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Jacqueline Gaye Bye

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NORTH DAKOTA ADMINISTRATORS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON
SCHOOL CALENDARS: ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota

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2021

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This dissertation, submitted by Jacqueline Gaye Bye in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Jacqueline Gaye Bye
November 30, 2021

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This work is dedicated to my grandchildren.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this qualitative flexible design research study was to discover if North Dakota should revise North Dakota PK-12 school calendar requirements for the academic and social-emotional development of students. Innovative reforms that might be beneficial in revising the North Dakota school calendar were researched. A literature review was completed which included relevant, and current (at the time of this study), research about school calendar revisions both nationally and internationally. This research may be a useful guideline of what would be an appropriate amount of time students should spend in school to benefit students both academically and socially-emotionally. Data was collected and analyzed through an open-ended narrative survey of North Dakota school superintendents, principals, and teachers.

Participants in this study included superintendents, principals, and teachers from within North Dakota. North Dakota administrators and teachers provided their perceptions about making changes to school calendars in North Dakota. Although only 21 responded out of the 444 who were recruited, information they provided was beneficial in providing some insight into what educators within North Dakota believed about school calendar changes.

Over half (52%) the respondents felt more hours should be required for elementary students in North Dakota. Only 20% of respondents felt the required hours

should be increased for Grades 7-12. One innovative idea was to *not* require a specific number of hours, but to personalize the time required in school to the learner.

The literature review revealed the concept of a modified year-round school year is a revision that has research to back up its effectiveness. Most respondents (74%) were not in favor of a modified year-round school calendar in North Dakota. Reasons provided for not pursuing a modified year-round school calendar were based on family and community needs, teachers wanting their summers off, family vacations, and other activities students may be involved in.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, student achievement, modified school calendar

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*"Do the Best You Can Until You Know Better . . .
Then When You Know Better, Do Better"*

~Maya Angelou (1994)

As educators, we are living in a time when we have the resources quickly available to us to determine what students need academically and emotionally to have a successful fulfilling life. As Maya Angelou's (1994) words remind us, now that we know better, we need to do better.

The PK-12 public school system in the United States has been a focal point of communities for hundreds of years. During a student's educational career, summer vacation has developed into a commonly accepted rite. Is that rite causing students of North Dakota to fall behind in their academic and social-emotional skills? Do North Dakota students need more time in school to meet academic and social-emotional challenges of their future? Societal needs, and not student educational needs, have dictated school calendars throughout history. Is it time North Dakota develops school calendars based on educational needs of students and not just society's needs? It is the responsibility of all educational leaders to establish a system that prepares students to be academically and socially-emotionally prepared to enter a world that is ever-changing. The North Dakota educational system must also evolve to meet those changing needs.

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 15.1 statutes guide education in North Dakota. They have one entity, the North Dakota Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee, to evaluate their effectiveness. The University of North Dakota Educational Cohort #8 (personal communication, March 3, 2021) explained, “As inferred by Chairman David Monson in the minutes of the Education Policy Committee meeting on October 2, 2019, it is time ‘to recommend changes to any laws found to be irrelevant, duplicative, inconsistent, or unclear’ (Assel, 2019, p. 4).”

Following this Education Committee meeting, a need to research and make recommendations about revising NDCC education statutes was brought to the attention of our University of North Dakota Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort #8. As a cohort of working North Dakota education leaders, we “believed the knowledge and experience within our group would be a natural fit for this task” (North Dakota Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort #8, personal communication, March 3, 2021). This was the beginning of my interest in researching the North Dakota school calendar requirements and to identify possible revisions that would improve the quality of PK-12 education in the state of North Dakota.

Based on my experience, school calendar length in North Dakota has not changed much since it was developed years ago. The calendar being used at the time of this study was developed for the agrarian society of the past in North Dakota when many students helped on the family farm and were needed at home during the busiest times of the year. Across our nation, economic and societal needs, not educational needs, dictated the structure of our school year calendar of the past (Hopkins, 2009).

We are now at a time in education when needs of our students are changing rapidly. The fast-changing world we live in begs us to find what time requirement in school will prepare students to be academically and socially-emotionally equipped to be leaders of society. Throughout this study, I researched and analyzed what was current and relevant literature at the time of this study, in addition to historical literature. Through a survey, I utilized North Dakota administrator and educator perceptions regarding revisions that might be beneficial to North Dakota's PK-12 school calendar and a benefit the students of North Dakota.

My goal was to discover if the traditional PK-12 North Dakota school calendar (in place at the time of this study) has been the best way to educate students. Or, if North Dakota should consider revising PK-12 school calendar requirements for the academic and social-emotional development of students. I was also searching for innovative strategies that would be beneficial in revising our North Dakota school calendar. I wanted to find out what amount of time in school might be most beneficial to the academic and social-emotional development of students. As a state, we want to prepare students for life in the 21st century, and for being leaders of society.

Need for Study

Preparing students to enter a world that is ever-changing means the education systems should also be evolving to meet those changing needs. Education in North Dakota is guided by North Dakota Century Code 15.1 Elementary and Secondary Education statutes, which provide schools with educational expectations of the state of North Dakota. The laws begin as bills, which are introduced at each North Dakota legislative session in odd numbered years.

In 2019, during North Dakota’s 66th Legislative Assembly, Senate Bill 2265 changed Section 15.1-06-04 of the North Dakota Century Code (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d.). The requirement for length of an approved school year had been a minimum of at least 175 instructional days. Senate Bill 2265 amended and reenacted the century code to state that “at least ~~one hundred seventy-five days~~ nine hundred sixty-two and one-half hours of instruction for elementary school students and one thousand fifty hours of instruction for middle and high school students” (North Dakota S.B. 2265 § 2, 2019, para. 15.1-06-04.a) would be the requirement for an approved school-year calendar in North Dakota.

We needed to ensure the relevant NDCC statute continued to meet educational needs of North Dakota students. The need for a study about school calendars was based on determining how many hours elementary and secondary students should spend in PK-12 school to develop their academic and social-emotional skills, and how to make best use of their required hours in school. There has been limited guidance provided to North Dakota PK-12 school leaders about how many days in school, or hours in school, meet students’ academic and social-emotional needs. North Dakota Century Code outlines requirements for number of hours students must engage in a public education. This study examined whether the hour requirement at the time of this study accurately addressed academic and social-emotional development needs of students, or if a time had come for PK-12 school calendars to change to meet needs of students at the time of this study.

This study also developed recommendations based on analysis of data obtained from administrators and teachers’ perceptions about statutes guiding elementary and secondary education in North Dakota. I identified strategies North Dakota educational

leaders might use to be innovative and revise school calendar requirements to better impact academic and social-emotional development of students. This was in keeping with Mr. Munson's invitation for stakeholders to "give the interim committee feedback on provisions that may need to be addressed" (Assel, 2019, p. 4).

Purpose of Study

This qualitative flexible design research study explored research available at the time of this study related to PK-12 school calendar requirements. I was searching for data to emerge from my surveys, and literature review, that would provide information to the state of North Dakota legislative body, and to North Dakota school district education leaders for use as a reference in the revision of a traditional school calendar to an innovative PK-12 school calendar, the purpose being to improve upon academic and social-emotional development of students, so they would be prepared for a society they will one day lead.

North Dakota school calendar requirements were stated in North Dakota Century Code 15.1, the Elementary and Secondary Education statutes, specifically at N.D. Cent. Code 15.1-06-04 (n.d.), School Calendar – Length (Appendix A). This study includes a literature review of current (at the time of this study) and relevant research strategies, an extensive historical review of literature pertaining to PK-12 school calendars, and perceptions of North Dakota PK-12 educators pertaining to PK-12 school calendar requirements. Educators' perceptions also include innovative suggestions for improving school calendars. The study focused on informational data that North Dakota PK-12 education leaders, and North Dakota legislative leaders, could use as a reference when considering revising N.D. Cent. Code 15.1-06-04 (n.d.), School Calendar – Length.

These revisions should be implemented to positively influence the academic and social-emotional development of students so they are prepared for a society they will one day lead. Specifically, my research addressed NDCC 15.1-06-04, School Calendar – Length (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d.).

In his book *What Works May Hurt: Side Effects in Education*, Yong Zhao (2018) built a case for educators to examine effects of educational changes over the years and make changes for improvement like how the medical field makes changes. In education, Zhao stated transformation is never easy, but it is necessary. Zhao emphasized the fact that transformation of education takes a collaborative effort. Everyone has a role to play (Zhao, 2018).

Research Questions

“Research questions should formulate what you want to understand through your research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 77). “You develop questions and ask questions to gain that understanding” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 67). The following research questions guided this study.

1. What are North Dakota school administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions about PK-12 school calendars specific to the number of hours and length of school day and school year?
2. What are North Dakota PK-12 school administrators’ and teachers’ recommendations for revision of school calendar requirements to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?

3. How can North Dakota PK-12 educators be innovative with their PK-12 school calendar to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?

Information gathered from this research may be of interest to the following entities for their educational policy decision-making. The North Dakota Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), the North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA), the North Dakota University System (NDUS), the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA), North Dakota United, all North Dakota school district administration teams, school boards, teachers, and school staff. In addition to those involved in the education field, the information researched should be of interest to citizens of North Dakota because of the impact education of our youth has on the future of our state.

