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Chelsea Nicole Wallace

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**A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING THE
PERCEPTIONS OF YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Education, Elementary Education

By

Chelsea Wallace

July 2016

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A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING THE PERCEPTIONS OF YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

Childhood Education and Family Studies

Missouri State University, July 2016

Master of Science in Education

Chelsea Wallace

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated potential perceptions of educators from a Southwest Missouri school district regarding a transition from a traditional school calendar to a year-round school structure. Through semi-structured interviews, reflective field notes, and researcher observations, this study descriptively interpreted data from nine individual interviews. Analysis provided a comprehensive review of the salient themes uncovered in hope of informing the affected district and those interested in current teacher perceptions of this educational change and acting as a catalyst for further dialogue surrounding the concept of year-round education. In this study, participating educators indicated their favor of year-round education as an option for their district by providing elaborative answers to ten open-ended questions. I am also an employee of the district and describe my reflections and personal connections regarding this complex concept that had the potential to affect the lives of everyone in the community.

KEYWORDS: year-round education, year-round school, modified school calendar, traditional school calendar, progressive school model, teacher perceptions

This abstract is approved as to form and content

Dr. Cynthia K. Hail
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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INTRODUCTION

Change in education is constant as educators strive to prepare students to become productive citizens in an evolving global society. Learning standards, curriculum, instructional practices, classroom management, and communication strategies are just a few examples of areas, which are continually being reviewed and developed to best meet the needs of school communities. A glance into today's collaborative, innovative, 21st century classrooms will show significant changes from the meager one room schoolhouse beginnings of public education in the United States. However, one topic that has not changed drastically since public education began is the school calendar.

Most school districts still operate using a traditional school calendar, which focuses instructional time with few breaks into the fall, winter, and spring seasons and with an extended 12-week break in the summer. Through their efforts to implement best practices for their communities, many school districts have been questioning whether this traditional calendar is most effective or if another option, such as year-round education, would best support the needs of students, educators, and families. Year-round education can be defined many ways, but the most salient aspect of this concept is that the traditional extended summer break be distributed evenly through shorter, more frequent breaks throughout the 12-month calendar. The participants in this study were educators from a district that was in the process of reviewing their own educational schedule and considering a transition from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model. This study examined teachers' current perceptions of year-round education as an option for their district.

Ballinger (2015) advocates for educational change to be made collaboratively and states that “Choice in education is one of the hallmarks of America’s stronger school systems” (p. 1). The choice of educational change at all levels should be deeply considered from multiple perspectives in order to best serve the affected community as a whole, and also accommodate the individuals as unique persons. Shield and Olberg (2000) advocate for the education of children to be at the center of all educational change; and as decision-makers in communities, it is the responsibility of the educators to ensure all stakeholders work together for the betterment of students and society as a whole.

As the participating district considered year-round school as an option for their community, this descriptive study presented comprehensive perceptions and opinions that dually served the educators being interviewed and the district. The study sought to identify teachers’ perceptions of year-round schooling to best meet the needs of all individuals involved in this transition.

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions educators in a rural district in Southwest Missouri held of year-round education and the expected transition from a traditional school calendar to a modified school calendar.

The implementation of year-round education is being considered in many schools throughout the United States, and ongoing discussions are taking place about the affects this shift in calendar will have on teachers, students, families, and communities. Educational transitions such as the implementation of more progressive models of

instruction and assessment are nothing new to school communities, as change seems to be a constant in the field of education; however, even though the concept of year-round school has grown significantly in popularity throughout the United States in recent years, not all educators are convinced this is a beneficial transition (Everhart, 2003). Davies and Kerry (1998) and Ballinger (1995) were confident that year-round education can provide solutions to academic concerns, such as summer learning loss, over-crowding, limited opportunities for enrichment for students, and professional development for educators. However, others disagree and state there has been no evidence that year-round education contributes positively to the learning experience for students or educators, and argue it may in fact cause negative repercussions. Von Hippel (2006) states the only time students in year-round schools have been shown to learn more than their peers who attend traditional calendar schools is during the traditional summer break when their counterparts are on vacation. With multiple studies offering mixed results, it is evident that more research needs to be conducted involving year-round education.

The growing rural district at the center of this study added a strategy to their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) to focus on progressive school models and hoped to begin moving toward a continuous learning calendar in the next five years. Although this concept had been included in two previous CSIP discussions, no progression toward a transition to a year-round education model had been made. Various perceptions from educators within the district had been presented regarding this shift in structure, and this study hoped to highlight and validate those perspectives in detail. This study contributed information regarding teachers' perceptions, questions, and concerns to an ongoing dialogue within the district about the potential transition to a progressive

school model. Teachers' current perceptions of year-round education were documented as well as how they felt about implementing this calendar design in the district. The hope was that on-going support and professional development might be offered to accommodate teachers' needs and make the potential transition to a modified school calendar a smooth, successful one.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide the research study:

1. What were the teachers' perceptions of year-round school?
2. What questions and concerns did teachers have about moving from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model?
3. What professional development opportunities and information did the teachers perceive to be of support for all stakeholders in preparation of the potential transition from a traditional school calendar to a continuous learning calendar?

Significance of the Study

The completion of this study provided the participating district with information regarding their teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding year-round school. After evaluating the results of this study, the district may be able to recognize teachers' needs and provide professional development and support to accommodate these needs and address any concerns during the potential transition from a traditional school calendar to a continuous learning calendar.

In order for teachers to become advocates in the community for a progressive school model, they must feel comfortable and confident with the transition and aware of

what it will mean for all parties involved. It is also essential for teachers to feel a part of the decision-making process for educational change in the district in order for them to take ownership of the transition, and the results of this study may provide the participants with a voice in the discussion.

Through this study, strengths and areas of improvement in which the district may use to build from moving forward were recognized. The goal was to provide the district with the opportunity to prepare teachers for this potential transition and build their confidence with year-round education in hopes that all became advocates of the progressive school model this district strived to implement. It was intended that the results from this study would be a catalyst for further conversation and consideration by sparking a collaborative dialogue between educators within the district.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made. It was assumed that the interview tool was a valid instrument for identifying teachers' opinions and perceptions. All participants were respectful during the study and provided feedback openly and honestly without fear of judgment or punishment. The district participating in this study allowed their teachers to participate freely and accept feedback openly. The researcher was a facilitator of the study but had no input whatsoever in teacher responses and interview data was accurately recorded and free of bias. Finally, it was assumed that the teachers were representative of typical rural teachers in southwest Missouri during the spring 2016.

Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the following limitations were identified. The population sample consisted of nine teachers from a rural school district in the Southwest region of Missouri during the spring 2016. Because this study was conducted within one school district, the results may not be applicable or generalized to other districts. The cultural and ethnic diversity were limited due to the area in which the study took place. The study was limited to data obtained during in-depth, one-on-one interviews using a researcher-constructed interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Definition of Terms

According to the National Association for Year-Round Education (2015), the following terms were defined as:

1. Year-round education: Year-round education (YRE) reorganizes the school year to provide more continuous learning by dividing the long summer vacation into shorter, more frequent breaks. Students in a year-round program attend the same classes and receive the same amount of instruction as students on a nine month calendar (usually 180 days)...The year-round calendar is organized into instructional blocks and vacation periods that are evenly distributed across 12 months (p. 1).

2. Year-round school: Year-round school is the redesign or modification of the traditional 180 day school calendar to promote more continuous instruction for students, and among other benefits, prevent learning loss over prolonged breaks (Ballinger, 1988).

3. Traditional school calendar: The traditional calendar features a summer vacation of 12 weeks followed by an extended period of instructional days, with the first break coming at Thanksgiving. The winter holidays are followed by 55 instructional days before a short spring break. Spring break is followed by 40 instructional days before the end of the school year (NAYRE, 2015).

4. Modified school calendar: A modified school calendar maintains the same number of instructional school days as a traditional calendar, but spreads these days out over the year with more frequent breaks. Several versions of modified school calendars can be found, but the 45-10 calendar is most frequently used. The 45-10 plan has 45 days of instruction followed by 10 days of holiday, and a common four-week to five-week summer holiday for staff and students with instructional time remaining consistent with the traditional year (Winter, 2005). This term can also be used synonymously with a balanced school calendar (NAYRE, 2015).

5. Continuous learning calendar: Synonymous with a modified school calendar, a continuous learning calendar represents a school schedule with shorter, more frequent breaks to promote more continuous learning opportunities as opposed to a more traditional, extended break in the summer (Winter, 2005). Several school districts use this term when describing a modified school calendar.

6. Progressive school model: This is the term currently used by Nixa Public Schools to represent their vision for the potential transition between a traditional school calendar to a modified school calendar (Nixa, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions educators in a rural district in Southwest Missouri held of year-round education and the expected transition from a traditional school calendar to a modified school calendar. Presented in this section of the review of the related literature were: (a) description of year- round school, (b) benefits and drawbacks of year-round school for students, (c) benefits and drawbacks of year-round school for educators, and (d) summary.

Description of Year-Round School

Year-round school is a complex concept involving multiple versions and tracks to accommodate the various needs of diverse learners in public school districts throughout the United States. Everhart (2003) reported that year-round education increased in United States public schools by more than 544% between the years of 1988 and 2003. However, even with growing popularity, there are still various perspectives and concerns held by educators regarding this practice. Year-round school can be defined and interpreted in many ways with several options for implementation. The concept is a redesign or modification of the traditional 180 day school calendar to promote more continuous instruction for students, and among other benefits, prevent learning loss over prolonged breaks (Ballinger, 1988; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005). Additional vocabulary to describe year-round school is mentioned throughout literature and the terminology *modified calendar/school year* and *balanced calendar/school year* are used interchangeably to refer to deviation from the traditional school calendar (Winter, 2005).

Along with various ways to describe year-round schooling, there are several complex ways year-round education can be provided to students. These options include single-track, dual-track, and multi-track designs that also vary in how many days of instruction is given in association with how many days of rest is followed (Ballinger, 1988; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005). The single track option requires students and educators to follow the same school calendar and break schedule. A dual-track option allows students and educators to choose either a traditional or a year-round school calendar. Winter (2005) refers to single and dual-track options as *schoolwide* options for year-round education. A multi-track option of year-round school creates a school calendar by which students and educators follow specific tracks separate from other students and educators that overlap one another. The multi-track option has been referred to as the “school within a school” option (McMillen, 2001, p. 68; Winter, 2005). The multi-track year-round option provides a cost-effective way to assist in school overcrowding situations. School districts may choose to adopt one track structure or have various year-round track options available to their students and families.

Within each of these tracks, the most common schedule of instruction is called *45-15*, which provides students 45 days or 9 weeks of instruction followed by 15 days or 3 weeks of break (Ballinger, 1988; Ballinger, 1995; Heaberlin, 2002; McMillen, 2001). Other less common format sequence options include: *60-20*, *60-15*, *90-30*, and an *82-41* extended day calendar version (Ballinger, 1988). Trimis (1996) points out in his experiential narrative review of year-round school that while there are different variations to the modified school calendar, these variations maintain the same number of school days as a traditional school calendar. Therefore, year-round school should not be

confused with extended-year schools, which require more than 180 days of instruction per year (McMillen, 2001).

Benefits and Drawbacks of Year-Round School for Students

The most noted benefit of year-round school for students is on-going, continuous education balanced between shorter breaks in the school calendar that provides more instruction time and less opportunity for learning loss over traditional extended breaks (Ballinger, 1988; Ballinger, 2005; Heaberlin, 2002; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005). Students, educators, and families are given more schedule options through year-round school tracks that promote differentiation based on student, school, and community needs. Remediation and enrichment opportunities are offered frequently during the intersession breaks of the year-round school calendar and provide students more immediate feedback and assistance than the traditional calendar allows (Ballinger, 1988; Ballinger, 1995; Heaberlin, 2002). This on-going assistance helps students comprehend and retain information more effectively and lowers student frustration in the classroom. In addition to academic support, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, such as clubs, teams, and family vacations, can occur throughout the year and interfere less with academic instruction time. More frequent, periodic breaks also allow students to remain more interested in learning by allowing time to rest and promote positive attitudes about school for students, parents, and teachers. Ballinger (1995) states these shorter, more frequent breaks refresh and rejuvenate teachers and students, which allow them to intensely pursue education while they are at school. Year-round school has also been shown to decrease student and teacher burnout out, improve school attendance, and lower

the number of disciplinary incidents (Haser & Nasser, 2003; Heaberlin, 2002; Lowe, 2002; Winter, 2005). In concert with all of these benefits, studies have shown student academic achievement also increases in year-round schools, especially for at-risk students (Haser & Nasser, 2003; Heaberlin, 2002; Kneese, 1996; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005).

While supporters of year-round school have advocated that year-round education increases student achievement and lowers retention rates, Opheim et al. states that research in this area is not conclusive (2001). Studies, such as Merino (1983), found traditional calendar schools out-performed schools with modified school calendars. Merino (as stated in Wildman et al., 1999, p. 467) found "no significant differences in achievement in six comparisons, and lower scores at year-round schools in three comparisons." Another study completed by Cooper, Valentine, Charlton, and Melson (2003) revealed a modified calendar had little effect on student achievement relative to other educational interventions, such as summer school programs. After hypothesizing that year-round school would increase student achievement, Opheim et al. (2001) concluded from surveying the attitudes of elementary school administrators in Texas that administrators were supportive of this hypothesis, although administrators from traditional calendar schools expressed significantly lower support than those from year-round calendar schools. Studies have revealed mixed perspectives of year-round school, but even studies such as Abramula et al. (1999), which include research supported perspectives that express significant reluctance toward year-round school, acknowledge there are strong arguments about whether or not year-round school has a positive impact on student academic achievement.

