

EDUCATION

Man describes pitfalls of year-round school

Harding grad who said his education was hurt doesn't want EACS students to be test cases.

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NEW HAVEN — Bill Larson approached the podium inside New Haven Elementary's gym, bringing with him years of resentment toward a school district that had tried something new with his education.

At the first formal meeting Thursday to discuss the possibility of having students attend year-round school, Larson told more than 80 people, including East Allen County Schools board members, about his years as a test case at Harding High School.

The school began letting students work at their own pace in class — a method that hurt rather than helped his education, especially through college, Larson said.

After doing his own research on a balanced calendar schedule, also known as year-round schooling, the 1975 Harding graduate said he didn't want current students to be test subjects, as he was.

"If you want to know if this is going to work, you have to ask the kids," he said. "This is who it's going to impact. Are you going to use your kids as research?"

His sentiments were met with applause from parents, many of whom are against a new schedule. New Haven administrators and teachers say will help improve student achievement, increase student retention and reduce student stress and teacher burnout.

MORE INFO

- ◆ Four nine-week grading periods
- ◆ Two three-week breaks — one in October, the other in March
- ◆ Two two-week intersessions where students can get academic help or take courses such as drama and horseback riding
- ◆ Six-week summer break
- ◆ School starts in early August and ends in mid-June

New Haven Elementary parents can hear the presentation on a balanced schedule at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 3 at the EACS administration building board room 1240

LOCAL

YEAR-ROUND: Man describes pitfalls of process

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How it works

A balanced calendar schedule reduces the typical three-month summer vacation and spreads it throughout the school year. School would start in early August and end in mid-June.

It also would include two three-week breaks in October and March and two two-week vacations, or intersessions, where students could get remediation or take classes such as pottery, drama, swimming or horseback riding.

The schedule also would allow students about seven weeks of ISTEP preparation time after the summer break, said New Haven Principal Kent Martz. Currently, the students have the first few weeks of school for preparation.

With increasing numbers of students on free or reduced lunch, low 2002 attendance rates and decreasing ISTEP scores, Martz said the

school had to look at alternative options in raising student achievement.

"What we're trying to say is the more they expand their academic instruction, the better they are going to perform," said Doris Speicher, a retired elementary principal and adjunct faculty at Indiana University at South Bend. Speicher is a consultant for the school.

Martz said the school started looking into a balanced schedule a year ago. Teachers and parents serving on a committee to study the option visited schools with balanced schedules. The committee surveyed the faculty on their thoughts; 80 percent of them said they support the idea.

Parents' thoughts

The topic is an emotional one for parents of New Haven students. Some said the new schedule would make it difficult to take family vacations or coordinate with their children's summer activities. Others

thought effort should focus on helping those in need of academic aid.

"What are we going to do to help that 30 percent who didn't pass (the ISTEP exam this year)?" said a mother of a special-needs student. "I don't think changing the school calendar is going to make a difference."

Superintendent Jeff Abbott said he encouraged the district's elementary principals to look into the balanced calendar schedule after learning of possible benefits. He said the schedule would need to have strong faculty and parent support, and be budget-friendly before it can be mandated.

"I wouldn't attempt to do it at all without parental support," Martz said. "I wouldn't do anything to jeopardize that."

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