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research is a type of research chosen so the researcher can use the views of those who participate in the study (Creswell, 2008). By choosing a qualitative study, I gave a voice to North Dakota educators so their opinions on how to innovatively revise our school calendar to better impact students could be heard. This qualitative study provided an opportunity to gather data based on educator's experiences in the education field. A qualitative study also provided me a foundation to explore what innovation of the school calendar would look like for the state of North Dakota, and for me as a North Dakota public school administrator. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, was a first step in allowing schools to be more innovative. One highlight of the newly authorized ESSA was the plan for supporting local school control. The ESSA plan,

“helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., ESSA Highlights section). This ESSA highlight allowed schools the ability to regain more local control of their school district. By conducting a qualitative study, I was able to gather information from participants, about what that innovative ‘local control’ might look like for different school districts in North Dakota.

I included some grounded theory in this flexible research design because in their book, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that grounded theory is a “theory that is derived from the data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). They go on to state “data analyzed through grounded theory will allow theory to emerge from the data and likely offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). This theory fit best my research questions, my data collection process, and participants I involved in the research.

I analyzed the data to see what codes and categories emerged and then developed themes about my topic. I looked for emerging themes from the data, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, and observed all data I collected to form conclusions and findings that were “grounded” in the theory. Hence, grounded theory is a part of my flexible design.

In a Sage journal article titled “Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework for Novice Researchers” by Ylona Chun Tie, Melanie Birks, and Karen Francis, they

stated, “Research findings and recommendations [from a grounded theory study] can contribute to policy or knowledge development, service provision and can reform thinking to initiate change in the substantive area of inquiry” (Chun Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019, p. 1). This explanation of grounded theory describes types of studies that seek to contribute to policy development and reform thinking, which is what needs to be done in the state of North Dakota regarding school calendar requirements. This explanation speaks to a need for this type of research to be used as a reference for legislators of North Dakota, so they may use information resulting from such research to affect policy change in the North Dakota Century Code statutes dealing with school calendars.

Crotty (2015) referred to a constructivist view that also contributed to part of my flexible research design and supported my research questions. In *The Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty explained the constructivist view as “meaning is not discovered, but constructed”. (Crotty, 2015, p. 42). “Constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 2015, p. 43). Participants in my research are engaged in a world I asked them to interpret. As superintendents, principals, and teachers in North Dakota public schools, they have experience and expertise to understand what the best way would be to revise their school calendars to better influence students of North Dakota. This qualitative flexible research design study included elements of grounded theory and a constructivist view.

This study includes a theoretical framework based around institutional change theory and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Institutional change theory is a framework based on the relationship between schools and the culture of the environment

in which they operate. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory is a motivational theory that centers around social-emotional growth. Maslow's theory focuses on human needs and how those needs must be met for humans to grow emotionally, to have the motivation to continually grow and development basic and higher-level needs.

Researcher's Background

I have worked for 31 years in the elementary education field in North Dakota and am currently the elementary principal for the Dakota Prairie School District, with the elementary school located in McVile, North Dakota, and the district office located in Petersburg, North Dakota. The elementary school is a PK-6 building, which at the time of this study, had an enrollment of 175 students.

I grew up in Hatton, North Dakota, and graduated from Hatton High School. My education journey took me to Mayville State University where I earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education, with a minor in psychology, in 1988. I began my teaching career with the Hatton Public School District in 1991. I taught in Hatton's elementary school for 25 years, beginning with a variety of positions, including teaching Kindergarten, third, fourth, and fifth grades. Most of my teaching career, in Hatton, was spent teaching first grade for seventeen years. During my teaching career in Hatton, I served other academics roles. I served on a teacher negotiators' team for over 20 years and was president of the local teachers' association. I was deeply involved in the Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) team for many years and took part in data analysis for increasing student proficiency.

While teaching at Hatton's Elementary School, I earned a math specialist certification from Mayville State, and then went on to earn my master's degree in

educational leadership from the University of North Dakota in 2008. I am currently continuing my education journey at the University of North Dakota and am enrolled in UND's Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort #8, pursuing a Doctor of Educational Leadership degree.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations are boundaries which may affect a study. This study was conducted within North Dakota and focused on recommendations for North Dakota Century Code 15.1 Elementary and Secondary Education statute(s); therefore, it was based solely upon North Dakota's educational needs. Another delimitation within the research was the focus on public education within the state of North Dakota; private education and home education were not included in the research. Also, it should be recognized that this study did not encompass a complete review of NDCC 15.1. Research conducted in this study was limited to the minimal number of studies done on amount of time students need to spend on academic subjects to master their content.

One assumption is that all respondents answered honestly when responding to survey questions. Another assumption is that the historical record regarding NDCC 15.1 is accurate and that sources used in this research have been honest in their reporting. A final assumption was that the researcher found enough current (at the time of this study) and relevant research to acquire accurate information about the optimal amount of time students should spend in school to develop and retain their academic and social-emotional skills.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and definitions are integral to this study and clarify meanings within the context of the study.

Administrator – An administrator is “an individual who holds an administrator's credential and who is employed by the board of a school district for the primary purpose of providing administrative services to the schools of the district” (N.D. Cent. Code, n.d., Section 15.1-13-01, para. 1).

Education Policy Committee – This is “an interim committee of the North Dakota Legislature tasked with reviewing educational policy at the state level” (University of North Dakota Educational Leadership Cohort #8, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

Educator – An educator may be a teacher in PK-12 grades, a school counselor, or anyone who educates students.

Elementary – In education and in this study, elementary concerns grades kindergarten through sixth grade.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) –ESSA refers to “federal legislation signed into law in 2015 that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965” (words of University of North Dakota Educational Leadership Cohort #8, personal communication, March 3, 2021; information taken from U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Focused Coding – This is a multi-step process in qualitative research. First, “narrow down themes and categories identified in open coding by reading through the

notes you made while conducting open coding. Identify themes or categories that seem to be related, perhaps merging some” (DeCarlo, 2018, pp. 389-390).

Instructional Hour – The state of North Dakota has not defined what an instructional hour is for educational purposes. For my research study, I use the term to mean 60 minutes of time spent in school. Through my research, I attempted to determine what activities in a school day the state of North Dakota should define as minutes that can be counted for an instructional hour to fulfill the hourly requirements of NDCC 15.1-06-04.

In Vivo Coding – This refers to “qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants” (Manning, 2017, Abstract). In vivo coding relies “on the voices of the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 129).

Local Control in Education – This refers to “the governing and management of public schools by elected or appointed representatives serving on governing bodies, such as school boards or school committees, that are located in the communities served by the schools” (“Local control,” 2016, para. 1). Also, “the concept of local control is grounded in . . . the belief that the individuals and institutions closest to the students and most knowledgeable about a school . . . are best suited to making important decisions about [the school]” (“Local control,” 2016, para. 2).

Middle School – For this study, middle school concerns education in Grades 7-8.

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) – North Dakota state laws (North Dakota Legislative Branch, n.d.).

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) – “Agency that oversees public instruction in North Dakota” (University of North Dakota Educational Leadership Cohort #8, personal communication, March 3, 2021).

PK-12 Public Education – Education must be provided to any student who reaches 5 years of age “before August first of the year of enrollment” in preschool, 6 years of age “before August first of the year” they are enrolling in first grade, and who has not reached 21 years of age “before August first of the year of enrollment” for any other grades (N.D. Cent. Code, n.d., Section 15.1-06-01, para. 1).

Secondary School – This type of school focuses on students in Grades 9-12.

Statutes – Statutes are written laws.

Student – A student may be any person who is studying at a public PK-12th grade school, a private school, or in a homeschool. The Merriam Webster dictionary has defined a student as “1 :a person who attends a school, college, or university” or “2 :a person who studies something” (“Student,” n.d., paras. 1-2).

Student Achievement – The measurement of what a student has learned during a school year by the administration of standardized and/or district tests, or grades.

Summative Assessments – Assessments mandated by federal law that compare students’ knowledge to a standard or benchmark. They are usually conducted at the end of a learning period in contrast to formative assessments, which are usually conducted during a learning period (“Summative assessment,” 2013). Examples of summative assessments include: North Dakota State Assessments (NDSA), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the American College Testing (ACT) exams.

Teacher – Someone who teaches students.

Traditional School Calendar – Students typically attend school from 175-180 days

divided out over a 9-month period with an extended summer break.

Acronyms

ACT	American College Testing
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NDCEL	North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders
NDHSAA	North Dakota High School Activities Association
NDSA	North Dakota State Assessment
NDSBA	North Dakota School Boards Association
NDU	North Dakota United Teachers Association
NDUS	North Dakota University System
NECTL	National Education Commission on Time and Learning
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I included an introduction, need for the study, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, researcher's background, delimitations and assumptions, definitions of terms and acronyms, and the organization of the study.

Chapter II provides the theoretical framework, a literature review highlighting relevant literature at the time of this study related to public school calendars both nationally and internationally, a review of academic challenges and benefits, a historical

review of the literature focused on public school calendars, and a section on school calendar practices.

Chapter III includes an explanation of the research methodology utilized in this qualitative study. The chapter includes a description of the research design, the selection of participants process, data collection, data analysis, steps for ensuring validity in the data, the researchers' reflexivity, and concludes with ethical considerations.