Another area of concern surrounding year-round education includes non-academic arguments. While some studies, such as Coleman and Freehorn (as cited in Cooper et al., 2003) have found multitrack models of year-round education to save districts money as a solution to overcrowding, other districts considering year-round education for other reasons are worried about the expense. Cooper et al states that cost effectiveness is a concern of year-round education. This study found

"Citizens concerned about the efficient use of public money often weigh in on modified calendar debates. They press the advocates of modified calendars for evidence that money actually is saved when schools use multi-tracking. They note that if schools are open 12 months of the year, then maintenance workers, office workers, administrators, and some teaching specialists have to be paid 12-month rather than 9-month salaries." (Cooper et. al, 2003, p. 4)

O'Sullivan (2013) suggests, "In implementing year-round programs, states and districts need to consider not only changes to teacher contracts and pay, but also the financial impact of year-round schooling on office staff, transportation staff, substitute teachers, and administration" (p.412). Building maintenance and construction that is usually completed during traditional extended summer breaks also has to be scheduled throughout the year and can cause conflict if students are in session while these things are taking place.

In addition, other concerns about year-round school for students, such as short-term memory loss during breaks occurring too often, have also been expressed. Patterson (1995) suggests year-round school promotes a setting of constant re-acclimation for students and teachers that does not allow learning to continue long enough without being interrupted by a break in the school schedule. In contrast, Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse (1996) supported year-round school in their review of 39 studies regarding the effect of extended summer vacations during a traditional calendar

year. Cooper et al. indicated students face significant, detrimental learning loss over extended academic breaks, which increase in severity as students get older and affect at-risk families more than other families. Because of these varying perspectives and contrasting results, more research needs to be done to assess the effects of year-round school on student achievement in relation to school calendars. Davies and Kerry (1998) suggest results from studies on the effects of year-round school are ambiguous and still very young. To come to a more conclusive stance regarding this aspect of year-round school, Davies and Kerry point out in their review of research on suggesting solutions for summer learning loss that there is a need for "longer-term, longitudinal studies using a variety of educational calendars" (p.121). These suggestions were echoed when Cooper et al. stated "The question of how school calendars affect learning cries out for a longitudinal study involving a natural lottery, which controls for testing date and availability of intercessions and summer schools, among other experimental and measured controls" (p.43).

Benefits and Drawbacks of Year-Round School for Educators

Similarly to some of the studies regarding student benefits of year-round school, some researchers believe educators have a lot to gain from year-round school as well. Haser and Nasser (2003) state that year-round education benefits educators by providing flexible work schedule options, reducing teacher stress, and providing time for professional development and reflection. Year-round school has a positive influence on teacher retention and job satisfaction, therefore creating a more positive school environment for everyone. With various year-round schedule options, teachers can

provide more consistent, ongoing instruction to their students and take advantage of continuous learning and planning opportunities throughout the school year without these activities competing with student instruction for time and attention. Because multi-track year-round calendars provide a cost-effective solution for over-crowding situations, educators can focus their time more efficiently on their students and school districts do not have to spend their limited funds on new buildings. The more frequent intercessions provided by a year-round schedule allow educators to participate in professional development, have more undivided planning time, and return from breaks refreshed and prepared to work (Ballinger, 1995). During these breaks, educators would have more time to improve curriculum and provide remediation to students in need. Heaberlin (2002) points out that year-round school also allows school districts the opportunity to provide full-year contracts and higher salaries to teachers. Teachers could also choose to substitute teach other in-session courses during their breaks to earn extra money, similarly to summer school opportunities. Cooper et al. states "In this way, regular teachers make extra money, and students benefit from improved instruction because their substitute teachers have more experience and knowledge of the curriculum" (p. 4). Shields and Oberg (as cited in Kneese, 2000) found specialty teachers and extra-curricular educators have the opportunity to teach on multiple tracks and provide a variety of courses to best serve students (p. 1). These opportunities could allow teachers to increase their salaries if they choose to teach instead of taking vacation time during intercessions. Shields and Olberg (1999) found teachers felt a continuous year-round schedule was more professional than a traditional school calendar and felt a more positive public image. Additionally, these studies have shown that through a year-round school

schedule, educators would be able to balance personal lives more evenly and take more frequent vacations at periodic times throughout the year instead of having to plan everything during a traditional extended break in the summer.

Mohajer, Read, and Opheim (1995) found year-round schooling presented many of the benefits listed above to educators. After distributing questionnaires to gain perspective on five hypotheses to 59 year-round school administrators and 46 traditional school administrators, with 71% and 41% response rates respectively, Mohajer et al. found administrators answered that year-round school presented no significant concerns from parents or the community, nor did issues arise in the areas of professional staffing and development. Additionally, Mohajer et al. found year-round schooling to increase student academic achievement and reduce cost factors concerning building expenses. Other benefits to educators such as less burn-out, less absenteeism, better utilization of facilities, and less disciplinary actions were reported from participants. Overall, this study found no major obstacles with the implementation of year-round school.

However, other studies have disagreed partially or completely with the above findings. In addition to highlighting studies that have discredited the evidence of increased student achievement in year-round schools, Wildman et al. (1999) descriptively reviews some of the negative perceptions educators held after experiences with modified school calendars. An administrator in this study revealed that a year-round schedule made him feel like he was never able to take a break from his work because of the unspoken expectations of his district that he still had school obligations during the frequent intersession breaks. He spoke candidly about his support of the traditional school year partially because it allowed him to better balance his time at home with his obligations at

work. The study found that with a year-round schedule, educators' stress was compounded because they were never able to find an instructional rhythm with their students due to the frequent breaks in their schedules. Another educator from this study mentioned that "Teachers lose one or two days of instruction each time they go off track since they have to get grades ready, often have to pack up their rooms while another teacher is moving in, and the kids are in a 'no learning mode'" (p. 470). Furthermore, participants in this study revealed they felt intersessions were not long enough for students needing remediation or enrichment to receive quality support during the breaks and pointed out that many students took vacations during these intersessions. Presented with these concerns, the question arises: If students need remediation, teachers need professional development, and everyone needs these breaks, how will this limited amount of time during intersessions meet all of these goals?

Everhart (2003) found other disadvantages of year-round education to educators, such as the inability to take summer graduate courses and other professional development offered during that time, as well as not having any options for gaining secondary employment during the short intersessions-available during a traditional extended summer vacation. While the majority of the analysis found in the Opheim et al. (2001) study supported year-round education, the study indicated principals agreed that some year-round schedules failed to meet the professional development needs of their educators. Everhart (2003) also found administrators and clerical staff also reported a 12-month modified school calendar to be more strenuous than a 9-month traditional school calendar.

