base	All students tested	Latest published data (2006 data gives snapshot on achievement)
Focus group sessions	Four to six parents and five or six teachers	October/November 2007
Administrator interviews	Both principals and assistant principals	October/November 2007

## Data Analysis

Glesne (1999) has provided some guidelines for the development of a coding system for evaluating transcripts. First it is a progressive process that starts with the development of major code clumps, followed by the breaking down of this major code clumps into numerous subcodes. Second it is an evolving process that will go through several iterations as the data is systematically sifted. Third it is necessary to be overgenerous in what is important so that no opportunities to learn are summarily



eliminated. Finally, it is not a mechanical process. As the data are sorted the researcher looks for connections and insights and imagines how they will appear in the final text.

This researcher went through this coding, categorizing, and issue searching process for each school. Each interview and focus group session was recorded and transcribed. The analysis began by studying these transcripts and identifying comments in the ten critical issues to be examined. Some comments were identified as relating to two or more critical issues. These comments were further analyzed. They were then either included in only one issue or, if necessary, reported in both issues. Each comment was further analyzed to determine if it was a positive, negative or neutral towards the issue to which it was related. Finally the researcher reviewed all the transcripts to see if any new issues, other than the ten identified in the review of literature and the pilot study, had surfaced. No new issues were identified in this review.

This researcher also conducted a cross-site analysis looking for differences and similarities in the YRE experience between schools. This was done by looking at the qualitative data on demographics, achievement, attendance, and at the qualitative data categorized by issue at each school.

### Reporting the Data

Reporting the data began with the presentation of a narrative account of the schools studied. This was a general overview intended to give the reader a means of identifying with each of the sites as the data were presented. This overview is followed by a detailed reporting of the data collected at each school. The data were categorized and then reported by category. The researcher then began the cross site analysis by presenting a matrix in the style recommended by Glesne (1999). This matrix has all the

schools listed on the vertical axis and all the major issues identified in the research along the horizontal axis. Then in each cell that marks the intersection of a school and an issue one of three symbols is entered (+, -, or 0). An “+” entry indicates that the school in question considered that issue a benefit of the YRE schedule, a “-“ indicates that the issue was considered a pitfall to YRE and a “0” indicates that the issue was not addressed or was considered insignificant at that school. This chart helped the researcher provide some structure to the analysis of the data. This matrix can be found in the cross site analysis section on page 86.

### Summary

This researcher conducted case study research designed to answer the research question: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? Data collection involved both quantitative data collected from the Georgia Department of Education web site and qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups and school visits. Participants in the study were a sample of administrators, teachers, and parents of students in two elementary schools that had implemented a modified YRE schedule. The focus group members consisted of parents and teachers at each site. Interviews were conducted with school administrators. A pilot of both the interview and focus group instruments was conducted to evaluate the validity of these instruments. The findings were reported in both narrative and graphical forms.

## CHAPTER 4

### REPORTING THE DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter details the data gathered during the field research at these two elementary schools. The data provided the substance for the researcher to answer the research question: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? This research was conducted in a case study format. Quantitative data on academic achievement and attendance were gathered from the Georgia Department of Education web site. Discipline data were provided by the schools. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews with school administrators, focus group sessions with teachers and parents, and researcher observations during school visits. The overall focus of the study was to give a detailed picture of these two elementary schools from small school systems operating under a modified year round calendar. The data presented focuses on the issues found to be important to the participants at these schools.

#### Research Design

This researcher conducted descriptive research of the YRE educational delivery method used in these schools. One of the forms of descriptive research is case study. This is the form of research design that was relied on in this study. In this study the researcher examined the process known as YRE in small school settings and developed a rich, deep description of these schools teaching under this calendar. Yin (2003) concluded that case study research called for multiple data collection strategies, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements. That strategy was pursued by this researcher.

A pilot study was conducted in order to determine if the researcher had developed interview instruments that could effectively mine the data necessary to produce a deep and descriptively accurate snapshot of these two schools. This was accomplished by conducting a pilot study of the interview instruments. Prior to starting the pilot study application was made to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University for approval to conduct the field research. Approval was granted, this approval is attached at Appendix E (note that the title of this dissertation changed after approval by the IRB). The pilot study was conducted at Taliaferro County School, another small school system that has adopted the YRE calendar. The administrator interview instrument was tested as well as the focus group instruments. Each focus group consisted of at least two participants and was a convenience sample of knowledgeable participants that were available. Each pilot session concluded with a critique of the process to solicit suggestions from the participants to make the instruments more effective. One administrator was interviewed during the pilot study and she was then questioned on how to make the interview more effective. The parent focus group and the teacher focus group conducted did not make any suggestions as to changes needed in the focus group questions. These two groups indicated that the questions covered all areas adequately and provided a detailed description of their school. The administrator interviewed suggested that the interview should cover teacher retention and teacher recruitment in more detail (Taliaferro County School Administrator Interview, October 3, 2007, p. 10). This was incorporated into the questions for interviewing administrators (see Question 10, Appendix D). The greatest benefit from the pilot study was that it gave the researcher valuable experience at conducting focus groups and interviews.

## Findings

The findings are presented in the way best suited to answer the research question: What are the experiences of stakeholders in small Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? --The findings will be presented by school, followed by a cross-site analysis of the data.

### *Lemons County Elementary School*

*The research setting.* Lemons County Elementary School is situated on a two lane highway about a mile outside of a small town that does not even have a stop light. Although the school is only a few miles from a major interstate, it is surrounded by cotton fields, in a very rural part of Georgia. After parking in the teacher parking and walking to the front entrance the researcher noticed several out-of-county license plates. It appeared that several members of the faculty commute into Lemons County to work.

The building houses both the middle school and the elementary school and was first occupied in August of 2003. It has a very business like appearance. The grounds around the school are well groomed and absolutely no litter could be observed. Also, there is a great deal of security. The researcher noted only three obvious entrances on the front of the building. As a visitor, when you go in the main entrance you are met by a desk similar to the entrance station at a hospital. It is manned by two friendly secretaries. When the researcher said he was there to see the elementary school principal he was directed to a door on the right that led him down another hallway to another desk manned by an elementary school secretary. All gatekeepers were helpful and friendly as the

researcher worked his way to the elementary school suite of offices. The entire building, especially the cafeteria had a very clean, sterile look about it.

On the researcher's first visit he sat in on a parent information session conducted in the cafeteria at midmorning. The school had sent a bus to the homes of parents to get them to the meeting because many of them had no transportation. The main focus of the meeting was on a State Program called Kinship Care. This is a program that provides assistance for relatives other than parents that have had to take on the child rearing responsibilities. Since that was the subject there were several grandparents in the audience. They also had a speaker talk about "safe schools, healthy schools". This speaker does some mentoring at the school and most of her talk was on parenting skills and useful tips for helping children to be successful at school. Snacks and door prizes were also provided. There were approximately 15 people at the meeting. Sending a bus to pick up parents as well as providing snacks and door prizes at this very informative session demonstrates just how committed Lemonds County Elementary School is to keeping the parents involved in the education of their children. Lemonds County Elementary School is also trying to keep the more affluent parents in their school involved. They have implemented a password protected software program call IParent that allows parents to check on the progress of their child on their home computer.

On the researcher's second visit as he drove through the town he saw a lot of police cars and a television crew in front of the bank. The school is about one mile outside of town and when he got to the school there was a police car right in front of the school that belonged to the School Resource Officer. The building was completely locked and the researcher had to knock loudly on the door to gain entrance. The school

was in a complete lock down due to a bank robbery that had just occurred. Once the researcher got inside the school it was business as usual. The teachers were escorting their children around as usual. The Principal and Assistant Principal were at a meeting at the board of education, but the current situation did not appear to warrant them coming back to the school. Everyone at the school seemed to take this lock down situation in stride and just continued to teach as usual. Also, the researcher did not see one parent come to the school wanting to take their child home because of the potential danger of this situation. It appeared that they had complete confidence in the school to protect their children.