Chapter IV includes a presentation of data findings. The findings are summarized by themes according to survey answers provided by administrators and teachers in North Dakota PK-12 schools. The themes were identified through the coding and analysis process as discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter V provides a discussion of thematic findings, followed by recommendations for further research and action. The chapter concludes with final thoughts from the researcher.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Do North Dakota students need more time in school to meet the academic and social-emotional challenges of their future? Societal needs, not student educational needs, have dictated school calendars throughout history. It is time we develop calendars based on educational needs and not just society needs. This literature review was conducted to determine if a more beneficial school calendar could be developed for the academic and social-emotional development of students. This review is organized into six main topics.

- Academic Benefits of Revising School Calendar Requirements
- Academic Challenges of Revising School Calendar Requirements
- Social-Emotional Benefits of Revising School Calendar Requirements
- Social-Emotional Challenges of Revising School Calendar Requirements
- Innovative School Calendar Practices
- Will the COVID 19 Pandemic Influence PK-12 School Calendar Decisions of the Future?

Within these main topics, there emerged sub-topics providing beneficial information about school calendars both nationally and internationally. The literature review begins with a historical review of how public schools first emerged and how they

began to develop school calendar requirements. Included in the historical review is a section on how school calendars have been developed in North Dakota.

Public education is mentioned in the United States constitution with the intent that most education policies be governed by each state, not the federal government. However, even without the federal government mandating it, the number of required school days in a year are quite consistent across the United States. According to Brixey (2020), in the Education Commission's *50 State Comparison: Instructional Time Policies*, traditional school calendars average 170-180 instructional days of school across the United States (Brixey, 2020). The remainder of the 365 days of the year are spent on summer vacation, weekends, and school breaks. In North Dakota, the North Dakota Century Code at 15.1-06-04, School Calendar – Length, requires elementary schools to provide 962.5 hours of instructional time per year, and middle and high schools to provide 1050 hours of instructional time per year (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d., para. 15.1-06-04.1.a).

In North Dakota, public school students spend, on average, 175 days in school to meet hourly state requirements. Days away from school average about 190 days. There are 365 days in a year. If you subtract the 175 days of in school time, what is left equals 190 days out of school. Of those 190 days out of school, 104 are weekend days, which leaves 86 days, minus holidays, which could be used for education. Those approximate 190 days out of school are the equivalent of about 27 weeks, or 6.75 months. Are the students of North Dakota spending too much time away from school and losing opportunities to learn valuable academic and social-emotional skills?

Is the yearly, hourly time requirement students spend in schools for North Dakota public schools enough instructional time to teach students all the academic skills and

social emotional regulation skills they need to be successful, productive, and contributing members of society? We are now in a technology information age and needs of students are changing constantly. The fast-paced world we now live in begs the question “What amount of instructional time is the most beneficial to students to prepare them to be academically and socially-emotionally prepared for *their* lifetime?”

This Chapter II literature review is meant to be informative and helpful in providing information that educational leaders of North Dakota can use to be innovative in updating the NDCC school calendar requirements. Revisions to NDCC statutes are meant to make a positive impact on the academic and social-emotional educational development of North Dakota students.

This literature review also focuses on the academic and social-emotional benefits and challenges of requiring more time in North Dakota’s public-school calendar. Included in the literature review are identified innovative school calendar strategies implemented within the public-school education field, along with a section about how the COVID-19 crisis may affect future decisions about school calendars. I investigated strategies public school institutions may implement to revise North Dakota PK-12 school calendars. The literature review also shows benefits and challenges of adding additional time requirements to school calendars. There is a section on the benefits of a modified year-round school calendar. Included in the literature review are innovative school calendar ideas that do not follow the traditional 5 days a week for 175-180 days per year calendar. Although, there is limited research available at this time, I included a section about how the COVID-19 pandemic may change the perspective of school administrators on their development of future school calendars.

We are at a place in North Dakota education where we need to collaborate and make institutional changes to transform our school calendar so North Dakota students are prepared for a future in which they will be leaders of a society largely different than it was almost two centuries ago, when the school calendar we follow now, was developed.

A review of literature does not tell a researcher what to do, but provides information on research and findings available at the time of a study that is relevant and informative to a research topic. I have organized my literature review by trying to tell a story that leads readers to an understanding of public-school calendars. The literature review will lead the reader to reflect on the research questions for this study.

1. What are North Dakota school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about PK-12 school calendars specific to the number of hours and length of school day and school year?
2. What are North Dakota PK-12 school administrators' and teachers' recommendations for revision of school calendar requirements to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?
3. How can North Dakota PK-12 educators be innovative with their PK-12 school calendar to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?

Theoretical Framework

The review of literature was based on institutional change theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. "Institutional change theory is a framework based on the relationship between schools and their cultural environments. Society's cultural norms shape organizational structure by encouraging schools to conform to the accepted rules

and rituals of an institution” (Henk, 2013, para. 4). Society influences traditional school calendars, and much of society depends on that traditional calendar for economic reasons. Changing norms of society to adopt to an extended school year, or a modified yearlong school calendar, would require institutional changes in systems in society that are not part of a school district. All stakeholders within a school district would need to be educated as to the benefit to students of changing the traditional school calendar in North Dakota.

The other theoretical framework for this research was Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow’s theory is a motivational theory in psychology composed of a pyramid model of human needs (Burleson & Thoron, 2017). Maslow (1943) believed “people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior” (McLeod, 2018, p. 3). Once that basic need is met, the next level up is what motivates us, and so on (Burleson & Thoron, 2017).

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy states that lower-level needs must be completely fulfilled before a person is motivated to achieve a higher level of needs in the hierarchy. People are motivated by different levels in Maslow’s pyramid and can also move up and down within the hierarchy dependent on circumstances in their life. Maslow’s theory supported my research as to why it is important to make sure we influence the social-emotional development of our students, so they will be ready to learn academically. Students may have moved up a level or two of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, but a life circumstance could affect them to the point where they are motivated by lower levels of needs in the pyramid, and they move down again. Those are more reasons for schools to

have time to help students socially and emotionally (lower level need), so the students can focus academically (higher level need).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid (Figure 1) shows examples of needs people may face in their lifetime, and what needs are to be met at each level for growth and fulfillment ("Maslow's hierarchy of needs," 2021) to occur. If a student's basic needs are not met, or their psychological needs are not met, it is very difficult for them to move up to self-fulfillment, which should be a goal for a PK-12 education system. Maslow's theory helps guide this study because for schools to increase academic achievement, the social-emotional needs of students must also be focused on.

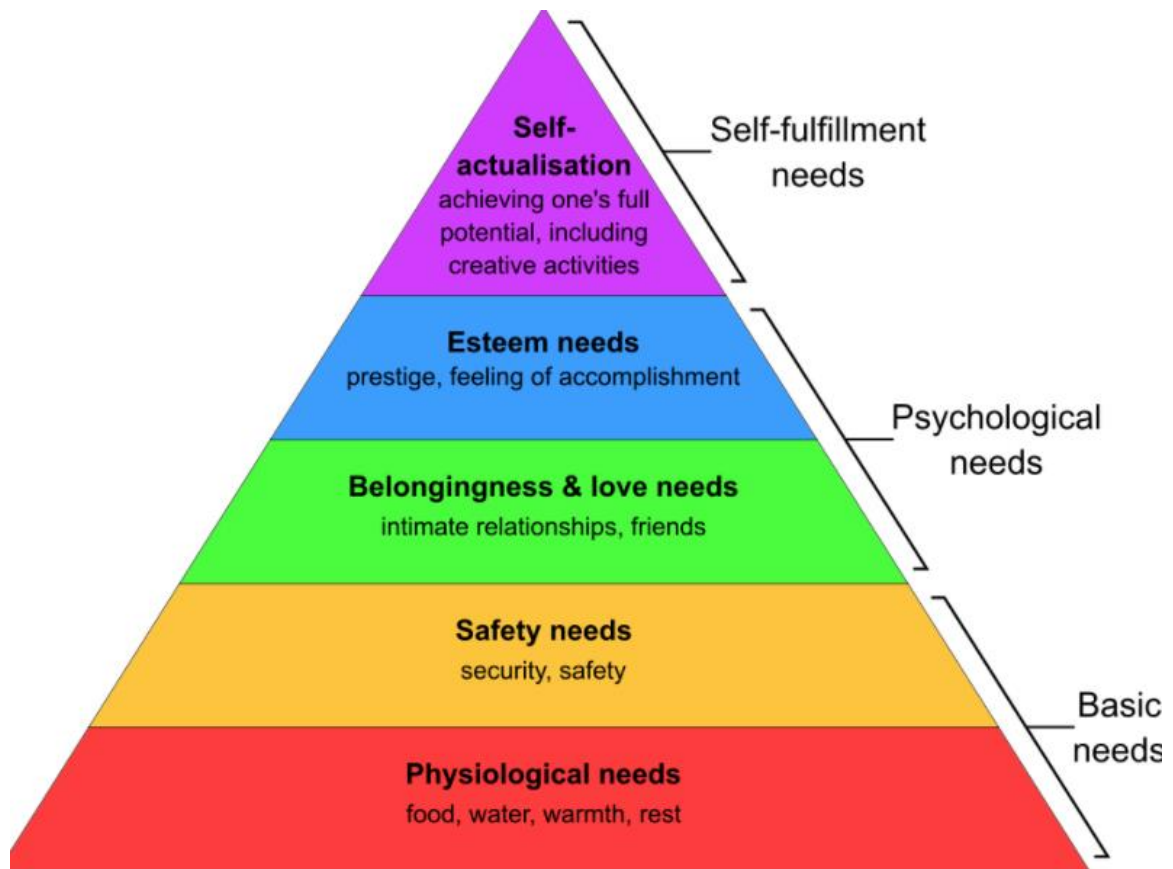


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Reprinted from "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," September 9, 2021, in *Simple English Wikipedia*, first paragraph. In the public domain.