Summary

Year-round education can be implemented in several ways to best meet the needs of students, educators, and communities, but not everyone is convinced this is the best solution for students in public schools in the United States. Researchers have found students receive more balanced, differentiated instruction, more frequent remediation and enrichment opportunities, and experience less learning loss and academic frustration on a year-round schedule than by following a traditional school calendar (Ballinger, 1988; Ballinger, 2005; Heaberlin, 2002; Lowe, 2002; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005). In conjunction with these benefits, year-round education has shown to increase student achievement, especially for at-risk students, and create a more positive, satisfying school environment for students and educators than a traditional school calendar (Ballinger, 1988; Ballinger, 2005; Heaberlin, 2002; Kneese, 1996; Lowe, 2002; McMillen, 2001; Shields & Olberg, 1999, Winter, 2005). Many studies state student, parent, and educator attitudes about school and self improve, along with school attendance, while stress and burnout decrease with year-round school (Haser & Nasser, 2003; Heaberlin, 2002; Lowe, 2002; McMillen, 2001; Winter, 2005). Educators benefit from year-round school by taking advantage of flexible schedule options, lower classroom sizes, increased professional development and reflection opportunities, higher salaries, and more frequent time to create curriculum, plan for instruction, and refresh personal lives (Ballinger, 1995; Haser & Nasser, 2003; Heaberlin, 2002; Shields & Olberg, 1999).

However, other studies argue these results are inconclusive and point out that more research is needed for a more definitive conclusion. Modifying the traditional school calendar to include shorter, more frequent breaks instead of an extended break in

the summer has many potential benefits for everyone, but some studies, such as Curry, Washington, and Zykowski (as cited in Freeman & Hood, 2000) state that these more frequent vacation days might cause inconvenience for families accustomed to a traditional break schedule. Cooper et al. stated that parents worry that their family could be negatively affected by multi-tracking if their children were placed on separate tracks (2003). This study also mentioned that families whose students are involved with athletics or extra-curricular activities might face scheduling conflicts and be competing on school vacation days. Campell (1994) reported no benefit of year-round school to students, and even reported some year-round school students demonstrated lower scores on some standardized tests than their peers attending traditional calendar schools. Other studies, as detailed in Abrambula et al. (1999), have found some educators feel year-round education increased teacher burn-out by adding stress to their professional and personal lives by never allowing them to have adequate, consecutive time for instruction or rest. Another concern is that students and educators are never able to establish a continuous learning environment but rather feel frustrated over the frequent amount of breaks year-round school establish. Additionally, some educators reported year-round school does not realistically accommodate all of the goals proponents of the modified school calendar advocate, but rather distract from personal opportunities while adding professional stress and providing inadequate results regarding the suggested benefits (Wildman et al., 1999). From the literature regarding the impact of year-round school on students and educators, it is clear that additional research needs to be conducted to provide more detailed, reliable results about the implications of a modified school calendar and the perceptions of those involved in the year-round school experience.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions educators in a rural district in Southwest Missouri held of year-round education and the expected transition from a traditional school calendar to a modified school calendar. Presented in this section of the methodology were: (a) instrument and design, (b) participants, (c) site of the study, (d) procedures, and (e) analysis of data.

Instrument and Design

This was a descriptive case study of nine educators within the Nixa Public School District using qualitative semi-structured interviews to illuminate the experience of each participant and detail their current perceptions of year-round education. These educators were chosen through purposive sampling based on their involvement on the district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) strategy five action team, which was investigating innovative structural plans for the Nixa Public Schools with consideration of moving beyond the traditional school calendar by 2020. The participants were selected from various stages of educational development (educational administration, educational counseling, early childhood, elementary, and secondary) to represent the multiple perspectives teachers of differing age groups brought to this topic and provided insight into the numerous complexities that should be considered when regarding educational change.

Many valid and relevant arguments supported and disagreed with the implementation of a modified school calendar, so it was important to study this issue further. The goal of this

case study was to descriptively detail teachers' perceptions hoping to stimulate an invested dialogue between all educators regarding year-round education to support all participants in a transition to a progressive school model. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) stated that one outcome of case study research was a narrative account that provided the researcher (and reader of the case study) with new insights into the way things were and into the kinds of relationships that existed among participants in the study (p. 446). The selection of a descriptive interpretation of the findings was chosen with a desire to ensure transparency into the research data and provide the reader with as much explicit detail of the interviews as possible to portray the experiences of the participants clearly and accurately. Similarly to Winter (2005), the purpose of this study was to develop a deeper comprehension of the perceptions regarding this concept from insider perspectives. The insights represented were authentic and relevant to the changes being proposed in the district that served as the site of this study. These insights could be taken into consideration with regard to any transition involving the school calendar in the future. The primary modes for data collection were interviews, field notes, and observations. A researcher-constructed interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to lead the semi-structured interview. These provide the data for comprehensive findings and emerging themes to help answer the overarching research questions.

Site of the Study

The study took place within the Nixa Public School District located in Christian County, Missouri. According to the 2013 United State Census, Nixa, Missouri had a population of approximately 20,200 people and was one of the fastest growing cities in the state. The same report revealed the mostly rural and suburban Christian County to

have had a population of nearly 80,900 people, and showed a population increase of 42.6% since 2000. This region in Southwest Missouri contained little racial diversity with 95.7% of the population identifying themselves as Caucasian. Hispanic residents made up 2.5%, persons identifying themselves as biracial complete 1.8%, and all other racial minorities made up less the 1% of the population respectively.

Nixa Public Schools included one early learning center (infancy-pre-K), four elementary schools (K-4), one STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) school (K-6), two intermediate schools (5-6), one junior high school (7-8) and one high school (9-12). The district had a total enrollment of nearly 6,000 students for the 2015-2016 school year. As a district, 33.34% of these students received financial assistance, such as free or reduced lunches. The school district's motto was *Excellence in Action*, and academic success had been shown through very competitive scores on Missouri's standardized state assessment, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). During the 2014-2015 school year, Nixa scored nearly 100% on the Annual Performance Report (APR), the assessment given by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to judge the quality and effectiveness of a school district, for the eleventh year in a row. The district had been honored with many other recognitions, including awards for athletic achievement, transportation safety, Special Education, implementation of instructional technology, and given the title of *Accredited with Distinction in Performance* by the Governor of Missouri and DESE for the last consecutive ten years. Additionally, the Nixa Public Schools School Board had been recognized as an Outstanding Board of Education (2001, 2004) and titled School Board Leadership Team (2012) by DESE.