*The schedule.* Lemonds County Elementary School has adopted a modified year round schedule that is defined as a balanced schedule (a balanced schedule is one that includes both a fall and spring break as well as a summer break of less than 10 weeks). The 2007-2008 School Year began on July 20 and ends on May 30. In the fall they had a break that began with a one week intercession followed by a one week break for all students and faculty. This break began at the end of the first nine week grading period. In the spring they have scheduled the same break of one week intersession and one week school wide break. This begins at the end of the third nine week grading period.

*Demographic and achievement data.* The researcher collected data from the Georgia Department of Education concerning the demographic make-up of Lemonds County Elementary School and their achievement on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). These data are displayed in Table 2. The data in Table 2 showed that Lemonds County Elementary School has a majority of students from the low SES category. The data in Table 2 also showed that the State has categorized this school

as a needs improvement school. They had less than 70% of their students who met the Criterion Reference Competency Limits in the subject areas of Reading and English Language Arts.

Table 2

*Demographic and Academic Achievement Data at Lemonds County Elementary School*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Data</u>
Number of students in 2006	724
Economically disadvantaged	85%
Students with disabilities	11%
English Language Learners	8%
Made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2006	No
<u>Improvement Status in 2006</u>	<u>Needs Improvement</u>
Met or Exceeded Criterion Reference Competency Limit by Subject in 2006	Data
Mathematics	73.1%
Reading	67.4%
English Language Arts	64.6%
Science	80.1%
Social Studies	80.3%



*Issues examined.* Ten issues identified in the review of literature and the pilot study were examined at Lemonds County Elementary School. The primary data sources for the examination of these issues were the data gathered through interviews with the school administrators and focus groups conducted with the teachers and parents at this school. The two administrators at the school were both interviewed. These administrators each have seven years administrative experience and have been at Lemonds County Elementary School since the introduction of the year round schedule. Six teachers participated in the focus group. Teaching experience of these teachers ranged from 7 to 21 years with a mean of 15.2 years teaching experience. These same teachers ranged from 5 to 18 years experience at Lemonds County Elementary School with a mean of 11.7 years at this school. Two of the parents that participated in the focus group currently had two students at Lemonds County Elementary School and the other four parents had one student enrolled at this school. Collectively the parents had experience at all grade levels K through 5 at Lemonds County Elementary School.

The first issue examined was student achievement and motivation. Standardized test score data on achievement from 2006 indicates that this school is on the needs improvement list for the State of Georgia. They fell below the competency limits in both reading and English language arts. However, participants in the interviews and focus groups reported their YRE schedule to have a positive impact on student achievement and motivation. One of the administrators interviewed indicated that test scores had gone up under YRE. The other administrator indicated that this was possible because the intercession at the end of the first nine weeks gave the teachers the opportunity to address achievement issues early and keep students from falling hopelessly behind. One of the

teachers pointed out that the schedule definitely had a motivating impact on the students because they knew that the only way to avoid attending the intercession was to perform well in the classroom. One teacher described the impact of the more frequent breaks provided under their schedule as follows:

I used to teach kindergarten, and we noticed before we started year round, that during the Christmas break, for some reason that the light bulb would go on and in January they would come back and they knew what we had been teaching them. When we started teaching year round, that wonderful phenomena happened in the fall. After that little two week break, when their little minds could rest, it cemented in, and they came back and they knew what we had been teaching....I feel we were able to move a little faster and to teach better because we were not continually going over what we had taught, as we had in the past (Lemons County Elementary School Teacher Focus Group, October 19, 2007, p. 5).

The parents also felt the schedule had a positive impact on student achievement and motivation. One of the parents spoke about how tired she and her daughter became by the end of each nine week grading period. They both remained motivated, however, because they knew that after nine weeks they would get a break from the academic demands. In general all participants indicated that the achievement problems were not a result of the schedule. They all agreed that students achieved more and maintained a higher degree of motivation under the year round schedule.

The second issue examined was discipline. In School Year 2006-2007 Lemonds County Elementary School had 171 incidents of in-school suspensions resulting in 493 days of student suspensions. The mean length of the in-school suspensions was 2.9 days.

In that same year they had 90 out-of-school suspensions resulting in 110 days of school missed. The mean length of an out of school suspension was 1.2 days. Data collected from participants indicated they did not consider these numbers to be unreasonable. This issue did not elicit many responses but the respondents did indicate that the YRE schedule had, in fact, had a positive impact on discipline. One parent did comment briefly on this issue:

The kids actually go the same number of days. I get tired, you get tired on your job. So after the kids get their break, they come back ready to go again and not cause trouble. At times when the eighth week comes around everybody be tired (Lemons County Elementary School Parent Focus Group, October 16, 2007, p. 6).

The third issue examined was attendance. In School Year 2005-2006 Lemons County Elementary School had 6.1% of their student miss more than 15 days. Attendance, however, did not seem to be of great concern to the participants in this study. One Lemons County Elementary School parent described the positive impact that the schedule has on attendance:

The schedule gives me time to plan their dental appointments so they don't have to mark them absent because being at school is important to the school because of the enrollment. They have to have so many students in order to get the federal funds. So I plan the doctor's appointments, I can plan the dental appointments, all that can be done on days when I know they are going to be out, rather than having to take them out of school (Lemons County Elementary School Parent Focus Group, October 16, 2007, p. 6).

However another parent described how the YRE schedule made it necessary for her to keep her children out of school at the beginning of the year until she had finished all her summer travel. Respondents were equally split on whether the YRE schedule had a positive or negative impact on attendance.

School climate was the fourth issue examined. The researcher looked at the relationships between all stakeholders in the school as well as the resources available to enhance the working environment and the educational process. School climate was positively impacted by the year round schedule at Lemonds County Elementary School. The parents talked at great length about their admiration for the teachers in their school. They felt that the year round schedule helped to enhance the relationship between teacher and parent. They also were very appreciative of the busses that the school provides for meetings because many of the parents do not have their own transportation. The teachers wanted to emphasize the numerous resources provided by the school for them to teach effectively. They felt that their school provided many more resources than any of the schools in neighboring counties. One administrator noted that the real barometer of a positive school climate is parental participation:

I think parents know they can come to us to talk about their child. This county has a high poverty rate. Some think their child never does anything wrong. Some parents had bad experiences in school growing up and don't like to come back to school to discuss problems their child is having. Yet we had a carnival last week and 400 to 500 people came to it (Lemonds County Elementary School, October 16, 2007, p 5).

Lemons County Elementary School considered the intercessions to be a key component of their educational schedule and had a very positive impact. This was the fifth issue examined. They only offer reading and math during these intercessions. The intercessions run from 8 am to 2 pm daily. As one administrator pointed out, if a student comes to the intercession just for math, that student can get the equivalent of nine weeks worth of math instruction in a one week intercession. The average attendance at an intercession is 125 to 150 students. Class size is approximately 10 students so that each child can get the individual help they need. A lot of Kindergarten ESL students attend and special education students (except for the severe and profound students) are invited to attend. The administrators work hard to insure that the students that need to attend do not take this week as a vacation. They send home a letter and follow it up with a phone call to each parent of a child identified as needing this extra instruction. Transportation is provided for all students attending the intercessions. One teacher did note one negative aspect of the intercessions, the problem of child care. Many of the families have problems arranging child care for their students that are suddenly out of school during traditional school days. One parent described her experience with the intercession this way:

Like my baby this time had to go to the intercession, not because she was failing, she was falling behind on her reading. So the intercession helped her back on top of her grade. Now that she done went to intercession this time...she done caught up with her classmates. (Lemons County Elementary School Parent Focus Group, October 16, 2007, p. 2).

The sixth issue examined was the summer break. This drew a lot of criticism from the teachers and the parents. The parents talked about the short break interfering with family reunions and family visits. Traditionally they had counted on July and August being reserved for these activities. The teachers felt that the short summer break interfered with their chance to take summer courses to further their education.

The seventh issue examined was stakeholder perceptions and communications. All participants talked at length about the communications systems and how accurate perceptions of what is taking place at school are maintained. The majority of the respondents considered perceptions and communications to be positively impacted by the schedule. Communications between the teachers and the administration is largely through email. This is backed up with a message board in a central location that the principal updates each day. Communication between teachers is also through email and a weekly grade level meeting. Most of the communication with parents is through letters or newsletters sent home with the students. The local paper also prints school news for the parents. The administration and teachers also talked about IParent. This is a password protected student information system that allows parents that have computer access to check on attendance and grades for their students. One parent did complain about the timeliness of the information provided by the school.