History of PK-12 School Calendars

North Dakota PK-12 school calendar requirements have not changed much since first developed years ago. Economic and community needs, not educational needs, dictated the structure of school calendars of the past (Hopkins, 2009). Today's society hardly resembles that at the turn of the 20th century, yet it retains the same structure for its school calendar year (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996).

Throughout history, PK-12 public school calendars have been changed and adjusted to meet the needs of communities, not necessarily the educational needs of students. The common belief has been that early school calendars were developed to meet agrarian or agricultural needs (Pedersen, 2012). However, school calendars have often centered on needs of a community, not just agriculture (Pedersen, 2012). Oftentimes, the financial stature of a school district determined how long the school was in session. Students attended school for differing amounts of days, and times, depending on where they lived and what their community could afford (Pedersen, 2012). School calendars of the past did not provide an equitable education for students.

In North Dakota, school calendars are developed by the superintendent of each school district with final approval granted by a school board. Superintendents may also form a committee to help them with development of their school calendar. I have been involved in this practice for many years. When developing a North Dakota PK-12 school calendar, the North Dakota Century Code items to be adhered to are hours required in a session (year) of school, holidays a school cannot be in session during, professional development days, and teacher compensation days for parent teacher conferences held outside of school hours. Including designated storm days, once required, may still be a

common practice while developing school calendars. The option of substituting virtual instruction for missed school days, incorporated with required hours rather than specific days, has changed the mindset of setting aside a specific number of snow days for inclement weather during a school year.

Once a calendar is developed, it can be brought to teachers at a school to get their feedback. After teacher feedback, and after any changes a superintendent chooses to make, a calendar is then brought to a school board at a monthly meeting to gain their approval. Once a school board has approved a yearly calendar, it is then submitted to the state of North Dakota for approval.

In the early 19th century, urban areas held school for 11 months of a year, primarily because of the influx of immigrants entering the United States. Those students needed to learn English and factory skills (Pedersen, 2012). Rural area schools were open only in winter months so students could help on their family farms (Pedersen, 2012).

Child labor laws, compulsory education laws, and curriculum standards began in the 1850s, which was the beginning of trying to have consistent school year calendars and expectations for all students (Dixon, 2011). Children were no longer working in factories or in the agriculture industry as much as they had been, so they were required to attend school (Pedersen, 2012). There were still times of a year when families needed help on their farm. For these rural communities, schools typically closed for harvest in September and October (Pedersen, 2012).

After the civil war, merging of urban and rural interest in education led to the traditional school calendar, which had students attending school from late August through late May, with summer months off (Johnson & Spradlin, 2007). The traditional summer

vacation from school did not become the norm in early American schools until the early 1900s (Pedersen, 2012).

No matter what school calendar requirements have been, education has always focused on developing productive citizens who can contribute to society. This practice dates to the first Puritans to settle in America. One educational goal for Puritans was culturalism of their children to the religious ways of Puritans so children could be saved and meet the religious goals of their families and communities (Hiner, 1973). The father in a family, or a minister, provided Puritan children an education based on religion. Children were to learn the ways of society so they could function within it (Hiner, 1973).

As education began to expand beyond religion, Horace Mann had a vision of what a common school should be and how it should function within the newly developing America. Mann's vision was that a common school "knows no distinction of [between] rich and poor" (as cited in Osgood, 1997, p. 375). Mann believed all children, whether their family had money or not, should receive the same education (Osgood, 1997). Joel Spring explained the hope was if all children (no matter their religion, socio-economic status, or ethnic background) were educated "in a common schoolhouse, . . . there would be a decline in hostility and friction among social groups" (as cited in Osgood, 1997, p. 376).

In 1994, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, as stated in Cooper et al. (1996), urged school districts to develop school calendars that acknowledged differences in student learning and changes in American society. The report reflected a growing concern about school calendar issues on the part of local

school boards, administrators, and teachers, especially as a calendar relates to students at risk for academic failure (Cooper et al., 1996).

In his book, *21 Trends for the 21st Century: Out of the Trenches and Into the Future*, Gary Marx examined how sweeping trends in education (at the time he wrote his book) were affecting our schools. He stated, “As an industry, schooling looked remarkably similar for hundreds of years” (Marx, 2014, p. VII).

Expectations on students, schools, and communities are changing rapidly, mostly through technology (Marx, 2014), and education needs to react to these changes and make necessary improvements in the education field. As educators, we can no longer afford to follow the adage “it was good enough for me” that our parents and grandparents made about school. Our students deserve an education that is appropriate for their lifetime.

Academic Benefits of Revising School Calendar Requirements

Through decades of educational reforms, standardized content, standardized tests, and numerous other strategies to push the United States educational systems into raising student achievement scores, one constant that has seen very little change is the school calendar. Over decades of educational reforms, many strategies have been implemented to close the achievement gap, but there is still limited research on whether the typical 175–180-day school year is most beneficial to students’ academic needs and social-emotional success. Although there is limited statistical data on whether adding hours, days, or months to a traditional school calendar will narrow the achievement gap, there is research that shows an extended summer break decreases the knowledge level students gained throughout their previous school year, and some research shows that as students

get older the long-term effects of the traditional summer break from school become more detrimental (Cooper et al., 1996). There is not as much consistent data on an extended school year. Limited research treats an extended school year, in which there are more days of school in a year than in the traditional calendar, and modified year-long school as the same thing. A modified year-long school is one in which there are the same 175-180 days in the school year as traditional school, but breaks are interspersed throughout the year, so as not to have a traditional three-month break from school in the summer.

Research has demonstrated, as presented in this literature review, that there are both academic and social-emotional benefits to be gained by revising the North Dakota public school calendar requirements. Revisions could include extending the school year, implementing a modified year-round school year, or a combination of both.

Maintaining Academic Growth

Cooper et al. (1996) conducted a study based on “summer fade,” as they called it. Their published report compared 39 studies conducted over 88 years beginning in 1906 and ending in 1994 (Cooper et al., 1996). All the studies examined summer learning loss attributed to school not being in session for summer break. One of the studies clearly showed mathematical skills lost were due to summer fade. Researchers in the studies determined that about 1 month of grade level is lost each summer by students on a traditional school year calendar (Cooper et al., 1996). Although these studies were conducted over 20 years ago, they are still relevant because they show that there is academic loss during the summer months when students are outside a school setting, which they refer to as “summer fade.” Cooper et al. (1996) also proved as the age and grade level of a student progresses over the years, the effect of summer vacation shifts

from positive to negative and grows more damaging (Cooper et al., 1996). As a student's age increases, Cooper et al. showed an average 2.6-month loss in mathematical skills can occur over the summer months. The summer fade more often affected math skills because students lack repetitive practice over the summer months needed to perfect math skills (Cooper et al., 1996).

Gary Hopkins (2009) gave practical reasons why the length of our school year and time in school is not enough anymore, and he implied that length of school year and the school day are under scrutiny. He said, "Recently, American students' dismaying results on the TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) have raised the concerns of educators, employers, taxpayers, and parents" (Hopkins, 2009, para. 2). Also, "Many of the countries where students outscored ours [the United States] require substantially more days of school each year" (Hopkins, 2009, para. 2), some of them require "more than 200 days of school each year" (Hopkins, 2009, para. 2). Over 12 years of schooling, that extra time adds up. "The amount of information children have to absorb has increased since the nine-month, 180-day school year was instituted" (Hopkins, 2009, para. 3). Hopkins appropriately stated, "Each year, new subject matter is mandated -- yet the length of the school day [nor year] does not increase" (Hopkins, 2009, para. 3).

Gregory S. Morin (2017) examined possible differences between a traditional school calendar and a modified year-round academic calendar regarding student achievement in two suburban high schools in northern Virginia. The importance of Morin's study was it showed . . .

. . . additional exploration is needed in order to more fully explore the potential loss of learned knowledge and diminished retention and recall of instructional

material in students who experience an extended summer vacation period as part of a traditional school calendar. . . . While existing research has suggested that a traditional calendar results in summer learning loss, the current study did provide some support to the assumption that a summer learning loss had a long term impact on the standardized test performance of students” (Morin, 2017, p. 3).

According to Figlio, Holden, and Ozek (2018), “Instructional time is a fundamental educational input” (p. 171), yet there is little research addressing the effect of longer school days on student achievement. Figlio et al. used “a sharp regression discontinuity design to estimate the effects of lengthening the school day for low-performing schools in Florida” (p. 171). Their . . .

. . . results indicate significant positive effects of additional literacy instruction on student reading achievement. In particular, we find effects of 0.05 standard deviations of improvement in reading test scores for program assignment in the first year, though long-run effects are difficult to assess.

(Figlio et al., 2018, p. 171)

International Data Comparison of Student Academic Growth

The time children spend in school varies across countries. Do these differences explain international gaps in students’ academic achievements? Throughout history, the United States has compared themselves to other countries in an educational achievement race to score at the top of international comparisons.