Participants

Through a purposive sampling procedure, nine individuals employed as teachers with Nixa Public Schools (NPS) were chosen to be participants in this study, with eight females and one male. These individuals were representatives of educators in NPS from various categories: two represented educational administration, two represented elementary educators (grades K-6), three represented educators from the junior high level (grades 7-8), and three represented educators from the high school level (grades 9-12). All educators had more than 10 years of educational experience. The participants held at least a Master's degree in education and most had or were currently pursuing further higher education. Only one participant held a doctorate in education.

The researcher identified educators who were interested in this study and were voluntary participants from the district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) Strategy 5 team, which reviewed considerations regarding a progressive school model during the 2014-2015 school year. The participants from this team signed up to investigate year-round school options for the district, and each of them had experience with and prior knowledge of year-round education. The selected participants met the researcher's criteria of representing educators from each educational stage in the district and were an informed decision maker regarding year-round education with a relevant perspective to contribute to this study.

Procedures

The rights and safety of the participants were of the utmost importance to the

researcher during this study. An application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Missouri State University (Appendix B; #16-0340; March 16, 2016) and Nixa Public Schools was filed and accepted before the study began in the Spring of 2016 to ensure that no unforeseen harm was done throughout this research. Each participant was required to sign an informed consent document before contributing to this study and the purpose was thoroughly explained to each individual, along with the intentions the researcher had of the findings. The interviews were held privately in a location determined by the participant so each individual felt comfortable and safe at all times during the study. Participants were able to withdraw from the study with no penalty or loss asked at any point. Because the personal perspectives of each participant were shared with the researcher during the structured interviews, each participant was identified using a pseudonym in all data collection, analysis, and results to protect the privacy of the individual and enhance the honesty and validity of the findings. The participants were asked to use vague descriptions when discussing personal identifying information in regards to this study, such as specific school name, family history, etc. that did not directly affect the findings of the research.

Qualitative data for this study were collected through one-session, semi-structured interviews designed and facilitated by the researcher. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to fill in missing information or gaps in the data. The researcher prompted the participant with a specific, predetermined set of questions during the interview (see Appendix A), but time allowed for the participant to speak freely about their perceptions and ideas with relevance of the study. The approximated time for each interview was 30-60 minutes, but the natural flow of the conversation concluded the interview before or

after this estimated time. The semi-structure of the interviews allowed the researcher to ask clarifying questions that prompted the participants to explain their thoughts further or discuss the reasoning behind the perceptions they shared. The interviews took place outside of the participant's contracted time of work with the district, and were held in a private location chosen by the participant to ensure they felt comfortable and safe while sharing their thoughts and feelings with the researcher during the study.

The interviews were audio-taped and retrospectively transcribed, and the researcher provided each participant with the questions for the interview at least one week prior to the scheduled interview date. In order to avoid distraction from the conversation occurring during the interviews with respect to the participants, field notes were made retrospectively while listening to the audio-recordings of the interview. A constant comparative method of moving in and out of the site through multiple interviews allowed for clarification of ideas and answers to the research questions to emerge.

Data Analysis

Based on the divergent, open-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews used as a data collection instrument in this study and the various perceptions expected from each participating educator, analysis of the data collected from this study was completed by thoroughly reviewing each interview and corresponding field notes and observations individually. After transcribing each interview and detailing my reflections through field notes, data were examined for emerging themes and recurring ideas that presented themselves during each conversation were highlighted. Gay et al. (2012) detailed the data analysis strategy of coding, which helped to identify emerging themes

and examine how many instances each theme was presented during each interview. After coding each interview with corresponding field notes and observations, the interviews were collectively reviewed to determine what similarities and variations were noticed between perceptions.

Through triangulation between the interviews, field notes, and observations, an authentic description of each participant's perceptions of year-round school emerged, while also compiling their perceptions to give insight into the complexity of balancing various perspectives when considering educational change within a district. Findings were presented in the next section.

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to take an in depth look at educator perceptions of year- round school. Presented in this chapter of the results of the study will be: (a) data analysis, and (b) summary.

Data Analysis

A qualitative study was conducted to investigate educator perceptions of year-round school. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes were gathered during the Spring 2016 semester. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method of moving in and out of the site while collecting and analyzing data to uncover the salient patterns. Data triangulation using all of the data sources was employed and Assurances of Trustworthiness were accounted for during the study. The analyses helped answer the overarching research questions.

Research Questions

Question 1: Data analysis revealed that the teachers interviewed as a part of this study were in favor of year-round school as an option for this district. There was a clear understanding from each of the participants that year-round education was an alternative school calendar, which included more frequent breaks throughout 12 months while not extending the number of school days students and educators attended. When defining what year-round education meant to them, the participants often started by clarifying misconceptions about what year-round education is not. For example, one participant described her definition by saying:

Year-round education does not mean we have longer days. It does not mean students go more days. It does not mean teachers work more days. It means there is less of a giant gap in the year where students don't have the opportunity to go to school. They can go to summer school, but it's just not the same thing--and that's just four weeks.

The CSIP Committee members interviewed confirmed that the committee was named *Progressive School Model* instead of *Year-Round School* to avoid community misconceptions, but noted that many people in the community still mistook this initiative for an extended calendar model. Because the committee's task was to present research about year-round education, a customized progressive model was not developed for this district; however, many participants were in favor of a nine week on, three week off school schedule. As it was mentioned in one interview:

The three week break could be used as a remediation time. Every quarter, you would have three weeks off. One or two weeks of that could be used like summer school and students could go to classes to cover anything they miss or gain enrichment.

Another participant described the committee's work by saying:

One of the things we looked at was shifting the time off so that the breaks were more consistent throughout the year. So, you didn't have this long time in the summer where students could forget what they'd learned or lose the momentum. In the past, there has been a lot of re-teaching in the first quarter of the school year instead of building on, so the idea was to eliminate that. Instead of year-round school, our focus was always year-round learning.

All of the participants noted that year-round education would have multiple benefits to students, educators, and families. Most frequently mentioned were students would receive more remedial and enrichment support during intersession breaks, educators would experience less teacher burn-out, and families would be able to plan for more

diverse vacations and other quality-time opportunities during various parts of the year instead of summer alone. As one participant noted:

When speaking as an educator on the benefits on year-round education, you can't hit the remediation and enrichment hard enough. As a parent, letting the kids not burn out is the biggest benefit to me. Two or three weeks off every quarter refreshes the students and the teachers. I've noticed that students are so excited and energized to come back to school after a two or three week break during the Christmas holiday, and hopefully they would feel the same with more frequent breaks throughout the year.

In addition to reenergizing, more frequent breaks would give members of the district the chance to schedule needed appointments outside of school time without missing material.

