

Year-Round Education in Douglas County Schools

In 1984, the Board of Education, faced with tremendous growth throughout the county, determined the best way to accommodate this growth and continue to meet the needs of students was to adopt a year-round calendar at the elementary level. The significant cost savings from a year-round program allows the district to build fewer schools.

As one of the fastest growing school districts in the nation, year-round education is an important strategy in use by Douglas County School District to cope with intense growth without sacrificing high standards of excellence. As the practice of year-round education becomes increasingly widespread, people and programs are adapting to a new set of needs and opportunities. Flexibility, enrichment, academic retention and cost savings are positive benefits of utilizing a four-track school year.

Advantages of year-round education include:

- Less learning loss with shorter periodic vacations. Students retain more of what they have learned during the previous session.
- Better use of existing space, furniture, equipment and materials by increasing student use throughout the year.
- Off-track time allows school districts to expand learning opportunities — electives, specialty courses and remediation — to all students.
- Better variety and flexibility of family vacations, including off-season vacation opportunities. For families who have middle school and high school students attending school on the conventional calendar, it is important to note that children attending schools on either calendar will have the same vacation dates for two weeks in the winter and up to five weeks in common during the summer.
- Less student boredom during the traditional three-month summer vacation. Instruction is not influenced by the school calendar; in fact it may be enhanced. Studies of the effect on learning indicate that students require less overall review when breaks are shorter than the traditional three-month vacation period. Shorter, more frequent vacations allow both students and teachers the opportunity to return from breaks with a refreshed attitude and renewed energy.

How the year-round calendar works . . .

Even though students go to school the same number of days on a four-track, year-round calendar, school is in session 48 weeks out of the year rather than the conventional 36. However, only three-fourths of the student population is in school at any particular time. The student population is divided into four, relatively equal-sized groups called tracks. Each track follows a slightly different calendar. Each school quarter is 12 weeks, rather than nine weeks long, and each track takes a break sometime during each quarter. Teachers are on break during the same time that the students are on break, and remain with the same students for the entire school year. When students return from break, they “track-in” at a different classroom. Each grade level rotates tracks among three classrooms. When one track goes on the break, the incoming track will utilize their classroom. Teachers return a day in advance of students to prepare the classroom for the next session.

Three of the four tracks (A, C and D) start the new school year on the same day in July. The fourth track (B) starts three weeks later, when Track C begins its first three-week break. Although Tracks C and D start with short sessions (3 weeks and 6 weeks respectively), their next sessions fall into the regular nine weeks in, three weeks out schedule. The only time the cycle varies is during the two-week summer break and the two-week winter break.

Frequently asked questions

Who decides if a school should be on a four-track calendar?

It is a collaborative decision between the principal and the school district's Executive Director of Support Services, based on enrollment projections and capacity.

Why aren't the middle schools and high schools four-track?

The 45/15 year-round schedule is difficult to implement at the middle school level and nearly impossible at the high school level due to the number of courses and electives offered. In the past, however, several Douglas County middle schools have operated on the year-round schedule due to capacity demands.

Why doesn't the District just build more schools?

Recent estimates indicate the cost of moving off of four-track would cost in excess of \$45 million. Given the amount of debt needed to build the schools needed for growth and the debt ceiling mandated by law this is an impossibility now and in the near future.

How are families assigned to tracks?

Track assignments are based on space availability, with consideration given to the first choice of the family. All children in a family are kept on the same track. Decisions regarding track assignments are made by each individual school.

Do families who have children in high school or middle school get preferential track assignments to match the conventional calendar?

No, everyone in this process has an equal chance. The calendars also change from year to year so that the track that matches well this year may not match in future years.

What are my options if the four-track schedule does not work for my family?

There are many choices for parents in our area if you are willing to transport your child to a different school. Both Littleton and Cherry Creek schools are soliciting students for their schools between Arapahoe Road and County Line Road. Littleton Public Schools has initiated transporting students from select Highlands Ranch locations. No tuition is required since Colorado allows open enrollment across district lines. In addition, there are several charter schools that operate on a traditional calendar.

Will tracks be assigned by neighborhood?

No, tracks are assigned based on space availability in conjunction with parent requests.

Can I request a track change?

Yes. Requests are dated upon receipt and accommodated as space becomes available up to the start of the school year.

Are my elementary age children ever off at the same time as my middle and high school students?

That is dependent on each track to some extent. The year-round calendar provides common days with the traditional calendar across tracks as much as possible. All students in the district are on vacation for two weeks during the winter holiday and for two weeks around July 4th.

Is there off-track day care provided at the school?

Many schools offer child care programs on-site. Some programs are school sponsored and some are contracted with outside childcare providers. Contact schools directly for site-specific information.