In his paper, *Do Differences in Schools’ Instruction Time Explain International Achievement Gaps? Evidence from Developed and Developing Countries*, Victor Lavy (2015) estimated “effects of instructional time on students’ achievement using PISA

[Program for International Student Assessment] 2006 data, which includes data samples from over 50 countries” (Abstract section, p. F397). Lavy found “instructional time has a positive and significant effect on test scores” (Abstract section, p. F397).

In another international study, Berthelon, Kruger, and Vienne (2016) analyzed “the impact of longer school schedules on children’s 2nd grade reading comprehension skills in Chile” (Abstract section). Berthelon et al. found “longer school schedules lead to an increase of 0.14 standard deviations in reading comprehension” (Abstract section). The study also found that “benefits of longer school days accumulate over time” (Berthelon et al., 2016, Abstract section).

Andersen, Humlum, and Nandrup (2016) reported how increasing instructional time in school is a generally accepted idea in many governments to improve student learning. “Prior research-mainly based on observational data-disputes the effect of this approach” (Abstract section) and points out possible student behavior problems from extended instruction time. However, Andersen et al. found “that increasing instruction time increases student learning” (Abstract section). Their findings support the value of increasing instruction time.

Huebener, Kuger, & Marcus (2017) looked at “PISA scores of students in ninth grade” (p. 15) to determine if “increased instruction hours improve the performance of all students” (p. 15). They analyzed “the effect of a German education reform that increased weekly instruction hours by two hours (6.5 percent) over almost five years” (Huebener et al., 2017, p. 15). “In the additional time, students are taught new learning content. On average, the reform improves student performance. However, . . . low-performing students benefit less than high-performing students” (Huebener et al., 2017, p. 15).

Huebener et al. suggested “the content of additional instruction time is an important determinant” (p. 15) in the outcome.

A research paper by Battistin and Meroni (2016) investigated “short term effects of a large scale intervention, funded by the European Social Fund” (p. 39). The intervention provided “additional instruction time to selected classes of lower secondary schools in Southern Italy” (Battistin & Meroni, 2016, p. 39). The intervention divided students into unique cohorts that remained stable as students advanced in grade level and tracked students’ achievements across grades. Battistin and Meroni compared participating cohorts to non-participating groups. They found “the intervention raised scores in mathematics for students from the least advantaged backgrounds” (Battistin, & Meroni, 2016, p. 39).

Cattaneo, Oggenfuss, and Wolter (2017) studied “student test scores in Switzerland, as measured by the PISA 2009 test” (p. 433). Cattaneo et al.’s findings confirmed “results of previous studies [showing] . . . a positive effect of instruction time on student performance” (p. 433). Cattaneo et al. found “considerable heterogeneity in the effectiveness of instructional time across ability-related tracks, with the more able students benefiting more” (p. 433).

Hincapié (2016) analyzed the “impact of longer school days on student achievement in Colombia” (p. 1) using “test score data from 5th and 9th graders in 2002, 2005, and 2009” (p. 1). Schools switched from having their students attend school for half days to full school days, and some switched from full days to half days. Hincapié found students attending full day schools achieved higher test scores than students attending half day schools. “The impact of attending full school days is larger for math

than for language, and it is larger for 9th grade than for 5th grade. Effects are largest among the poorest schools and those in rural areas” (p. 1). Results suggested “lengthening the school day [or more time in school in a different format] may be an effective policy for increasing student achievement, particularly for the lowest-income students in Colombia and other developing countries” (Hincapié, 2016, p. 1).

Academic Challenges of Revising School Calendar Requirements

Amount of time children spend in school is one of the most discussed educational matters. Parents plan vacations and time off from work based on when their children will be in school. Some even put off a career until their children begin school. Any changes to a school calendar will affect the lives of students’ families. Traditions are hard to give up, and the traditional school calendar that runs from August to June is hard wired into the mindset of many communities.

If North Dakota, or any state, elects to add more required hours to their school calendar, or implements a modified year-round calendar, it will affect family decisions and vacations, and possibly childcare situations. Families’ opinions do matter, but family decisions may only be based on emotions and convenience. When a state makes educational decisions about how long students should spend in school, and what days they should spend in school, state educational leaders must do what is best for students academically and socially-emotionally, not what is most convenient for families.

Pedersen (2012) stated, “critics of year-round schools argue that summer industries, such as tourism that tends to utilize student workers, would be greatly affected” (pp. 59-60). Pedersen continued, “Societal influences tend to have greater influence in determining if a school will move to year-round schedule than does the

potential academic benefits” (Pedersen, 2012, p. 60). North Dakota should be a state that bases decisions on potential academic benefits among other things, but not societal influences.

Lammers’ and Garcia’s (2017) explanation of institutional theory explains the school calendar phenomenon as it relates to society. Scott (2004) explained “institutional theory attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior” (p. 2). An institution, whether it be a school or the community a school district resides in, can be stuck in the norms and routines of their community.

Social-Emotional Benefits of Revising School Calendar Requirements

Students need social-emotional guidance from trusted adults to help them navigate the ups and downs of childhood and adolescence. There are students for whom school is the safest place to be in their day. The basic idea behind Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, “is that lower level basic survival needs, would need to be met before any higher-level needs can emerge (Maslow, 1943). This would affect students because they need to have their basic needs met, so they can have the ability to concentrate in school and grow and learn. School is a place where some students get their basic needs met through food, caring adults, and a place to feel safe. Once those basic needs are met, students can begin to learn. The more time students spend in a school setting with caring adults, the better chance they have to gain academic and social-emotional skills they need to make a better life for themselves.

Student Academic Success

According to an article by Shi and Brown (2020), “students develop a positive mindsets and behaviors to promote academic achievement” through “direct and indirect services from school counselors” (Shi & Brown, 2020, p. 1). This fact supports an idea that students benefit academically from more time with a school counselor and more time developing social-emotional skills. It would then stand to reason, some students need more time in school to have guidance in the social emotional aspects of their lives, as well as the academic aspects.

Zins and Elias (2006) developed CASEL (Collaboration for Academic and Social Emotional Learning). “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Zins & Elias, 2006, p. 1). According to a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students, those who participated in evidence based SEL programs showed an 11% gain in academic achievement (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018/2019).

With so many academic standards for student to master, there is little time left in a school day for social-emotional instruction, even though the importance of social emotional learning to academic achievement is crucial. According to Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Durlak (2017), “evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, when implemented effectively, lead to measurable and potentially long-lasting improvements in many areas of children’s lives” (p. 13).

Greenberg et al. (2017) claimed SEL “can support a public health approach to education for three reasons” (p. 13).

- “First, schools are ideal sites for interventions with children” (p. 13).
- “Second, school based SEL programs can improve students’ competence, enhance their academic achievement, and make them less likely to experience future behavioral and emotional problems” (p. 13).
- “Third, evidence-based SEL interventions in all schools—that is, *universal interventions*—could substantially affect public health” (p. 13).

Barna and Brott (2011) discussed the importance of state standards in counseling in support of academic achievement in elementary school. Carrell and Hoekstra (2014) found that “one additional counselor reduces student misbehavior and increases boys’ academic achievement by over one percentile point” (p. 66). Carey and Dimmitt (2012) provided a summary of six studies that presented “valuable evidence of the relationship between positive student educational outcomes and school counseling” (p. 146).

Student Positive Social Emotional Self-Regulation

Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) relayed the importance of including more time in school for social-emotional learning (SEL).

At the elementary-school level, social and emotional learning (SEL) enhances students’ abilities to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve personal and academic goals, show respect and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and ethical decisions. These personal and interpersonal competencies provide a foundation for success in work and relationships as adults. (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 2)

PK-12 School Mental Health Resource Centers

The more time there is in a school year, the more time there would be available to help students with other aspects of their social-emotional health. “It is widely estimated that approximately 25% of school age youth face mental and behavioral health challenges” (Swick & Powers, 2018, p. 129). Most of these youth are treated poorly outside school . . .

. . . leaving them vulnerable to negative school outcomes such as [poor] attendance, behavioral [problems], and academic problems. One common barrier to treatment is a lack of access to appropriate and consistent care including assessment and intervention. . . . A unique school-community partnership in North Carolina attempted to overcome these obstacles by bringing mental health services to youth at the school campuses. (Swick & Powers, 2018, p. 129)

Eiraldi, Wolk, Locke, and Beidas (2015) agreed with Swick and Powers (2018).

Eiraldi et al. wrote:

Schools have become the main provider of services to children with mental health needs. Although there is substantial literature on barriers to implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in under-resourced school districts, less has been written on how to overcome those barriers. Providing mental health services in the school setting presents a tremendous opportunity to increase access to quality mental health care for underserved youth. (p. 124)

Reback (2010) studied the value of providing counselors to elementary school children. He stated:

Recent empirical research has found that children's non-cognitive skills play a critical role in their own success, young children's behavioral and psychological disorders can severely harm their future outcomes, and disruptive students harm the behavior and learning of their classmates. . . . This is the first nationally representative study of the provision, financing, and impact of school-site mental health services for young children. (p. 698).

Students need time with their peers, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and positive interactions with caring teachers and school staff. More time in school could mean more time for students to interact with peers. Teachers, counselors, and school staff would also be able to observe signs of depression in students. School age children and adolescents are at risk for suicidal thoughts as well, and more time in school would provide time for counseling and therapy to help students who need that intervention.

