

Website: The Charlotte Observer

Publisher: The McClatchy Company

URL: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/08/18/1628866/cms-talking-year-round-schools.html>

## CMS talking year-round schools

**Board directs staff to study the idea as a means to relieve school overcrowding.**

By: Mark Price

Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010

After years of casual discussion of year-round schools, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board decided Tuesday to have its staff formally study the pros and cons.

The decision came as the board discussed options for relieving overcrowding at a time when there is no money to build new schools.

At-large board member Kaye McGarry prompted the decision but cautioned it was an idea that the board would have to sell to the community.

"If we feel it's something viable to (try), we should," she said. "We're no longer an agricultural economy that needs summer off."

Board member Joe White noted year-round schools is not going to be an easy sell, given public outcry to simpler proposals on when CMS should start and end classes. "If the board doesn't have enough to do, let them research that," he said pointedly.

The strongest opposition came from board member Rhonda Lennon, who suggested year-round school would create an exodus of families out of the district.

"For those of you who don't have kids in school, that's a great idea," Lennon told the board. "I think the public that has kids will think 'Are you kidding?' Anything you can think of that has to do with kids; it is geared toward doing it in the summer."

In the 1990s, CMS offered year-round schools as a magnet program. Wake County has 46 year-round elementary and middle schools, which allows the district to expand the use of school buildings 20 percent to 33 percent as students rotate in and out.

In 2007-08, parents sued to stop Wake from assigning students to year-round schedules, but the N.C. Supreme Court upheld Wake's right to do so.

Studies show year-round schedules can boost student performance by replacing the long summer holiday with shorter breaks. Typical year-round options have children attending classes for nine weeks, followed by three weeks off.

They also can hold down the need for new schools because the staggered schedules allow more kids to be taught in the same space. But the unconventional scheduling can frustrate parents trying to arrange car pools or vacations.

In past years, when enrollment was growing faster than CMS could build new schools, Superintendent Peter Gorman mentioned year-round classes as an option to relieve crowding. But previous boards showed little interest. Five new members were elected last November, and this is the first time the topic has come up since the new majority took office.

Neither Gorman nor his staff broached the subject Tuesday.

"That strong a directive was unanticipated," said Mike Raible, the district's executive director of planning and project management.

"Why now? ... The lack of capital resources, the lack of operating resources and we're facing a funding cliff in terms of federal resources. ... As far as those schools that are overcrowded, this could be a solution."

Staff writer Ann Doss Helms contributed.