

What is Balanced School Calendar and How Does it Work?

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One of the few constants in education over the past 140 years has been the 180-day school calendar. Despite the learning gaps the long summer intermission creates, unfinished learning due to the pandemic, educator burnout, and the substitute shortage, educators across the nation continue to work diligently each year to make a difference. While not a new idea, due to the pandemic, school districts across the nation are taking a longer look at year-round education. The term year-round education is falling out of favor because students and staff do not attend school 300+ days each year, but rather school districts balance their allocated school days across the calendar year. A more accurate description is a balanced school calendar. Balanced calendar education has ties to the late 1800s and it provides more frequent access to the students which allows school districts to provide food, care, and educational materials more consistently than the traditional school calendar does with a long summer recess.

Continuous Education

A foundation of the balanced calendar is continuous access to food, instruction, care, and education resources, which research shows is especially important in preventing summer learning loss for students who may not have the benefits of travel, camps, and trips to the library. Educators are able to provide continuous access through what is known as intersessions—the days when students are on break. With the additional days, some students might actually go to school for more than 200 days each school year. Intersession provides real-time remediation and enrichment opportunities, which in the traditional model tend to occur during the summer.

Positive Outcomes

The balanced school calendar parents and guardians have shared that this alternative calendar is more aligned with current lifestyles and work schedules. In fact, budgeting for 12-13 weeks of childcare each summer can be a burden. The balanced calendar reduces the number of consecutive days off each summer in exchange for additional school breaks throughout the school year.

Jennifer Robel, a balanced calendar parent, says, “Overall, parents continue to see tremendous academic and social growth in children who attend school on the balanced calendar. They see their children retaining what they have learned the previous school year. Students and educators remain revitalized and refreshed on this continuous instructional cycle.”



Final Thoughts

The traditional school calendar requires teachers to reteach between 20-40 school days each year. The amount of required time to reteach contributes to the learning gaps that educators are trying so hard to close. Collectively across the nation, school districts are spending 21 billion dollars remediating the learning gaps that the traditional calendar contributes to each year. By moving to the balanced school calendar, we may be able to repurpose the funds that are being devoted to closing learning gaps and earmark them instead for programs that focus on differentiating instruction or extending learning opportunities.