The eighth issue was community and after school activities. This issue did not generate a lot of data. One parent did indicate her appreciation that the school sent out flyers concerning community events. She talked about her Family Connections, a program that brings in outside speakers from as far away as Atlanta to discuss school and

community issues. However, there was no discernable relationship between the YRE schedule and community and after school activities.

The ninth area examined was facility maintenance and cleanliness. The researcher found Lemonds County Elementary to be clean and well maintained. This issue did not generate much discussion with the respondents. The custodians work year round. All respondents felt that the two week fall and spring breaks, when only a small portion of the student population is in the building, allows the custodians to tackle projects that are normally done during the summer in a traditional school. Specifically it allows them to strip and wax floors during these break periods.

The last issue examined was teacher acquisition and retention. Respondents were equally divided on this issue. Some teachers felt that it hurts retention when a teacher is working at Lemonds County Elementary and living in another county where the schools are on a traditional schedule. This creates problems when the teacher's children are on a different school calendar than the schedule under which he/she is working. One administrator also indicated that their school contracts their teachers for the next year later than they would under a traditional calendar. This creates acquisition problems because they need to scramble to find quality teachers after other school districts have already filled their vacancies. On the other hand, the teachers found positives to the YRE schedule with respect to teacher retention. One of the advantages is that teachers can work during the intercessions and get extra pay. This option does not exist with a traditional calendar. Another positive item noted was the opportunity this calendar provides to take vacations during nontraditional times:

I wouldn't be here if I hated it. I don't exactly look forward to it everyday, but once I am here, I love what I am doing. Also, it helps me because I love to take a trip in October, same thing in the spring (Lemons County Elementary School Teacher Focus Group, October 19, 2007, p. 7).

*Implementation.* Lemons County Elementary School first used the YRE schedule in School Year 2001-2002. The schedule has been fully implemented, all current students have been on this schedule since they entered this school. Some of the faculty gave insight on the implementation process when their school converted to a year round school. One administrator related her recollection of the process:

We ran a newspaper campaign. We sent a letter home to all of the parents, through the students to explain the year round school schedule. A lot of parents did not understand it at first. We did research through the curriculum coordinating council to determine if this is the direction we wanted to go. We also discussed it in PTA meetings. Initially we had a lot of complaints. Most of the parents did not really understand what they were complaining about, they were just resistant to change. It took about a year for the parents to truly understand the new schedule (Lemons County Elementary School Administrative Interviews, October 16, 2007, p 1).

A teacher at Lemons County Elementary had a different recollection of how the year round schedule was implemented:

I can remember it well. It was a hard sell, and it was more like the administration just made this decision and it was in a sealed envelope and they let it go at one time. But after one year I did not want to go back to any other schedule



(Lemons County Elementary School Teacher Focus Groups, November 19, 2007, p. 4).

*West City Elementary School*

*The research setting.* West City Elementary School is located close to a major interstate within easy driving distance of a major city. Yet the town of West City does not yet seem to be impacted by urban sprawl. The town looks like a typical small town from the 1960's, with a main street filled with local businesses. However, some of these stores look like they are getting ready to go out of business. The elementary school is almost in the center of town and seems to be of the same architectural design as the rest of the town. It was constructed in 1958, but a lot of piecemeal construction has taken place since that time, including a new cafeteria that was occupied for the first time this year. Also the board of education offices are in the same building so there was evidence of some central office activities including a lot of transportation assets. It is a very open campus, security does not seem to be much of a concern. The researcher was able to walk right in the building without being stopped, although he could be observed from the office that was to the left as he entered the building.

The school had a very friendly look to it. The recessed lighting in every hall had covers that replicated a blue sky with fluffy white clouds that brightened the hallways. Lots of examples of student work could be seen, there were numerous examples that the school celebrated the academic accomplishments of its students.

Students were well behaved and wanted to be rewarded by the administration. A student stopped the assistant principal in the hall and asked if he was going to "brag on him today." The assistant principal explained to the researcher that if a teacher has a

student that does exceptionally well during the day then the teacher asks him to “brag” on that student during the afternoon announcements. Also, there was a lot of jingling in the hall with students wearing their accelerated reader dog tags. The school awards dog tags as students reach their accelerated reader goals (25% is a dog shaped tag, 50% a pig, 75% a cat and 100% a star). Students were proudly wearing this visible evidence of an academic achievement.

The researcher also noticed that no children were in the office for discipline during his two visits. The assistant principal explained to the researcher that most discipline referrals are handled by the teachers, empowering their role in the discipline process. They use a conduct cut system. If a student has three conduct cuts in a 30 day period s/he is assigned after school detention by the teacher. On the fourth cut the assistant principal assigns a day of in school suspension.

On the researcher’s second visit to West City Elementary School he arrived as the school day was beginning. The researcher arrived at the office at the same time as seven students from one of the classes. These students had been sent to the office to help lead the school in the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem. The principal made the morning announcements and then these students went to the microphone to lead the school in this morning ritual. The students handled this very well and the principal encouraged them with lots of praise for their efforts.

There is a strong emphasis on learning at West City Elementary School. There are two large bulletin boards in the hallway by the principal’s office and a conference room. One board was entitled “Accomplishments and Goals.” It emphasized all the state AYP

report cards. The other bulletin board had curriculum on the wall. It had units 1 through 8 of language arts and mathematics for all three grades.

The teachers lounge also had a strong emphasis on academics. This is a Learning Focused School and there were lots of Learning Focused materials displayed. One coffee table was completely covered with the Learning Focused implementation books. On the bulletin board a lot of Learning Focused information was displayed, including sample lesson plans.

Professional learning for teachers also received a heavy emphasis. The academic coach had set up a center that had several professional books displayed. Each book contained a sign-up list for teachers to join a discussion group on that book. A strong emphasis on collegiality was evident. The birthdays for all teachers were posted on the bulletin board in the teacher's lounge.

*The schedule.* West City Elementary School has adopted a modified year round schedule that is defined as a balanced schedule (a balanced schedule is one that includes both a fall and spring break as well as a summer break of less than 10 weeks). The 2007-2008 school year began on July 30 and ends on May 23. In the fall there is a one week break for all students and faculty. This break begins at the end of the first nine week grading period. In the spring they have scheduled a two week break. This will begin with a one week intersession and followed immediately by a one week school wide break. This begins at the end of the third nine week grading period.

*Demographic and achievement data.* The researcher collected data from the Georgia Department of Education web site concerning the demographic make-up of West City Elementary School and their achievement on the Criterion Referenced Competency

Test (CRCT). These data are displayed in Table 3. These data displayed in Table 3 show that at West City Elementary School, 54% of their students come from the low SES category. These data also show that the State has categorized this school as a distinguished school. More than 80% of their students met or exceeded the competency limits by subject tested on the CRCT.

Table 3

*Demographic and Academic Achievement Data at West City Elementary School*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Data</u>
Number of students in 2006	389
Economically disadvantaged	54%
Students with disabilities	12%
English Language Learners	1%
Made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2006	Yes
<u>Improvement Status in 2006</u>	<u>Distinguished</u>
<u>Met or Exceeded Criterion Reference Competency Limit by Subject in 2006</u>	<u>Data</u>
Mathematics	84.6%
Reading	82.0%
English Language Arts	82.8%
Science	87.5%
Social Studies	89.0%

*Issues examined.* Ten issues, identified in the review of literature and the pilot study, were examined at West City Elementary School. The primary data sources for the examination of these issues were the data gathered through interviews with the school administrators and focus groups conducted with the teachers and parents at this school. The two administrators at the school were both interviewed. One administrator had seven years administrative experience, but this was her first year at West City Elementary School. The other administrator had four years administrative experience but had been at West City Elementary School in other capacities dating back to the introduction of the YRE schedule at this school. Teacher focus groups were conducted by grade level due to availability of teachers. Three teacher focus groups were held with from five to six teachers in each group. Teaching experience of the teachers participating in the focus groups ranged from 4 to 35 years with a mean of 17.1 years teaching experience. These same teachers had ranged from 1 to 30 years experience at West City Elementary School with a mean of 11.2 years at this school. All of the parents that participated in the focus group currently had one student at West City Elementary School. However, one of the parents had two older children that had completed their three years at West City Elementary School and another parent had one older child that had gone through the three years at this school.