According to one educator:

Every 45 days, teachers can go to the doctor and get their checkups. We can all go to the dentist. You know, right now we schedule everything in the summer. Weddings are in the summer, dentist appointments, doctors visits...everything is in the summer! Surgeries that can be put off wait until the summer. So, year-round school would allow teachers to avoid having to plan everything for the summer.

When asked if the participants would be interested in moving to a progressive school model if the opportunity presented, all participants indicated being in favor of a transition to year-round education. Some participants believed the district should move to year-round education because the benefits outweighed the drawbacks. Others felt optimistic because the traditional school calendar was an area that had not changed in a century of public education and needed to be remodeled. An excited participant expressed her elation by saying, "I would be ecstatic if we would move to a progressive school model! I would go to it in a heartbeat. I think it would improve so many elements of the learning model." While all participants expressed interest in transitioning to year-

round education, it was noted that many felt more research needed to be reviewed before deciding the best options for this district. Participants mentioned that being labeled a progressive school should not be done just for a title. An educator from the respondents said:

Any changes we make should not be made just to be making a change. We need to look at the reason behind the change. If we see that it is going to add to our district, we should do it.

Question 2: While all participants were in favor of moving to year-round school, the teachers interviewed during this study indicated some professional and personal concerns about the transition. Many participants mentioned the change from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model would take preparation, community education, and time for everyone to adjust. "It would just be a transition" mentioned a participant; and then continued:

The same thing happened in this district when we went to Collaboration Time and early release on Fridays. It took everybody some time to ask, 'Ok, how are we going to do this?' Then once it became our norm, it was no big deal. To me, this would be the same way. The first year or two may just be getting everyone accustomed to the new way of doing business, and once we got over that hurdle, I think we could make some big improvements.

Another participant noted that "Anytime you change something people are accustomed to, there is a hesitation. Change can be hard." These concerns were echoed when a participant pointed out:

We are creatures of habit. That is one reason we looked at modifying our current calendar to include more frequent breaks instead of completely changing our calendar. We hoped to ease people into it if they were willing to try it. We have to continue to look at the benefits and get through the complaints. Eventually, people

would get used to this way of doing things and then if you would change from it, people wouldn't like that.

Attendance was another topic presented as both a concern and something that could be addressed by the implementation of year-round school. As one participant mentioned:

Families are so used to having time off in the summer that attendance could be a drawback at first. We would know when those breaks would be and could plan for that, but not everybody would do that. People don't even do that now when we have a longer summer break.

To counter this concern, another educator sympathized with families who currently cannot take summer breaks from work and can only take vacation time during the school year. Year-round school might give families more options to plan vacations around school. While the adjustment in schedule could be a concern for some, the opportunity to take time off more frequently could accommodate families' work schedules with more flexibility.

During the interviews, educators also mentioned personal concerns, such as childcare options and making sure all children within a family were on the same academic schedule so calendars did not overlap. With more frequent breaks that were shorter than the traditional time off, families would need to have childcare accommodations. The concern was described by one educator when she said:

Right now, it is easier for working families to find childcare for three months during the summer than it would be to find someone for two weeks every 45 days. We would need to assist families in finding options that work for them. It's hard to find a worker every two weeks every 45 days; but we do that with after school and before school care, as well as bus drivers. There are people that want to do it, it will just be about finding those people and treating them well so they will stay.

Another participant suggested:

Right now when we have time off, we have programs in place like XLT (the district's before and after school care program). It isn't as if we couldn't provide options for the other breaks. One thing we discussed was having a system in place for low-income families where they are not paying for daycare. Developing that would be an important factor in gaining support from the community.

Aligning a progressive school model with athletic and other extra-curricular calendars was one of the most frequently noted concerns from all interviewees, along with coordinating schedules for secondary students who elected to take dual-enrollment courses for college. While the educators interviewed for this study did not find these to be personal concerns and suggested solutions for how the district could accommodate academic and athletic calendars, each of them mentioned that community members were very reluctant to make any changes. A particular comment made was that "Athletics really was a game-changer. That put a stop to the discussion with some members of the community completely. There was not a lot of openness, and there was not an agreement that we could align." Because this district competes with surrounding area school districts in athletics, the variance in school schedule could create a problem when creating athletic calendars. While some sporting teams, including girls' and boys' basketball, currently attend athletic events during academic breaks, such as Winter Holiday, there has been resistance from other teams and groups to modify their calendars. "We should not be driven by athletics," one educator stated, "these extra-curricular things are very important to our students, but they should not drive district decisions. Accommodations can be made."

Professionally, educators mentioned that instructional planning schedules needed

to be revised to accommodate the new school calendar. Participants also noted concerns about the timing of professional development and were interested to know how a progressive calendar accommodated mandatory and optional opportunities. As educators did not want to increase the number of required days or attend mandatory professional development during breaks, it was suggested that the first or last day of each school period be devoted to professional development and collaboration. For example, if the district adopted a 45-15 progressive model, the first or 44th day would be dedicated to a teacher work day.

The primary concern all educators discussed during the interviews was to gain a clear understanding of which progressive school model would work best in the district. Many mentioned that addressing this concern would help educate the community, clarify misconceptions, and open further dialogue about year-round education as an option for the district. An interviewee mentioned:

I would want to hear from all stakeholders before we implemented year-round education. Not just about whether or not they are in favor, but more about what components they would be most interested in revising and developing if we did go to year-round school.

Another participant mentioned that there were misconceptions across the district and in the community about what year-round education was and clarification was needed. She stated:

Everyone needs to understand what year-round school means. It doesn't mean going to school all year long...Some people just hear the word 'year.' I think there is a misconception. There are so many different kinds that it's hard to know what people mean by year-round schooling, so people are automatically going to pull back because it's an unknown.

All participants understood there were various options for year-round school, and all were interested in collaborating further to investigate which option would best meet the needs of all parties involved.

Through observations during the interviews, it was noted that the participants shared many community concerns but shared no concerns without offering suggestions for solutions. The concerns mentioned were often noted from third-party opinions found by the participants during prior research and discussion, and many clarified that these concerns were not directly from the participant themselves. Some participants even stated they had no personal concerns about a transition from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model. When asked what concerns she felt personally, one participant stated:

None. None at all. Year-round school is a brilliant idea. Not being tied to a school model that was designed 100 years ago to meet a completely different demographic and different need. I think the idea of revamping the schedule to work with where we are now in society is needed. We need to interact with the world around us, so I don't think we need to be in school every week of the year. Our brains don't operate that way. We need time to take the information that we're learning and apply it. If we don't give students that time, they're not going to retain or progress in their learning. So, I like the idea of looking at things anew, and coming up with something that fits where we are right now and where we want to be.

While mentioning concerns, several participants reiterated that these concerns were no more pressing than their existing concerns involving a traditional school calendar. A participant revealed:

I would like to know more about the data that has been discovered from districts who have tried year-round education, but it is hard to believe we are comparing apples to apples because there are so many different ways to implement year-round schooling. People want to see evidence of the benefits and not just hear what we think year-round education will do, but everyone has a different idea of how it should be done and that affects the data.