We are still too early in the COVID 19 school crisis to determine what long term social-emotional affects the pandemic will have on students. We may need to revise our school calendars: to help meet future emotional needs of North Dakota students due to possible regressions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to address any academic crisis the pandemic may have caused some students.

Social-Emotional Challenges of Revising School Calendar Requirements – Unhealthy School Environments

In an ideal world of perfect teachers and perfect classrooms, there would be no concern about the amount of time a student may spend with an inept teacher, or in a toxic classroom environment. Unfortunately, there are some classrooms that may not be the best place for students to spend an extended period. This would be one challenge or negative consequence of requiring more time in school.

Blank and Shavit (2016) studied “the relation between student reports regarding disciplinary infractions to student achievement, with a special focus on classroom disruptions” (p. 1). They concluded:

A disruptive classroom climate can hinder the learning process and lower the achievement of the entire class, regardless of the conduct of any particular student. Therefore, a special focus on disruptions in the classroom . . . emerges as instrumental to the understanding of how school climate relates to student achievement. (p. 1)

An unhealthy school climate may not be the best place for students to spend an extended school year. The social-emotional stability of a student could be compromised if that student is in an environment that was not helpful or even hurtful.

Innovative School Calendar Practices

Individual school districts have local control over their school calendar.

According to the Glossary of Education Reform:

In education, local control refers to (1) the governing and management of public schools by elected or appointed representatives serving on governing bodies, such as school boards or school committees, that are in the communities served by the schools, and (2) the degree to which local leaders, institutions, and governing bodies can make independent or autonomous decisions about the governance and operation of public schools. (“Local control,” 2016, para. 1)

In North Dakota, we have requirements about the number of school instructional hours in a year. North Dakota Century Code requires those hours must come between August and June of an academic school year.

There are a variety of school calendars that do not follow the traditional August to June school schedule. The challenge for school leaders is to find ways to develop a school calendar that will provide students with an appropriate amount of time to develop academically and socially-emotionally and still follow the requirements set forth by the state legislative body.

Some common non-traditional school calendar ideas include extending a school year by adding more days or using a modified year-round calendar that may have the same number of days or added days with built in breaks throughout the whole year. Another type of schooling that has seen an increase in the last few years is virtual learning. Supplementing a school year, or school day, with virtual personalized learning has become a new and growing option for schools as well.

Christou (2016) stated, “Schools as conceived and as constructed historically are no longer relevant to a modern age” (p. 61). He used theme development to present why he believed “schools need to be re-conceptualized” (p. 61). Christou wrote, “We must prepare our youth for the world of the future by engaging them actively with technologies available to us in the present. The world they will inhabit is not the world of the past” (Christou, 2016, p. 61).

Wayne Jennings (2018) concluded the educational system needs a transformation. In his book, *School Transformation*, Jennings described school problems and some weak efforts schools have made to reform. He contended the school model at the time he wrote his book did not prepare students for the changed world they will experience. He presented innovative ideas for positive school change (Jennings, 2018). School innovation, reform, change, whatever verbiage you want to use, is not a new concept, but

any institutional change is difficult for society to accept. “It was good enough for me” is a common phrase parents will make when they are faced with school changes. As North Dakota educators, we need to ask ourselves: “Do we just want good enough for our students?”

Modified Year-Round School

In their book *School Calendar Reform: Learning in all Seasons*, Dr. Charles Ballinger and Dr. Carolyn C. Kneese (2006) provided several reasons for updating school calendars from a traditional format to a more balanced year-round calendar. In addition to reducing the summer learning loss, they gave other reasons for implementing a balanced year-round calendar that directly related to student achievement. A balanced year-round calendar could:

- Maintain student interest in learning;
- Provide faster remediation and advanced enrichment;
- Help students who are learning English as a second language get year-round practice;
- Provide access to extra-curricular activities that students would have had to miss or take time off from school to attend during a traditional year; and
- Help teachers take advantage of staff development opportunities without being absent from their classrooms.

(Ballinger & Kneese, 2006)

Schools implementing a modified year-round school calendar have changed from the traditional calendar for various reasons. A modified year-round school calendar can look very different for different school districts and be called different names. The one

consistent is that a modified year-round school does not follow the traditional school year calendar of having a 2-3 month summer break. The modified year-round calendar simply spreads breaks from school throughout a school year by implementing frequent smaller breaks and avoiding one long break in the summer, thus avoiding summer learning loss.

School districts can incorporate innovation into the breaks from school. Some schools have included intervention times during the breaks for students who need re-teaching, or who may have missed many days of school. Another option for a break time is an enrichment block where enriching activities are provided to extend a student's academic and/or social emotional abilities. Teacher professional development time is another option for breaking from instruction during a year. By using students' breaks for teacher professional development, interruptions for professional development during in-session instructional time can be avoided.

When breaks are used for more academic purposes, the breaks could be referred to as academies, or enrichment blocks. A school district can design their curriculum for remediation, enrichment, or acceleration. These breaks in the year-round calendar can provide an opportunity for school districts to provide opportunities to students that are not possible during traditional school calendar years. Academy time can be part of a teacher contract or offered as an opportunity for teachers to supplement their regular teaching contract with additional assignments.

The success of a year-round modified calendar lies within development of a best in-session and out-of-session for a community. In North Dakota, we can be cognizant of our winters and needs of our rural communities and develop in-session and out-of-session

days that are best for North Dakota. Various modified year-round school calendars are being utilized throughout the United States.

Educational leaders want to make the most of the instructional time required to influence students' academic and social-emotional development. Ballinger and Kneese (2006) broke down the school year. Each calendar year has 365 days. Out of the 365 days, there are an average of 180 days of legislatively mandated instruction annually. In North Dakota, the mandated instructional time as of November 2020 is 962½ instructional hours for elementary students, and 1050 instructional hours for middle and high school students, which comes out to an average of 175 days of instruction based on a 7-hour school day. In a year, there are 104 days of weekends (Saturday and Sunday), and there are about 10 winter holidays between Christmas and New Year's, and 11 other legal holidays. After considering all of this, it leaves about 60 days remaining for flexible days, some of which could be added instruction time in a year (Ballinger & Kneese, 2006).

The National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) reported in their *Prisoners of Time* document that students in the United States spend about 1,460 hours engaged in required core academic instruction during the final 4 years of secondary education (Jones et al., 1994). This compares to 3,170 hours for Japan secondary students, 3,280 hours for France secondary students, and 3,528 hours for Germany secondary students (Jones et al., 1994). In comparing days in school, Ballinger and Kneese (2009) found the 180 mandatory days per year students spend on average attending school in the United States is less than the United Kingdom's 190 days

required, and 28 days less than East Asia who has 208 days required (Ballinger & Kneese, 2009).

In their *Prisoners of Time* report, the NECTL made eight recommendations for increasing student achievement in the United States:

(1) reinvent schools around learning, not time; (2) change the fixed clock and calendar to better use students' time in school; (3) organize the school day so that students spend at least five and a half hours learning core academic subjects; (4) keep schools open for expanded services and activities; (5) give teachers more time to prepare for their classes; (6) seize the promise of new technologies to increase productivity, enhance student achievement, and expand learning time; (7) develop local action plans to transform schools; (8) build coalitions of policymakers, community leaders, educators, and parents to make learning a “national obsession.” (Jones et al., 1994, Abstract)

It is now 27 years later and school calendars in North Dakota have not changed to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of our students. The students of North Dakota have been “prisoners of time.”

Extended School Year

Probably not a popular choice by those trying to balance education budgets, adding time to a school year, either through requiring more hours or requiring more days, is an option that can increase student achievement levels. There is evidence to show a positive relationship between more required learning time and student achievement. In a May 2013 article, *The Impact of Learning Time on Academic Achievement*, Jez and Wassmer (2013) studied California’s elementary school sites and found “a statistically

significant and positive relationship between the number of instructional minutes in an academic year and school-site standardized test scores” (Jez & Wassmer, 2013, Abstract section, p. 284). Jez and Wassmer found that just . . .

. . . “fifteen more minutes of school a day at a school site (or about an additional week of classes over an academic year) relates to an increase in average overall academic achievement of about 1%, and about a 1.5% increase in average achievement for disadvantaged students. This same increase in learning time yields the much larger 37% gain in the average growth of socioeconomically disadvantage achievement from the previous academic year.

(Jez & Wassmer, 2013, p. 284)

Four Day School Weeks

To save money, some school districts have implemented a 4-day school week. Some research on 4-day school weeks show less time in school is not beneficial to student achievement. A study by Tharp, Matt, and O’Reilly (2015) provided “conclusive evidence” (p. 126) that students in a 4-day week did not achieve as well as students in a 5-day school week. Tharp et al. looked . . .

. . . at the relationship between student-achievement in the four-day school week compared to student achievement in the five-day school week. This analysis focused on a common criteria referenced test given to all students over a period of seven years in a single western state. The study provided conclusive evidence that students in the four-day week did not performed [*sic*] as well, over time, when compared to students in the traditional five-day week settings.