The first issue examined was student achievement and motivation. Standardized test score data on achievement from 2006 indicate that this school has been designated as a distinguished school by the State of Georgia. More than 80% of their students met or exceeded the competency limits by subject tested on the CRCT. The respondents at this school all indicated that the YRE schedule had a positive impact on these high

achievement scores and on student motivation. The teachers felt that year round education positively impacted student retention of material taught because there is not as much lag time between instruction of new concepts and that students did not regress as much during the shorter school vacations. Most teachers also felt that the week of intercession right before taking the CRCT gave them an opportunity to ensure every student was prepared to take that test. One of the administrators commented on how it also positively impacts student motivation:

There are just times during the year where children just reach a full point to where they just need a break and I think with the balanced calendar, it allows them to have breaks at appropriate times. I think that's also good for the teachers that have their own families that need those breaks also. It gives them time to recharge their batteries and come back to us fresh and more energetic (West City Elementary School Administrator Interviews, October 11, 2007, p. 3).

The second issue examined was discipline. In School Year 2006-2007 West City Elementary School had 162 incidents of in-school suspensions resulting in 255 days of student suspensions. The mean length of the in-school suspensions was 1.6 days. In that same year they had 11 out of school suspensions resulting in 27 days of school missed. The mean length of an out of school suspension was 2.5 days. The respondents at West City Elementary School presented arguments on both sides of this issue. The administrator whose job encompassed most of the discipline indicated that he was able to develop a more lasting relationship with the students because of the shorter breaks between their time together. He did not need to try to renew those relationships after a

long break. One of the teachers had an opposing view on the impact of the schedule on discipline:

I think that with younger students every time you come back from an extended break, you are almost re-teaching your procedures again and it seems like you do that three or four times a year. Whereas if there were not so many breaks you wouldn't have to start over with things like; this is how we line up or this is how we go to the cafeteria (West City Elementary School Teacher Focus Groups, November 1, 2007, p. 14).

The third issue was attendance. West City Elementary School has a very good record in this area. In School Year 2005-2006 they had only 2.3% of their students absent for more than 15 days. One of the administrators reported that attendance has never been a problem at their school, regardless of the schedule used. A secretary keeps track of attendance and if a student misses three days, a letter is sent home. Letters are sent to the parents when a student is absent three, five and ten days.

The fourth issue examined was school climate. This section reports findings on relationships between all stakeholders in these school as well as the resources available to enhance the working environment and the educational process. The school climate at West City Elementary School has been positively impacted by the year round calendar. No other issue examined at this school received such an enthusiastic positive response. Parents talked at length about the warm feeling they get when they enter their school. They described the school as providing a home town atmosphere that made them feel part of the school. They talked about the admiration they have for the teachers and about how much their children love to go to school. The teachers talked about the collegial

relationship they have with their peers. They talked about the way they all pull together and help each other as need. There was some disappointment mentioned with adapting to the changes brought about by the arrival of a new principal. The principal of West City Elementary School is in her first year and she had the unenviable task of taking over from a principal that had been there for very many years and was revered by her staff.

However, another teacher noted that this is just the normal growing pains of a change in leadership. One of the administrators summed it up as follows:

People hear good things about us. There's nothing unusual about us other than in a smaller system you can do things on a more personal level, develop those relationships that I was talking about that children aren't just numbers. You know things that are going on in people's families, that families feel connected to the school and if they have a problem they can come to you, even if it doesn't relate to the school. They take comfort in knowing that there's a big community that cares for their children and I think they know we care about their children. We've got a very diverse population, socio-economic, it's diverse, but you would be hard pressed to know who was who because of the way that they act and are treated (West City elementary School Administrator Interviews, October 11, 2007, p. 8-10).

The fifth issue studied was intercession. West City Elementary School has one intercession. It is scheduled at the end of the third nine weeks of instruction. This is before the administration of the CRCT. An administrator explained that this timing helps the students that are falling behind to be ready and more confident when they take this important test. Students are strongly recommended to attend this session if their teacher



feels that they may struggle on the CRCT. Attendance at the intercession is approximately 75 to 100 students. The teachers and administration indicated that this extra week has made a difference for these students, not only an academic difference, but also a reduction in the anxiety level for taking this standardized test. This school also offered enrichment classes for higher performing students in the past. However, this was discontinued due to low attendance. Many of these students go on vacation with their families during this time. The school still invites higher performing students and uses them in peer tutoring relationships with other students

The sixth issue was the summer break. This issue drew criticism from some of the teachers. Some teachers expressed their desire to have a longer break. They complained about coming to school at the height of the hot Georgia summer. One teacher just expressed her desire to return to the traditional long summer break:

I don't necessarily agree (with the short summer break). I have a unique situation where I just work part time anyway, but I don't think their summers are long enough. I think the kids feel that it is insane to come back to school in July. That's my opinion (West City Elementary School Teacher Focus Groups, November 1, 2007, p. 13).

There was however, one parent that remained a strong advocate for the shorter summer break.

The shorter summer break allows for more retention and I think the fall, winter and spring breaks give more of a pause. I think the teachers can organize their units better so therefore it flows better. Also the shorter summer break is good, because the

kids don't get so bored during the summer (West City Elementary School Parent Focus Group, November 1, 2007, p. 5).

The seventh issue studied was stakeholder perceptions and communications with all stakeholders. The respondents considered this to be a very positive element at their school. The primary method of communicating with parents noted in the focus groups was the Wednesday folders. Every Wednesday the school sends home a newsletter. In that same Wednesday folder each teacher sends home a report on the work their child has accomplished during the week. Teachers also send home a daily agenda that gives a report on student behavior. The teachers also commented on the extensive use of emails with parents and some teachers have also created their own websites that parents can access. Teachers did indicate that communication with the administration had suffered a little with the new principal. However, it was also noted that the front office had all new secretaries and that this had resulted in some problems in communicating with the principal. Teachers felt that this situation was improving over time. Parents gave positive marks to communication with teachers but also noted some problems communicating with the front office. The administration and the parents both felt that a new method of communicating by telephone called Connect Ed was a very positive improvement. One of the administrators described Connect Ed as follows:

We're very conscientious about information dissemination and we try to get it out. We've started some new avenues this year with our phone calling system that we have called Connect Ed. That we can actually contact parents with one phone call and contact every parent of every child by just recording a message and pushing a button on a computer....This is a program that we signed on to as a

school system that the principal if she wants to get a message, let's say in an emergency situation, if the students had to be moved to another location because of terrorist activity, bad weather, whatever, the principal could go to her office, call up the phone number that we have been give. She could record a message saying, "your children have been moved to the First Baptist Church, you can pick them up there, this is why we are doing it..." She has her calling list there, she clicks on that, and it immediately calls every phone number in our school phone book. If we have inclement weather and need to call all the teachers and tell them not to come in, one phone call, no more calling trees. No calling trees and it's a one price thing where I think we paid five thousand dollars a year and you can use it an unlimited amount of times. We use it for when we're having fall pictures, to remind students when fundraisers are due, and things like that. The principal can just call. The superintendent can call all the schools, every person in the school system if she wanted to, and she's done that several times when we had issues that we needed to discuss as a community. It's been a great communication tool. We've only had it in place a few months and we've already seen a lot of positive response from it (West City Elementary School Administrative Interviews, October 11, 2007, pp. 5-7).

The eighth issue examined was community and after school activities. This area did not seem to be impacted to any great extent by the YRE schedule. West City Elementary School had comments related to year round education, but they were equally divided between positive and negative comments. Therefore the impact of YRE was deemed to be neutral at this school. An administrator emphasized that the schedule

allowed them to run an after school program that got them started with the at risk students earlier in the year. The parents pointed out that community activities for their children were negatively impacted by the YRE schedule. The local recreation department continues to run their schedule for teams such as t-ball regardless of whether this school is in session or not. This makes parents sometimes choose between going on a family vacation or staying home and participating in the community recreation department activities.

