

Year-round school may benefit students



Photo by [Jennifer Simonson](#) , Star Tribune

Paideia Academy fifth-grader Caitlin Driscoll, right, paid for an item that she won during a school auction. Students at Paideia earn “money” for good behavior and can use it to bid on toys or candy.

Teachers and parents report improvements in behavior and academics as the number of year-round schools increases.

By [Emily Johns](#), Star Tribune

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When Sam Larson's friends are at school and he's on winter break, he hides behind a snowbank and waits for them to come home. The seventh-grader waits for the school bus to stop in his Lakeville neighborhood, then ... Bam! He pelts them with snowballs. "I like having a different [school] schedule," Larson said. "I like to skateboard and snowboard, so in the winter, I can go play in the snow." Larson attends Apple Valley's Paideia Academy charter school, a school where students have classes year-round but have several weeks of break between each quarter. Public school teachers in districts with traditional summers-off schedules say October is when they can finally start teaching students new material, after having spent the first few weeks reviewing academic subjects and behavior expectations.

At Paideia (pronounced Pi-DAY-ah), teachers and students say the year-round schedule keeps students from forgetting too much over the summer, from academic subjects such as math to how to raise your hand and ask to go to the bathroom.

"There is a lot less regression at the end of the summer," said Chris Pellant, the school's principal. "And they get a little break after every quarter, so they get rejuvenated and they're ready to come back and work hard."

Increasing numbers

Minnesota has at least 26 year-round schools, according to the National Association for Year-Round Education. Although most of those are not charter schools, the number of year-round schools in the state is rising because of the growth of charter schools.

Recently, the Department of Education approved two year-round charter schools that can open as soon as next fall in Minneapolis. The schools will be the first two in the state providing the Knowledge is Power Program, a nationwide program that has been recognized for improving performance among at-risk students and helping them get into college.

Paideia Academy is a K-7 charter school that opened in 2005 and serves about 330 students. The school operates on a "core knowledge" curriculum, which focuses on giving students a good understanding of many different subjects.

The school year is on the quarter system, with a six-week break in the summer and two to four weeks between the other quarters.

Fourth-grader Peter Flynn of Eagan admits there is a downside to the schedule. He has wanted to play in baseball and soccer leagues but can't. And he sometimes gets bored when he is on vacation and neighbor kids aren't.

In August, going to school after playing until sundown the night before is also hard. He sleeps with a tomato stake in his bed so he can turn down the volume on his radio alarm clock, which his mom has strategically placed out of reach of his bed.

But overall, he likes it.

"Some of my friends' moms make them do flash cards every day so they don't forget math," Peter said. "I don't have to."

Re-teaching behavior

Sixth-grade teacher Jessica Noland taught at another charter school for six years before coming to Paideia. With a more traditional agrarian schedule, Noland remembers spending four or five weeks in September reteaching kids.

At Paideia, she said, that was cut to one or two weeks. She's also trained in teaching English as a Second Language classes, and the shorter summer break helps those students retain their language skills.

So far, most of Paideia's evidence that the schedule is helping students is anecdotal. In statewide standardized tests delivered last spring, every subgroup of students at the school was making "adequate yearly progress."

Fifth-grade teacher Erin Harmon said she loves the schedule.

"I wasn't a believer until I actually started teaching under this schedule," Harmon said. "And I actually saw the difference in retention."

Students at Paideia attend school for the same number of days per year as students at more traditional public schools, but their school day is about an hour longer.

"This schedule is funner because we have longer breaks separating the school year," said fourth-grader Anna Payne of Lakeville. "My parents like it 'cause I don't forget as much over the summer."

Emily Johns • 612-518-9294

Emily Johns • ejohns@startribune.com