(Tharp et al., 2016, p. 126)

As of 2019, in a study by Paul N. Thompson, there were “approximately 1,500 schools in 600 school districts [in the United States] operating on a four-day school week” (Thompson, 2019, p. 2). Thompson’s study was based on the student achievement of students in “four-day school weeks in Oregon from 2007-2015. Thompson’s findings showed that student achievement declined following a switch from a five-day school week to a four-day school week. He found that “math test scores fall by between 0.044 and 0.053 standard deviations and reading scores fall by between 0.033 and 0.038 deviations” (Thompson, 2019, p. 3). Thompson also studied subgroups. He said, “I find that both math and reading achievement for boys is more negatively impacted by these school schedules than girls and find greater detrimental effects on reading achievement for low-income students” (Thompson, 2019, p. 3). These were only two findings from Thompson’s study about four-day school weeks, but both do follow the premise that students are not benefitting from less time in school.

Virtual Learning

Virtual learning is rather new, and utilization of virtual learning increased tremendously during March of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led schools to abandon in person learning and send students home to learn online. Even though students could do academic tasks online, a lesson educators learned because of the pandemic is that students need to be in school with adults and peers, for social-emotional and in-depth academic engagement. According to a Kentucky Counseling Center online article dated April 20, 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a “lack of interaction and students face social isolation” (para. 8). “This greatly impacts a student’s mental health. The lack of social interaction in online learning leads to feelings of loneliness, lack of

motivation, and isolation” (Kentucky Counseling Center, 2021, para. 8). The virtual learning option can be beneficial in coordination with in-person learning, but by no means is it the option that should be embraced wholly to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students.

Will the COVID-19 Pandemic Influence PK-12 School Calendar Decisions of the Future?

Research provided in this literature review does show that there are benefits to a longer school year. A longer school year with a modified year-round calendar may be what we need to combat any learning loss due to the COVID 19 pandemic. In his study, Goodman (2014) addressed the effect of instructional time lost for snow days. Results of Goodman’s study could be generalized as any days missed for any reason, such as the COVID-19 crisis. Goodman discussed how student absences do affect their achievement, and during the COVID-19 crisis, there were numerous absences even during distance learning. Goodman stated, “The average American student is absent more than two weeks out of every school year” (Goodman, 2014, p. 1). He explained, “Student and school fixed effects models using Massachusetts data show a strong relationship between student absences and achievement but no impact of lost instructional time due to school closures” (Goodman, 2014, Abstract section). Goodman confirmed “findings in instrumental variable models exploiting the fact that moderate snowfall induces student absences while extreme snowfall induces school closures” (Goodman, 2014, Abstract section).

Through his research, Goodman (2014) determined, “Each absence induced by bad weather reduces math achievement by 0.05 standard deviations, suggesting that attendance can account for up to one-fourth of the achievement gap by income. That

absences matter but closures [of a school] do not is consistent with a model of instruction in which coordination of students is the central challenge” (Abstract section). Students do better with closures because “teachers appear to deal well with coordinated disruptions of instructional time like snow days but deal poorly with disruptions like absences that affect different students at different times” (Goodman, 2014, Abstract section).

Summary

This Chapter II literature review provided an overview of relevant research surrounding the topic of PK-12 public school calendar requirements, and the potential benefits and challenges of revising those requirements. Revisions do not necessarily mean more hours or days, or even adding more required hours. The literature provided innovative ways to revise calendar requirements to benefit students by remodeling the traditional August to June calendar and shortening the long summer break into smaller breaks scattered throughout a school year, as an innovative option.

Chapter III includes an explanation of the research methodology utilized in this qualitative study. The chapter includes a description of the research design, participants’ selection process, data collection, data analysis, steps for validity and reflexivity, and concludes with ethical considerations.

Chapter IV includes a thematic presentation of data findings. Themes were identified through a coding and analysis process as discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, a connection to the theoretical framework of the study, recommendations for further research and action, and limitations of the study, followed by final thoughts about the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research for this qualitative flexible design study explored PK-12 school calendars. The rationale for this qualitative flexible design was to determine how many hours elementary and secondary students should spend in PK-12 school to develop their academic and social-emotional skills. The perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers, an extensive review of recent relevant literature, and a review of historical literature, were all analyzed to help answer the research questions.

There is limited guidance provided to North Dakota PK-12 schools about how many days or hours in school fulfill students' academic and social-emotional needs. The state of North Dakota has listed in the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) at Section 15.1-06-04 requirements for number of hours students must engage in school. My study researched whether the hour requirement in North Dakota at the time of this study was an accurate determination of hours needed to adequately teach academic and social-emotional development in North Dakota students. Preparing students to be 21st century ready citizens in a world that is ever-changing means that educational systems must also evolve to meet those changing needs. This study examined whether or not it is time for North Dakota PK-12 school calendars to be reviewed and revised to meet the needs of students who will one day lead society.

Research Questions

“Research questions should formulate what you want to understand through your research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 77). “You develop questions and ask questions to gain that understanding” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 67). The following research questions guided this study.

1. What are North Dakota school administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions about PK-12 school calendars specific to the number of hours and length of school day and school year?
2. What are North Dakota PK-12 school administrators’ and teachers’ recommendations for revision of school calendar requirements to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?
3. How can North Dakota PK-12 educators be innovative with their PK-12 school calendar to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?

Research Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative flexible research design. Qualitative research is a type of research chosen so a researcher can focus on the views of those who participate in the study (Creswell, 2008). By choosing a qualitative study, I gave a voice to North Dakota educators so their opinions on how to innovatively revise our school calendar to better impact students could be heard. The 21 educators who participated in the study were able to express their perceptions on whether the North Dakota PK-12 school calendar should be reviewed and revised. Participants were also given the

opportunity to express their perceptions on how to innovatively revise our school calendar to better develop students' academic and social-emotional skills.

A qualitative study provided the opportunity to collect data from administrators and educators in the field who have experience in administration and teaching, both in large school districts and small school districts in North Dakota. The perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers, along with an extensive literature review of recent relevant information, and an extensive historical review of literature, gave me a foundation upon which to explore what innovation and revision of the school calendar could look like for the state of North Dakota.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, was a first step in allowing schools to be more innovative (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., ESSA Highlights section). ESSA allowed schools to regain more local control of their school district. The statement in the ESSA referring to local control for schools stated: “to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., ESSA Highlights section). The ESSA of 2015 gave schools the ability to regain more local control of their school district. While conducting my qualitative study, I gathered information from participants about what that *local control* might look like for different school districts regarding PK-12 school calendars.

The use of grounded theory as a research methodology was also implemented within the flexible design. Including grounded theory was a good choice based on Strauss

and Corbin's (1998) book *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Strauss and Corbin stated that grounded theory is a "theory that is derived from the data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (p. 12). They stated, "Data analyzed through grounded theory will allow theory to emerge from the data and likely offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). This explanation of grounded theory methodology fit my data collection process and the participants I involved in the research process.

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) definition of grounded theory, as stated in the previous paragraph, gave flexibility to my research by allowing innovative calendar strategies to emerge. These strategies may prove beneficial in revising the North Dakota PK-12 school calendar. The survey questions answered by North Dakota administrators and teachers provided educational perspectives to guide me in answering my research questions.

In addition to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) definition of grounded theory, I found another explanation to reinforce including some grounded theory in my flexible research design. This explanation came from a Sage journal article, "Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework for Novice Researchers," by Ylona Chun Tie, Melanie Birks, and Karen Francis (2019). They stated, "Research findings and recommendations [from a grounded theory study] can contribute to policy or knowledge development, service provision and can reform thinking to initiate change in the substantive area of inquiry" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 1). This explanation of grounded theory describes types of studies that seek to contribute to policy development and reform thinking, which is what

needs to be done in the state of North Dakota regarding school calendar requirements. This explanation speaks to a possible need for this type of research to be used as a reference for legislators of North Dakota, so they may use information resulting from such research to affect policy change in the North Dakota Century Code statutes dealing with school calendars.

Crotty (2015) referred to a constructivist view that also contributed to part of my flexible research design and supported my research questions. In *The Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty explained the constructivist view as “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 2015, p. 42). “Constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 2015, p. 43). Participants in my research were engaged in a world I asked them to interpret. As superintendents, principals, and teachers in North Dakota public schools, they had experience and expertise to understand what the best way would be to revise their school calendars to better influence students of North Dakota. This qualitative flexible research design study included elements of grounded theory and a constructivist view.

Research Design

Data Collection

The data collection method for this research used a Qualtrics survey. The survey was developed through the University of North Dakota Qualtrics survey software. Open-ended narrative survey questions were developed based on information gathered in my review of recent relevant literature, and historical literature, along with questions that helped me answer my research questions. The survey was emailed to 444 North Dakota

superintendents, principals, and teachers. The email contained: a letter (Appendix B) explaining the research, information ensuring participants' privacy would be protected, and assurance that all answers were anonymous. The email also contained a consent to participate document (Appendix C) that explained respondents' rights as a participant in the survey.

Survey

The survey was developed using Qualtrics, a web-based tool for designing and administering surveys through the University of North Dakota. Survey questions were administered through the Qualtrics web-based survey design software. After completing my literature review, I developed a 22-question survey (Appendix D). The survey contained open-ended narrative questions which gave participants an opportunity to express their perceptions to questions asked. There were two demographic questions about participants' occupations within PK-12 education and the size of their school district. There were four dichotomous questions in the survey which asked participants to answer with a "yes" or "no." The dichotomous questions asked participants' opinion on whether North Dakota's PK-12 school calendar time requirement should be changed to include more student time in school or less student time in school as it pertained to elementary and middle-high school. One final dichotomous question asked respondents overall opinion of changes to North Dakota school calendar requirements.