The next issue examined was facility maintenance and cleanliness. Respondents at West City Elementary School reported the YRE schedule to have a positive impact in this area. The observations of this researcher corroborate the fact that West City Elementary School does an excellent job of keeping their school clean and well maintained. The administrators pointed out that with more frequent breaks and shorter increments the custodial staff was always prepared to hit the cleaning issues hard during the one and two week breaks. Spring cleaning took on a real meaning at this school as they stripped floors and got the school shining again before the students and faculty returned. The teachers indicated that everyone took a real sense of pride in their school and did their part to keep it looking good on a daily basis. One respondent in a teacher focus group gave a testimonial to the quality of their maintenance and custodial staff:

We have the best maintenance staff on earth. They're great, you couldn't ask for better help. We have one lady, she does all the decorations, she puts up all the stuff, like the main hall, all the holiday stuff....And if we have, I mean, you know the teachers aren't allowed to go to the bathroom but sometimes you have to and she'll come watch your class. I mean they work with you and they do things to

help you (West City Elementary School Teacher Focus Groups, November 1, 2007, p. 5).

The parents were complimentary concerning the cleanliness and maintenance of their school. However one parent did point out the problem that the shorter summer break created in getting maintenance projects completed along with all the other tasks necessary to be ready for the first day of school. She indicated that on visiting the school the week before school began that she was a little concerned that the staff would be able to get the mess cleaned up before opening day. This task, however, was accomplished and the school was clean and ready for the students on the first day.

The last issue examined was teacher acquisition and retention. The administrators pointed out that once a teacher comes to work at West City Elementary School, they never leave. The principal that just retired had been in their school system for 28 years and had been principal at West City Elementary School for 12 years. They also pointed out that once a teacher retires they try to come back and work part time at the school. Teachers indicated that the schedule helps with retention because the more frequent breaks make the job less stressful. They also do not want to leave and lose the opportunity to work intercessions for extra pay. They also believe the small town and accessibility of the school board help make this school somewhere a teacher would not want to leave. One teacher summed it up as follows:

I've been here, my Dad went to school here, I went to school here, my daughter graduated from here, so I'm pretty attached. For more money I would not go to any neighboring school system (West City Elementary School Teacher Focus Groups, November 1, 2007, p. 15).

*Implementation.* West City Elementary School adopted the YRE schedule in School Year 2002-2003. The schedule is now fully implemented with very few changes from the first year of a YRE schedule. One of the administrators has been there since the implementation of this schedule and he provided data on the implementation process. He pointed out that the implementation was successful because the faculty did a lot of research and a lot of preparing prior to moving to this schedule. The community knew it was coming for several years and were kept informed as the implementation took place. The first year was difficult because they were having trouble adjusting to going to school on the traditional summer days. Teachers involved indicated the change was successful because the school kept them informed with background information about this schedule and the reasons for the change. Teachers indicated the greatest problem was making adjustment in day care requirements.

#### *Cross Site Analysis*

This cross site analysis looked at the ten critical issues examined and noted differences in the findings at each school. Table 4 below gives a tabular representation of these differences. It must be pointed out that a rating of positive (+), negative (-) or neutral (0) is not based on a longitudinal analysis tied to baseline data. These ratings are based on the analysis of the data gathered from the on-site visits conducted during a two month period in the fall of 2007.

Table 4

*Issues Examined*

	Lemons Cnty	West City
Achievement/Motivation	+	+
Discipline	+	0
Attendance	0	0
School Climate	+	+
Intercession	+	+
Summer Break	-	-
Stakeholder Perceptions/Communications	0	0
Community/After School Activities	0	0
Facility Maintenance and Cleanliness	+	+
Teacher Acquisition/Retention	0	+

KEY: + signifies that YRE had a positive impact on the issue examined

- signifies that YRE had a negative impact on the issue examined

0 signifies that YRE was neutral in this area

A cross site analysis of the major issues shows that both schools agreed on five areas in which the year round education schedule had a positive impact. These areas were; student achievement/motivation, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and facility maintenance/cleanliness. Lemonds County Elementary School also identified discipline as an area positively impacted by the current school calendar. West City Elementary School listed teacher acquisition/retention as an

item positively affected by the current school calendar. The two elementary schools both indicated two issues to be neutral with respect to the schedule. These were: attendance and community/after school activities. The two schools both identified summer break as an area negatively impacted by the YRE schedule.

The quantitative data shows West City Elementary School to be out performing Lemonds Elementary School in the areas of student achievement and attendance. However, both schools indicated that their current school calendar had a positive influence on student achievement and was neutral with respect to attendance. However, Lemonds County Elementary School had a much higher percentage of their student population that came from the economically disadvantage category. Lemonds County Elementary School had 85% of their students in this category while West City Elementary School only had 54% of their students in this category. The YRE schedule had not been able to overcome the challenges of educating a student population that was largely economically deprived. There was also a significant difference in the discipline data with West City Elementary School having a much larger percentage of in-school suspensions and a much lower percentage of out of school suspensions. This is the result of a difference in discipline administration philosophy between the two schools. An administrator at West City Elementary School explained their discipline policy as being tied to his attempts to empower the teachers in this area. They therefore use one day in-school suspensions much more routinely and do not go to out of school suspensions as often.

Some other differences were also noted in the cross site analysis. First of all, the Lemonds County Elementary School schedule more closely replicates the standard YRE



calendar. Lemonds County Elementary School conducts intercessions in both the fall and spring. West City Elementary School has breaks in both the fall and spring but only conducts the one week intercession in the spring. The second difference noted was the change in leadership at West City Elementary School. This school is undergoing the typical angst associated with a new principal. Lemonds County Elementary School, on the other hand, has had a long period of stability in school leadership dating back to before the implementation of the YRE schedule. Finally there was a distinct difference in the physical appearance of the two schools. Lemonds County Elementary School is a much newer school and has placed a heavy emphasis on security and cleanliness. It has the stark appearance of a professional building with very few personal touches. West City Elementary School does not seem as concerned about security. Their emphasis is on making the school looking inviting to the visitor. The personal touches of students can be seen as you enter the building.

Some similarities between the two schools were also noted. The first similarity was the strong emphasis placed on intercession attendance by the school leadership. In each school there was a process for identification and recruitment of the students that needed to attend the intercessions. The leadership at each school got involved in this recruitment process. Students that had been identified for attendance received written invitations and phone calls, if necessary, to get them to attend the intercessions. The second similarity was a significant use of technology in both schools. The primary form of communication in both schools was the email system. Also at both schools some form of technology had been used to establish more effective communication with parents. Lemonds County Elementary School had adopted a computer program called IParent for

communication with parents. West City Elementary School had purchased a computer generated system of communicating with parents by telephone called Connect Ed. The implementation process was also similar at both schools. Each school conducted extensive research on YRE prior to implementation. Each school recognized the importance of keeping parents and the community at large informed and involved in the implementation process. Implementation was successful at both schools because this extensive communication with all constituencies helped them survive the trials and tribulations of the first year after implementation. Finally, respondents at both schools had universally demonstrated a high degree of school pride. Administrators, teachers, and parents all exuded pride in their association with their school and a sense of belonging to the important task of educating their children.

#### Summary

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to present and discuss the findings of this study. Two elementary schools operating in small Georgia school systems were the focus of the study. Quantitative data were collected from the Georgia Department of Education web site and from the school data bases on achievement, absenteeism and discipline. Qualitative data were collected through on-site interviews and focus groups.

Ten critical issues (as determined by the review literature and the pilot study) were discussed with the respondents at Lemonds County Elementary School. The respondents at this school indicated six of these issues were positively impacted by their year round calendar. These issues were: student achievement/motivation, discipline, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and facility maintenance/cleanliness. Only summer break was identified as a negative issue in using

their current school calendar. Three other items were determined to be neutral with respect to the year round calendar. These were: attendance, community/after school activities, and teacher acquisition/retention.