Another participant noted:

I looked at a lot of the research that promoted or discredited different school schedules, and there isn't a lot to promote year-round education unless it is used effectively. When districts implement year-round education to meet a need such as overcrowding, student achievement may not rise because it isn't being addressed through the calendar. However, when districts use the breaks in the schedules to promote remediation, enrichment, and rest, everybody gains. The most effective option for our district would be a calendar that allowed a break during each quarter that allowed time for remediation, enrichment, and vacation.

While several participants mentioned that research on the topic varied, it was noted that many districts who have implemented year-round education have done so very successfully. A participant cited "They had higher retention rates and higher moral because they were rested." Another participant said, "I know when I come back from Spring break or Christmas break, I feel renewed. How wonderful would that be every quarter?" Other participants mentioned personal family members and friends who lived in an area where year-round education was implemented and mentioned benefits such as lower budgeting costs and better use of building facilities depending on the model used.

More passionately mentioned from the participants than concerns about the transition to year-round education were concerns that the efforts of their CSIP committee were not validated. Many of the participants mentioned disappointment as their research and suggestions were rejected and very quickly dismissed when it was presented to the CSIP Board after months of work. While most of the participants mentioned they would serve on the committee again if given the opportunity, all of the members felt their work was not given enough recognition. The frustration was noted by statements like:

It is disheartening when you find research with a group of people for months and months and months and you're excited because you find that we can work smarter, not harder. And we can have better tests results and higher moral, and all of that. And then,

it's not accepted because it's not the norm. Regardless of how innovative this district is, without really strong leadership, change doesn't happen. People don't know how to navigate change often; that's why we've kept this same system for a hundred years. Well, it's not going to work. The millennials are changing the face of the work place and people are changing what they consider to be important.

In addition, a participant mentioned:

I think we did our due diligence in trying to make sure all of the concerns were addressed. And then to have it dismissed so quickly just reminded me how stuck people are in the familiar. Even though I work in one of the most innovative districts in the region, a lot of the decision makers are accustomed to this one way of being. When we're saying, 'This doesn't work,' they are saying, 'Well, it worked for us; it worked for our grandparents; it worked for everybody else.' There is a disconnect between older generations of decision makers and today's generation of needs.

Many participants noted that the district's Superintendent of Schools was a promoter of year-round education, and the committee completed their work with the hope of making a difference in the lives of students. One educator said, "The superintendent has always been an advocate, so participants were confused as to why the committee's efforts were denied quickly with little attention." These feelings were mentioned again when another interviewee stated:

This is the third time since our superintendent has been with the district that it has been presented to our CSIP board since it happens every five years. It's always a topic, but they've never done enough advertising of it and planning to let people know what it actually is. They just say, "Here it is!" And then the committee says, "No, we're not into it."

Some participants were concerned their work would continue to be denied if the district was not serious about looking at year-round education as an option. A participant expressed frustration by stating:

My only question would be: Why do we keep putting it on the CSIP review? Why do we keep putting it on there if we are going to go in and present and get told *no* very quickly. We worked for months, and it was disheartening. If we aren't going

to be open to it, don't put it on there.

While concerns about their work not being validated were numerous, some felt that this work was laying the foundation for future efforts. A participant remarked:

There are a lot of people willing to look at different models because they want to see success from students. While we weren't successful this time, I do know that there is a ripple effect. You know, like when the butterfly flaps his wings and causes a tsunami. Things may occur because we've set this into motion. Even if this wasn't heard at that meeting, it is out there. There are people discussing it. There are people who have heard us and are looking at the research.

Question 3: All participants noted that the professional development opportunities needed for the transition from a traditional school calendar to a continuous learning calendar stemmed from the concerns mentioned above and centered around open-ended collaboration time to hold discussions, gather and share ideas, and plan instruction." We would need time together in departments or teams where we could plan our instruction and the remediation and enrichment that could be addressed during the breaks" one participant mentioned. Another said "We would need to decide what we are going to teach each quarter and design our remediation plans ahead of time so that teachers can prepare." The participants felt a scope and sequence would need to be developed for educators to decide when each of the learning standards were going to be taught and how to effectively teach them during the allotted time. A participant noted that if shorter, more frequent breaks led to higher student retention, less review time would be needed and the curriculum could be covered in more depth during the school calendar. Additionally, decisions would need to be made about requirements or options for teaching during the intercessions. An interviewee posited:

If we broke up our traditional summer school schedule into the intercessions after the quarters, you'll have to decide if teachers who have elected to teach summer school are going to handle that remediation and enrichment, or if all teachers would be responsible for their own students during those periods. There would be a lot of trial and error into perfecting these decisions.

The participants noted collaborative planning could be spent investigating districts who had successfully implemented a continuous learning calendar, reviewing and customizing calendar options that would best meet the needs of this district, and revising the current academic and athletic schedules to accommodate this new calendar. An educator from the group suggested that the transition be made over a two or three year time frame similarly to the technology initiative the district is currently implementing to give the district time to prepare and the community time to become more educated on the topic. She proposed that "if we knew two years from now this is what we are doing, we could start preparing in small baby steps."

Summary

The data revealed that educators in this study were in favor of year-round education and found several benefits to students, educators, and families, including lessening student learning loss during traditional, extended summer breaks; raising student achievement through remediation and enrichment during intercessions; lessening student and educator burnout; and giving all stakeholders more frequent opportunities to plan for activities, such as vacations or appointments, outside of school time. While the participants in the study indicated unanimous support of a transition to a progressive school model, professional and personal concerns were mentioned about the transition,

such as accommodating extra-curricular schedules, having childcare options during intercessions, allowing time for educators and community members to ease into the transition, and preparing for the adjustment through adequate collaboration and planning opportunities. Professionally, educators expressed interest in developing new instructional schedules to design a scope and sequence that would accommodate year-round education and ensuring professional development opportunities would be offered during the existing required school days without additional mandatory work days being added. Personally, maintaining scheduling consistency at the elementary and secondary level to avoid overlapping intersession schedules for families with multiple children was noted. During the interviews, educators noted these concerns could be addressed during collaborative discussions and many solutions had already been found. Frequently mentioned, educators felt all parties involved in the transition needed to have a clear understanding of what the new calendar would look like and how it would accommodate the needs of the district and community. The largest concern found in this study was participants felt their work on the CSIP committee had not been given adequate consideration and validation from the CSIP board because of misconceptions of year-round education. These sentiments were reflected when another participant said:

A school district does what a community is ready for. A school district should always reflect a community. Why are we not doing this now? Because there is a fine line between if the district drives what the community is doing or whether the community drives what the district is doing. It is a balance, and we're just not ready yet.