The same ten critical issues were examined at West City Elementary School. Six issues were positively impacted by the year round schedule. These were: student achievement/motivation, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, facility maintenance/cleanliness, and teacher acquisition/retention. The respondents at West City Elementary School only indicated summer break to be a negative issue with respect to the current school calendar. Three issues were considered neutral with respect to the current school calendar. These were: discipline, attendance, and community/after school activities.

A cross site analysis of the major issues shows that both schools agreed on five areas in which the year round education schedule had a positive impact. These areas were; student achievement/motivation, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and facility maintenance/cleanliness. Several other similarities were noted. These schools both put a great deal of emphasis in getting the students most in need of the intercession instruction to attend. Both schools also placed a great deal of emphasis on the use of technology, especially in both internal and external communication.

There were also some differences identified in the cross site analysis. Lemonds County Elementary School identified discipline as an area positively impacted by the YRE calendar while West City Elementary identified teacher acquisition/retention as an area positively impacted. Also, Lemonds County Elementary School uses an intercession

in both the fall and the spring while West City Elementary School only uses one in the spring. West City Elementary School is undergoing the angst associated with a change in leadership while Lemonds County Elementary School has enjoyed several years of stability in their leadership. Lemonds County Elementary School emphasizes security while West City Elementary School emphasizes an inviting atmosphere for visitors.

Finally the findings were reported with respect to the implementation of a modified year round calendar that is used at both of these schools. The key to successful implementation was lots of research by the faculty prior to implementation and continuous communication and education of parents and the community at large. This was necessary to overcome the natural resistance that a change of this magnitude will generate.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes a brief summary on this study of year round education at two Georgia elementary schools in small school districts. It also includes an analysis and discussion of the research findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations for further study.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools after full implementation of a year round education calendar. The setting was two elementary schools that are part of small school districts in Georgia. The research question for this study is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? This is a descriptive study using the case study format. The study began with the collection of quantitative data on student achievement and absenteeism from the Georgia Department of Education web site. Quantitative data on discipline was also gathered from the data bases at each school. Site visits were conducted at each school to gather the qualitative data necessary to complete the portrait of these schools. In addition to researcher observations of the two school sites qualitative data was gathered from interviews with both administrators at each school and focus groups with the teachers and with the parents at each school. Focus groups consisted of from four to six respondents. The teacher focus groups covered all grades at each school and all respondents had experience with both a traditional school calendar as well as a year round calendar. Parents selected for the focus groups had been exposed to a year round schedule for at least one year. The

issues discussed in these interviews and focus groups were those identified in the literature review on year round schools and in the pilot study at Taliaferro County School. The qualitative data gathered during these on-site visits were transcribed and then sorted by issue for evaluation. Findings were reported in both narrative and graphical form.

### Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

Ten critical issues (as determined by the review of literature and the pilot study) were discussed with the respondents at Lemonds County Elementary School. The respondents at this school indicated six of these issues were positively impacted by their year round calendar. These issues were: student achievement/motivation, discipline, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, and facility maintenance/cleanliness. Only summer break was identified as a negative issue in using their current school calendar. Three other items were determined to be neutral with respect to the year round calendar. These were: attendance, community/after school activities, and teacher acquisition/retention.

The same ten critical issues were examined at West City Elementary School. Six issues were positively impacted by the year round schedule. These were: student achievement/motivation, school climate, intercession, stakeholder perceptions/communications, facility maintenance/cleanliness, and teacher acquisition/retention. The respondents at West City Elementary School only indicated summer break to be a negative issue with respect to the current school calendar. Three issues were considered neutral with respect to the current school calendar. They were: discipline, attendance, and community /after school activities.

The findings of this study can now be examined against the backdrop of the findings of other researchers noted in the review of literature. The first area examined was student achievement/motivation. The findings of this study showed that both schools found student achievement/motivation to be positively affected by the use of a year round calendar. It should also be noted that in both schools there was a majority of economically disadvantaged students. In Lemonds County Elementary School 85% of the student body was economically disadvantaged while at West City Elementary School this group made up 54% of the student population. This positive impact on a student population that is largely disadvantaged supports the findings of Korth (2005). In this study of California schools the students from low SES families enrolled in YRE schools outperformed their peers in a traditional setting. However it should also be pointed out that West City Elementary School has a much lower percentage of their population that comes from families in the economically disadvantaged category (54%), while 85% of the Lemonds County Students came from this category. Also the data shows that the AYP status of West City Elementary School is “Distinguished” while Lemonds Elementary School is in the “Needs Improvement” category. This data supports the findings of Kneese (2000) who reported that the students from higher SES categories demonstrated greater academic achievement under a YRE calendar. The standardized test score data showed both schools to do best in social studies, history and mathematics. This supports the earlier findings of Moore (2002) whose study listed these same three categories as the ones that showed the greatest achievement under YRE. In contrast researchers in several studies did not find YRE to have a positive impact on achievement. These studies include: a quantitative study of students from a Midwestern city in grades 4

through 6 (Shepherd, 2000), a multiple regression analysis of students taking the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills that found that YRE students had lower mean scores in mathematics (Cole, 2001), and a study of low SES students in the Mississippi Delta that showed that traditional students outperformed their YRE counterparts in reading and mathematics (Thigpen, 2004).

The second critical issue was discipline. The data from Lemonds County Elementary School indicated that the YRE schedule had a positive impact on discipline. This supports the findings of Beazley (2001). Beazley looked at student achievement, school climate, discipline and stakeholder attitude. Discipline was found to be the only area that was positively impacted by switching to a YRE calendar. The data for West City Elementary School did not indicate discipline to be impacted by the YRE schedule. Heaberlin (2000) also found that discipline was not impacted by the YRE schedule.

The third critical issue was attendance. The quantitative data in this area showed West City Elementary School to outperform Lemonds County Elementary School. The Georgia Department of Education data shows that in 2006 West City Elementary School had 2.3% of their students miss more than 15 days and Lemonds County Elementary School had 6.1% of their students in this category. Yet both schools indicated that this issue was not impacted by the YRE calendar. This finding supports earlier findings in several studies that showed no statistically significant change in attendance after conversion to a YRE schedule. Marks (2006) examined the attendance records at nine elementary schools in Maury County, Tennessee over a 3 year period. Conversion to a year round calendar did not impact attendance at a statistically significant level. In a study of two demographically matched elementary schools, there was no statistically



significant difference in attendance based on the instructional delivery schedule used (Heaberlin, 2000). Another researcher studied attendance data for 87 year round students and 26 traditional students from one urban middle school in southeastern Virginia. No significant differences in attendance were found based on the educational schedule (Sexton, 2003).

The fourth critical issue examined was school climate. This study found that the school climate of both schools improved under YRE. The parents at Lemonds County Elementary School talked about the close relationship they had with the teachers. The teachers talked about the abundance of resources provide for them to accomplish their goals in the classroom. The parents at West City Elementary School also talked about their close relationship with the teachers and about the home town atmosphere of their school. The teachers at West City Elementary School emphasized the collegial nature of their faculty. Earlier studies also found this to be true. A study by Prohn and Baenen (1996) of the transition of three elementary schools to a YRE calendar in Wake County, North Carolina produced similar results. In this study 15 of 18 measures were found to be higher under the YRE calendar. Numerous other studies also found school climate to be improved under YRE. Studies that produced these results included: Helton's (2001) study of 23 matched pairs of schools in Florida, Adams'(2001) study of a K-12 school located on the East Tennessee University Campus, a study of a matched pair of elementary schools in Arkansas (Fritts-Scott, 2005), and a rural Tennessee school district (Lasater, 2005).

The fifth critical issue examined was intercession. Again the schools in this study supported the positive impact of the intercession. Respondents at Lemonds County

Elementary School emphasized that the intercession was designed to be an intensive, individualized course in reading or math that allowed a student to get the equivalent of a normal nine week session in just one week. They also talked about the strong support from the school that included phone calls urging students to come and school transportation to get them there, and small class sizes for the intercession. West City Elementary School respondents highlighted the importance of having the intercession right before the students took the CRCT. They focused on test taking skills in the intercession. The findings of this study were also reported in an earlier study by Mulligan (2005). Mulligan found that intercessions that had small class sizes produced positive outcomes for students. Researchers in another study found the intercession to be an effective method of getting at-risk students back on track (Jacobsen et al., 2002).

The sixth critical issue examined was the summer break. The respondents in this study indicated that the shorter summer break was a negative influence on their schools. They indicated the lack of an adequate summer break inhibited the professional development of teachers and disrupted family plans. Pickeral (2004) supported this finding in that Pickeral also found that YRE disrupted the summer employment opportunities for high school students on a YRE schedule. Hold and Karr-Kidwell (1998) also found that teacher professional development was a problem because teachers could no longer enroll in the traditional university summer courses. In the current study only one respondent emphasized the academic gains realized by less learning loss from the shorter summer break. The teachers at West City Elementary School felt that the short vacations helped, but it was not a point of emphasis in the data presented by them. This is in contrast to earlier studies that found the shorter break to have a positive impact

on student retention of material taught. A meta-analytical review of 39 studies by Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse (1996) found that the summer break resulted in a one month loss in academic achievement on a grade level scale. Varner (2001) reported that traditional students must spend more time reviewing at the end of the summer. Alexander, Entwisle and Olson (2007) traced the achievement gaps between high SES and low SES to differential learning that took place during the summer break.

The seventh critical issue examined was stakeholder perceptions and communications. This area received a positive rating with most comments being about communications. The schools in this study were both proud of their automated forms of communication. In the case of Lemonds County Elementary School this was a computer web site entitled IParent. This was a password protected way for parents to check their student's grades and attendance. In the case of West City Elementary School this was an automated phone system that allowed the principal or superintendent to contact all parents in the school district. There was some concern about timely information getting to parents at Lemonds County Elementary School and about communication between teachers and the administration at West City Elementary School. These findings are similar to the earlier findings of a qualitative study at a large Virginia elementary school. Morris (2002) found that stakeholder perceptions were generally favorable but the respondents did recommend changes in the communication between teachers and parents.

The eighth critical issue examined was community and after school activities. Respondents at Lemonds County Elementary School had few comments on this issue. They did not see any relationship between their student's attendance in a year round school and their participation in other activities. Respondents at West City Elementary

School were equally divided between positive and negative comments on this issue. West City Elementary School respondents were very positive about the after school academic program sponsored by the school but negative about the impact of the schedule on participation in recreational sports activities in the community. Overall, the impact of YRE was deemed to be neutral in this area. No elementary school studies were found on this issue. Therefore this study fills a gap in the literature in this area. However this issue has been studied at the high school level. Trinis (2007) reported that intercessions make it difficult for high schools to complete a normal music schedule that includes performances at football games by an entire band as well as holiday concerts.

The ninth critical issue examined was facility maintenance and cleanliness. The YRE schedule was found to have a positive impact of both schools in this area. Respondents indicated that the frequent breaks gave the custodians and maintenance staffs an opportunity to stay ahead of the cleaning and maintenance requirements in the school. It was noted, however, that the shorter summer break does not allow the time needed to complete major construction projects. No other studies were found that addressed this issue and therefore this study helps fill that gap in the literature.

The last critical issue examined was teacher retention and acquisition. West City Elementary School indicated that YRE had had a positive impact on teacher retention. Respondents indicated that the schedule is less stressful and that turnover in their school has been negligible. Earlier studies would corroborate this finding. Shields and Oberg (2000) reported that the switch to a YRE schedule was accompanied by a dramatic increase in teacher attendance. Shields and Oberg found that 30 teachers requested a transfer to the year round school after it had been fully implemented. In another study

Kinsey-Baker (2000) found that a multi-track YRE calendar created a more collaborative organizational climate that enhanced the professional lives of the teachers.

Finally, the findings were reported with respect to the implementation of a modified year round calendar that is used at both of these schools. The keys to successful implementation were lots of research by the faculty prior to implementation and continuous communication and education of parents and the community at large. This was necessary to overcome the natural resistance that a change of this magnitude will generate. This finding is supported by the earlier findings of several studies as detailed below. Lovett (2006) studied 13 principals in the Tulsa metropolitan area as they led the transition efforts to a year round calendar. Effective communications, public relations, staff collaboration, and professional development were important in achieving a successful transition. Scheurer (2001) studied the factors that facilitated the adoption of a YRE schedule at a middle school in the Reno, Nevada area. YRE was found to be a viable option if the implementation was properly planned and if communication channels between the school, parents and the community were used to convey the need for and the progress of YRE implementation. Another study queried 97 principals from 12 Florida schools districts that had implemented YRE. The respondents in this study recommended that a smooth transition to YRE required a school to start the process early, introduce the subject to key stakeholders, conduct considerable staff development and hold many parental meetings during the implementation process (Pawlas, 1996).

## Conclusions

The first conclusion is that this study corroborates the findings of the majority of the research completed on year round education. Studies could be found that supported the findings of this research study in eight of the ten critical items examined. Two of these issues however, also had several studies that produced findings that did not support the findings of this study. These areas were student achievement/motivation and summer break. Student achievement is the most studied issue with regards to YRE. Therefore numerous studies can be found that support student gains under YRE and also studies that find YRE to be a detriment or neutral with respect to student achievement. There were two areas, community/after school activities and facility maintenance/cleanliness, that have not produced any significant studies to date. The issue of summer break is one area in which this study seems to have produced findings significantly different from other studies. The respondents in this study highlighted the negative aspects of the summer break. They reported that the lack of an adequate summer break inhibited the professional development of teachers and disrupted family plans. Earlier studies of this issue focused on the greater retention of knowledge realized by the shorter summer break. This was only emphasized by one respondent in one school in this study. Respondents in this study attributed the positive student achievement gains to the frequent breaks that helped to invigorate the students and the intercessions that helped the students prepare for the standardized test as well as get caught up on concepts missed the first time through the curriculum. The findings in this study concerning the implementation of YRE were also directly in line with previous studies. Communication with and education of all stakeholders is always the key to successful implementation of this schedule change.

The second conclusion is that the YRE schedule cannot completely overcome the challenges inherent in the education of a student population that is largely classified as low SES. Lemonds County Elementary Schools lags behind West City Elementary School in both student achievement and attendance. The only discernable difference between these schools is the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Yet in Lemonds County Elementary School, despite their AYP status as a Needs Improvement School, all stakeholders had positive data to present on the year round schedule.

The third conclusion is that year round education is an effective educational delivery system for elementary schools operating in small Georgia school systems. In both schools, six of the issues studied showed a positive impact from using the year round schedule. Only one item was listed as a negative at each school studied. The stakeholders at these schools have all embraced the year round schedule. All respondents in this study gave their school a positive rating. Additionally, site visits by this researcher revealed a very healthy and productive learning environment.

The fourth conclusion is that implementation requires a very detailed plan and cannot be accomplished overnight. These schools have both been on this schedule for more than five years and it can be concluded that the year round schedule has been fully adopted. These schools were able to accomplish this because they conducted their research prior to implementation, they involved key stakeholders in the implementation process and they communicated their efforts in detail during implementation of the year round schedule.

## Implications

The most important aspect of successful implementation of a year round schedule is communication with all stakeholders. The communication of educational goals, class schedules, and other school requirements is critical to YRE implementation. Accomplishing this requirement is much easier in a small school system. The task of communicating with all stakeholders is less onerous and can be accomplished without the expenditure of too much time and other resources.

School systems with only one school at each level can effectively execute a year round schedule. It is easier to foster a sense of unity as students move through the system. Families are not required to deal with the complexities of having students from one household on more than one school schedule. Older siblings have the same weeks off as younger children and are able to assist with child care requirements.

Stakeholders that feel that they belong to a school will work to make it successful. Respondents in this study repeatedly indicated their attachment to their school and their dedication to the success of every student at their school. A sense of unity and ownership had been engendered with all stakeholders. Their commitment to the achievement of all academic goals was apparent.

Attention to the ten issues identified in this study is critical to the effective use of a year round schedule. The issues analyzed in this study impact all aspects of the school setting. The year round schedule will foster a positive sense of worth if the issues analyzed in this study are being addressed by the administration and teachers in the school.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study several recommendations are presented. Recommendations for implementing the results of this study and recommendations for further study are presented.