As a suggestion to improve communication and prevent this concern from reoccurring, one participant proposed:

We need to expose and educate the community to this idea. If the district really wants to try year-round education, we need to educate the community and parents a year in advance before the CSIP was ready for review. So, on the fourth year of this CSIP in 2019, we should be getting the word out and talking about it.

All participants felt that more needed to be done in the future to inform and prepare district and community members to review all CSIP strategies. The next CSIP review for this district will be in 2020.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine educator perceptions of year-round education. Presented in this section will be: (a) conclusions, (b) applications, and (c) recommendations for future study.

Conclusions

To the extent the subjects were representative of typical elementary and secondary educators and based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion appears warranted:

Question 1: With a common understanding of the definition of a progressive school model, all participants in this study indicated their favor of year-round education as an option for their school district. Each educator also stated there were various misconceptions surrounding the concept of year-round education within the school district and surrounding community, which influenced some to have a negative perception of the topic. The participants felt year-round education offered students, educators, and families many benefits, including more frequent opportunities for rest, remediation, and enrichment that could lead to higher student achievement, less teacher burnout, and more continuous learning with less learning loss occurring during breaks.

Question 2: The participants indicated concerns about moving from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model that included ensuring time for district and community members to adjust and prepare for the transition, providing childcare opportunities during breaks, and working with extra-curricular groups and athletic teams

to align coordinating schedules as best as possible. Educators suggested additional collaboration time as an option to research year-round education further, educate district and community members on the concept, and ensure everyone had a clear understanding of the definition of year-round education and how it would look in their district. The most passionately and commonly mentioned concern from all participants in this study was the perception of a lack of validation and consideration given to their team efforts to research and present year-round education as an option for their district to the CSIP Board during the most recent review in 2015.

Question 3: The participants of this study suggested professional development opportunities that would best support a transition to a continuous learning calendar would include open-ended, collaborative time for discussion and planning. Each educator indicated a need for more time to gather and share ideas with colleagues and plan for instruction that would accommodate a new school calendar. Specifically, educators suggested the current scope and sequence be redesigned to include shorter, more frequent breaks and remediation and enrichment instruction be planned to occur during these intercessions. Additionally, the participants stated that decisions about teaching requirements during these intercessions would need to be developed and agreed upon by district members. All participants agreed that professional development should be implemented gradually and included into the school calendar with no additional work days being required.

Applications

This descriptive case study was completed by collecting qualitative data through one-session, semi-structured interviews designed by the facilitator and analyzed using a constant comparative method to determine educator perceptions of year-round education as an option for their school district. While gaining an understanding of these perceptions, the researcher used ten divergent, open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) to examine the participants' concerns about transitioning from a traditional school calendar to a progressive school model and also gained insight into their perceptions of professional development to assist the district in this transition.

Analysis of the data revealed the participants of this study had a clear comprehension of the complexities of year-round education and had dedicated many hours researching current literature and working collaboratively to prepare and present this concept to the CSIP board as an option for the district. The favor of year round education expressed by each individual was gained after consideration of the potential positive and negative aspects of this calendar, and it was evident that all participants were well-informed after volunteering so much of their time to invest in their CSIP committee. While many concerns about the transition to an alternative school schedule were mentioned, several of the participants mentioned concerns of third-party community members and stated those were not personal concerns. For the concerns mentioned, participants were eager to offer suggestions for solutions or expressed interest in collaborating with others to find ways to accommodate everyone's needs as best as possible. Time to collaborate and plan with colleagues was suggested as the most beneficial use of professional development resources to assist district members in

preparing and adjusting to a transition to year-round education. Aside from the topic of year-round education, participants mentioned that extended collaboration time would be helpful regardless of whether the district considered a change in school calendar or not. The educators were all in agreement that the misconceptions surrounding year-round education had not been adequately addressed, but all were confident that with more education and continued discussion more people would be interested in investigating the concept of year-round education. They believed more effort should be given to move this model forward in the agenda of the school district.

Most notably during the analysis of this study were the participants' perceptions of a lack of consideration and validation given to their efforts as a team to present year-round education to the CSIP Board. After months of voluntary collaboration and research outside of contracted school time, it was stated that the CSIP Board rejected their suggestions in a matter of minutes without expressing much interest in learning about the team's research or giving year-round education adequate consideration. Even though all participants were advocates for year-round education, many felt their time as a CSIP committee could have been better spent investigating another topic in which the board would have been more interested. It was felt by the participants and the researcher that the school district should value better the reports and work their committees and working groups have done. Increased education among district and community members was suggested as a potential way to raise awareness about year-round education in the future. Although their frustration was evident, each participant stated they would advocate for year-round education again if it continued to appear on the district's CSIP in the future.

Recommendations for Future Study

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for future study were made:

1. It was recommended that additional time be taken by district and community members to further research progressive school models, educate one another, and collaborate with each other to investigate year-round education as an option for this district. This would allow misconceptions about the concept to be addressed and all stakeholders to work together to determine the best way to meet the needs of the district and the community.
2. It was recommended that a larger sample size be used. Increased number of participants would strengthen the test of significance and allow more individuals to contribute their perceptions.
3. It was recommended that more communication be offered between CSIP committees and the CSIP board to ensure validation of the efforts extended by all parties. To show appreciation and collaborative concern, it would have benefitted everyone to have had a clear understanding of why each CSIP strategy was reviewed and why each committee's presentation was either accepted or rejected by the board.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview Protocol

1. In your own words, what is year-round education?
2. In our district, what do you think year-round education would look like?
3. What are the benefits of year-round education?
4. What are the drawbacks to year-round education?
5. What concerns do you have about year-round education?

Note: Potential follow-up to questions 3-5 might be to ask if there would be various benefits/drawbacks/concerns from the perspective of an educator vs. parent vs. administrator vs. community member. How might these roles in the community vary in regard to their perceptions of year-round education?

6. What questions do you have about year-round education?
7. What perception do you have of year-round education as an option for our district?
8. What do you think educators need in order to prepare for a transition to a year-round school calendar?
9. What other considerations should be made regarding year-round education?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion about year-round education that we have not covered?

Appendix B. IRB Notice

To: Cynthia Hail
Childhood Ed and Fam Studies
HILL 123 901 S National Ave Springfield MO 65897-0027

Approval Date: 3/16/2016
Expiration Date of Approval: 3/15/2017

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
Submission Type: Initial
Expedited Category: 4.Noninvasive clinical data
Study #: 16-0340

Study Title: A Descriptive Case Study Investigating the Perceptions of Year-Round Education Held by Educators

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Investigator's Responsibilities:

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the procedures found at <http://orc.missouristate.edu>). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB following the adverse event procedures at the same website.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

CC:
Chelsea Wallace, Childhood Ed And Fam Studies