### *Recommendations for Implementing the Results of this Study*

1. Any school considering the implementation of a year round schedule should develop a detailed plan that considers its impact in each of the ten critical areas identified in this study.
2. Small schools should study the data presented on each school to determine how closely it replicates their situation. This will give them some insight on the possible effectiveness of this schedule in their school.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

1. Additional study needs to be done of year round education at the middle and high school level. An especially enlightening study would be a study of the relationship between year round education and the different types of daily schedules used in the high school. No study exists that looks at whether a year round high school would be more effective using a block schedule or the traditional six period day schedule.
2. A longitudinal study of a school similar to the two in this study, starting with the last year on a traditional schedule would also be a useful extension of the studies of year round education.

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## APPENDIX A

## PRELIMINARY SURVEY FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Suppose I was a new parent coming to this school. What would you tell me about this school? \_\_\_\_\_

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What you consider the greatest benefit of your current school calendar? \_\_\_\_\_

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List any greatest negative consequences of using this calendar? \_\_\_\_\_

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Has the current calendar impacted the academic achievement of your child? \_\_\_\_\_

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Has the current school calendar impacted the scheduling of family activities including vacations and participation in community activities? \_\_\_\_\_

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Does your child like coming to school? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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Is there anything about this school that you would like to see changed? \_\_\_\_\_

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Is there anything about this school that you hope never changes? \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS

**Introduction:** I would like to start by telling all of you how grateful I am for your participation in today's session. The completion of my dissertation is only possible with your input. I am sure each of you has insightful comments about YRE that will make this project a useful one.

Let me begin by introducing myself and telling you a little about my dissertation. My name is Rodney Backman, I am the Assistant Principal at Bryan County High School and a student at Georgia Southern University where I am working on my Doctorate in Education Administration. My dissertation is entitled: *A Case Study of Year Round Education in Two Georgia Elementary Schools*. The research question on which this study is based is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education?

I am tape recording this session so that I don't miss anything. I don't want to take the chance of relying on my notes and maybe missing something you say or inadvertently changing the intent or meaning of your input. I do not want to include names in my study so I will assign identifications to each of you. For example, the person sitting to my immediate left is seat one. In a minute I will give each of you a seat identification and an opportunity to briefly introduce yourself using your seat identification. I will want each seat to introduce themselves by telling me what grade level you teach, how many years you have been teaching and how long you have taught at this school? We will begin the introductions with Seat One.

After the introductions the questioning will begin:

**Question #1:** Suppose I was a new parent coming to your school. What would you tell me about YRE?

**Question #2:** What do you like or dislike about working at this school?

**Question #3:** What has been the most important experience you have had with YRE?

**Probe Question A:** When did that happen?

**Probe Question B:** Who else was involved?

**Probe Question C:** How did that come about?

**Question #4:** How has YRE impacted student achievement and/or motivation?

**Probe Question A:** Are there more opportunities for enrichment activities under a YRE schedule?

**Probe Question B:** How has YRE impacted student retention of material taught?

**Probe Question C:** When a student is struggling academically, does YRE impact the ability of teachers and parents to keep this student on track?

**Probe Question D:** Does it impact student's motivation to come to school?

**Question #5:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination within the school?

**Question #6:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination with parents or with the community?

**Question #7:** Does YRE impact the relationship of teachers with the school administration?

**Question #8:** Does YRE impact the maintenance and cleanliness of your school?

**Question #9:** How has YRE impacted your work environment?

**Probe Question A:** Do you enjoy coming to work?

**Probe Question B:** Do you have the necessary time and resources to accomplish your teaching objectives?



## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

**Introduction:** I would like to start by telling all of you how grateful I am for your participation in today's session. The completion of my dissertation is only possible with your input. I am sure each of you has insightful comments about YRE that will make this project a useful one.

Let me begin by introducing myself and telling you a little about my dissertation. My name is Rodney Backman, I am the Assistant Principal at Bryan County High School and a student at Georgia Southern University where I am working on my Doctorate in Education Administration. My dissertation is entitled: *A Case Study of Year Round Education in Two Georgia Elementary Schools*. The research question on which this study is based is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education?

I am tape recording this session so that I don't miss anything. I don't want to take the chance of relying on my notes and maybe missing something you say or inadvertently changing the intent or meaning of your input. I do not want to include names in my study so I will assign identifications to each of you. For example, the person sitting to my immediate left is seat one. In a minute I will give each of you a seat identification and an opportunity to briefly introduce yourself using your seat identification. I will ask each seat to introduce themselves by telling me about their past and current experience in this school I am interested in knowing how many children you currently have in this school and what grades they are in. I am also interested in knowing if you have any older

siblings that have completed instruction at this school and when they graduated. We will begin the introductions with Seat One.

After the introductions the questioning will begin:

**Question #1:** Suppose I was a new parent coming to your school. What would you tell me about YRE?

**Question #2:** What would you like to see changed at your school?

**Question #3:** What do you hope never changes at this school?

**Question #4:** What has been the most important experience you have had with YRE?

**Probe Question A:** When did that happen?

**Probe Question B:** Who else was involved?

**Probe Question C:** How did that come about?

**Question #5:** How has YRE impacted the scheduling of family activities such as vacations and participation in community recreational activities?

**Question #6:** How has YRE impacted student achievement and/or motivation?

**Probe Question A:** Are there more opportunities for enrichment activities under a YRE schedule?

**Probe Question B:** How has YRE impacted student retention of material taught?

**Probe Question C:** When a student is struggling academically, does YRE impact the ability of teachers and parents to keep this student on track?

**Probe Question D:** Does it impact student's motivation to come to school?

**Question #7:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination within the school?

**Question #8:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination with parents or with the community?

**Question #9:** Does YRE impact the relationship of teachers or parents with the school administration?

**Question #10:** Does YRE impact the maintenance and cleanliness of your school?

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

**Introduction:** I would like to start by telling you how grateful I am for your participation in today's session. The completion of my dissertation is only possible with your input. I am sure you have insightful comments about YRE that will make this project a useful one.

Let me begin by telling you a little about my dissertation. My dissertation is entitled: *A Case Study of Year Round Education in Two Georgia Elementary Schools*. The research question on which this study is based is: What are the experiences of stakeholders in two Georgia elementary schools that have implemented year round education? I am sure this dissertation will provide a useful insight into the dynamics of this particular YRE situation.

I am tape recording this session so that I don't miss anything. I don't want to take the chance of relying on my notes and maybe missing something you say or inadvertently changing the intent or meaning of your input.

**Question #1:** Suppose I was a new parent coming to your school. What would you tell me about YRE?

**Question #2:** What has been the most important experience you have had with YRE?

**Probe Question A:** When did that happen?

**Probe Question B:** Who else was involved?

**Probe Question C:** How did that come about?

**Question #3:** How has YRE impacted the scheduling of after school activities?

**Question #4:** How has YRE impacted student achievement and/or motivation?

**Probe Question A:** Are there more opportunities for enrichment activities under a YRE schedule?

**Probe Question B:** How has YRE impacted student retention of material taught?

**Probe Question C:** When a student is struggling academically, does YRE impact the ability of teachers and parents to keep this student on track?

**Probe Question D:** Does it impact student's motivation to come to school?

**Question #6:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination within the school?

**Question #7:** Does YRE impact on information dissemination with parents or with the community?

**Question #8:** Does YRE impact the relationship of teachers or parents with the school administration?

**Question #9:** Does YRE impact the maintenance and cleanliness of your school?

**Question #10:** Does YRE impact hiring practices at your school?

APPENDIX E  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

The title listed on the Institutional Review Board Approval differs from the final title of this dissertation. This was because, in consultation with my Dissertation Committee, it was decided that the final title of this dissertation more accurately describes the research conducted. None of the data collection protocols described in the application for Institutional Review Board Approval were altered in any way. A copy of the Institutional Review Board Approval Letter is included on the next page.

Georgia Southern University  
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

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**To:** Rodney J. Backman  
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**CC:** Dr. Walter Polka  
P.O. Box-8131

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** September 25, 2007

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H08037**, and titled "**The Year Round Experience in Small Georgia School Systems**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