The survey was open for 1 month. I sent an email reminder after 2 weeks. I also included one more reminder on January 14, 2021, when the Grand Forks Herald reporter, Michelle Griffith, reported that North Dakota Superintendent of Schools, Kirsten Baesler, "testified at a committee hearing of the House Appropriations Education and

Environment Division” (Griffith, 2021, para. 3). According to Griffith’s article, Baesler testified about the possibility of extending the school year due to declining test scores because of the COVID 19 pandemic (Griffith, 2021). I used this opportunity to try and gain more completed surveys, but it only yielded one more completed survey. This would have been an ideal time for the North Dakota educators that I selected for my survey to provide their perceptions on school calendars, since Superintendent Kirsten Baesler had just brought up the subject.

Question Development for Survey

My literature reviews, both recent and historical, were used to help develop questions for the survey (Appendix D). As a practicing elementary principal in North Dakota, and through my 31 years of educational experience in North Dakota, I relied on my background knowledge and experience in education to help develop survey questions. Hammersley (2000) believed a researcher cannot be detached from his or her own previous experiences and knowledge, and that experience and knowledge should not be ignored while conducting research. That explanation validates that as researchers we should use our experiences to aide our research, but we should also be cautious not to detract from the validity of our data.

After developing my questions for the survey, I compared them to my research questions to gauge whether I had addressed each research question. My next step was to categorize which survey questions answered which research question. Through this process, I felt I had quality questions that could provide me with the perceptions of North Dakota educators about PK-12 school calendars in North Dakota. Those perceptions, along with my literature review, would help me answer my research questions.

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic influenced how I conducted my research for my data collection. I was unable to do any face-to-face data collection. Not being able to conduct face-to-face interviews limited some aspects of my study because examining participants' body language would have been beneficial to my collection of data. Due to health concerns of our nation regarding COVID-19, I relied on data collected online through a Qualtrics survey (Appendix E) and an extensive literature review. As I have stated, COVID 19 has affected this research and is considered a limitation to the collected data.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic altering data collection methods, it may also have altered views my participants had about my survey questions. After completing the fourth quarter of school year 2019-2020 via a distance-learning plan no one was prepared for, North Dakota educators may have had a different perspective on school calendar innovation and revisions.

Participant Selection

Participants I selected for my research study were North Dakota public school superintendents, building level principals, and teachers. I purposefully selected these participants by following the guidance of Joseph A. Maxwell (2013) in his book *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* because I wanted perceptions of administrators and teachers in North Dakota who had experience with students' academic and social-emotional development. These were also the people in North Dakota with experience working within a structured school calendar.

In Maxwell's (2013) description of purposeful selection, he stated, "The settings and participants are deliberately selected to provide information that is particularly

relevant to questions and goals of [a] researcher (p. 97). Maxwell (2013) stated the following five goals for purposeful selection:

1. *Achieving representativeness*: “by deliberately selecting cases, individuals, or situations, that are known to be typical, provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98).

This goal relates to my study because information obtained by purposeful selection was relevant to my research questions because I gave a voice to North Dakota administrators and teachers. They had the most experience and knowledge about how to achieve a quality academic and social-emotional education. They were the school leaders with knowledge and experience about what would be needed to provide a quality education.

2. *Adequately capture the heterogeneity of a population*: “to ensure that the conclusions adequately represent the entire *range* of variation, rather than only the typical members” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98).

The relevance to this goal is achieved by involving superintendents, principals, and teachers. I gathered data from the range of members who influence school calendars and the academic and social-emotional development of students.

3. *Deliberately select individuals*: “Select individuals, or cases, that are critical for testing the theories you began the study with, or that you have subsequently developed” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98).

For my study, I deliberately selected North Dakota school leaders and teachers whose perceptions provided me with data that helped me answer my research questions. I

purposefully chose only North Dakota school leaders and teachers because my research pertained only to North Dakota statutes on PK-12 school calendars.

4. *Establish particular comparisons*: “to illuminate the reasons for differences between individuals or settings” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98).

The relevance of this goal is that I gathered data from small schools and large schools in North Dakota. The survey had a question about the size of respondents’ school districts, which allowed me to do some comparison of answers based on school district size. By involving superintendents, principals, and teachers, I compared differences in how a person’s position within a school affected their perceptions.

5. *Establish relationships*: “to select groups, or participants, with whom you can establish the most productive relationships, ones that will best enable you to answer your research questions” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 99).

By having built relationships of respect and honesty within education circles in North Dakota (because of my extensive work experience in North Dakota), I was able to make participants comfortable providing answers to my survey questions. The importance of having established trusting relationships is paramount to attaining data that is beneficial to the study I conducted.

Through my qualitative data collection, using Maxwell’s (2013) purposeful selection, and awareness of his five goals to guide my process, I believe I received a well-rounded accumulation of data from purposefully chosen administrators and teachers in North Dakota. Even though I did not receive as many responses to my survey as I would have liked, I do believe the data I received helped guide me towards authentic and relevant conclusions and suggestions to answer my research questions.

Participants

In addition to following Maxell's (2013) purposeful selection goals, I also incorporated Roulston's (2010) comprehensive selection. Roulston's comprehensive selection means "that all possible participants in the research setting are included in the sample" (p. 82). This was achieved by obtaining the emails of all North Dakota superintendents, all North Dakota elementary and secondary principals, and all North Dakota teachers.

The selected group included, 170 North Dakota public school superintendents whose email addresses were listed on the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (2019b) website. I surveyed all superintendents as they are the school leaders who develop school calendars in North Dakota. But it is ultimately school board members who are given authority to approve a school calendar that a school district will follow each year.

On the NDDPI website, I found a list of principals in North Dakota along with their email addresses. I then employed a random selection process to narrow the list of principals I would email my survey to. The random selection process for secondary principals was to choose every other name on a list obtained from the NDDPI website. To randomly choose elementary principals, I chose every fifth name on a list of principals obtained from the NDDPI website. From the list of principals in North Dakota, my random selection process left me with 81 secondary principals, and 65 elementary principals. As a note, I took my name off the list while choosing elementary principals.

Also included in the survey were 128 teachers. A public list of teachers was not available on the NDDPI website. I obtained a teacher email address list through a request

to the North Dakota Department of Instruction. I contacted the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (2019b) to request email addresses of teachers and received a spreadsheet of all North Dakota teachers along with their emails. Once I had the teacher email list, I began to narrow down teacher names through a random process. I first removed every 100th name on the list. My second step was to remove every 37th name on the list. The last step was to remove double names, as some teachers taught in both middle school and high school. Once I completed that random selection, I had 128 teacher names. Another step I took to deter any bias was to remove my sister's name from the list of North Dakota teachers before I began a random selection process. After my purposeful selection process and random selection process, I emailed my survey to a total of 444 administrators and teachers in North Dakota.

I developed a letter to email to participants I had chosen to complete the survey (Appendix B). The letter was sent through the Qualtrics survey platform, introduced participants to the study, and explained how I would maintain their confidentiality within my research. Also included in this letter was an informed consent explanation along with information about protecting the data collected (Appendix C).

Only 21 out of the 444 contacted participants responded and completed the survey for a completion rate of only 5%. I would have liked to have had more respondents; those who did complete their survey provided insightful and thought provoking answers. Their responses did give me a sense of what North Dakota educators and educational leaders perceptions were at the time of the study regarding school calendar changes. My perception about the low response rate was it may have been due to COVID exhaustion

all educators in North Dakota were feeling during the 2020-2021 school year. Not many wanted to take the time to complete a survey.

Data Analysis and Coding

In determining how I would analyze my survey data, I used a book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Johnny Saldaña (2016), as a tool for researching coding methods. Saldaña (2016) stated:

If your goal is to develop new theory about a phenomenon or process, then classic or re-envisioned grounded theory and its accompanying coding methods—In Vivo, Process, Initial, Focused, Axial, and Theoretical Coding—are your recommended but not required options. (p. 71)

Since my research design is qualitative and flexible and does include some grounded theory, I utilized Saldaña's coding format recommendations for analyzing my survey data.

After researching each of Saldaña's (2016) coding recommendations, I chose *in vivo* as my first cycle coding, and *focused* as my second cycle coding. I chose *in vivo* because it is appropriate for all qualitative studies, but especially for beginning qualitative researchers, which I am (Saldaña, 2016). I wanted to give a voice to the participants I collected data from and this coding method allowed my data to prioritize and honor my participants' voices (Saldaña, 2016).

After the completion date of my survey had closed, I printed a report from Qualtrics with all the respondent's answers to begin my coding process. During my initial review of the answers, I wrote memos of my thoughts pertaining to the answers of respondents and how they answered survey questions. My next step was to create a

spreadsheet for the survey. I created headings to help me organize the data. Headings were: significant statements, codes, categories, and themes. After headings were established, I copied and pasted all answers into “significant statements,” organizing them by the number of the question being answered. Then, I highlighted what I thought were significant statements within those answers for each question. Throughout this lengthy process I wrote notes, reminders, and thoughts that occurred to me to help me with further code, category, and theme development.

Another objective for me during analysis was to gain an understanding of what the main perceptions of administrators and teachers of North Dakota were regarding changes to the North Dakota school calendar. I reflected on what my own bias may be as a North Dakota educator and kept noting respondents’ answers to make sure I let their voices stand out and did not insert my own perceptions into the data.

Before continuing my coding process and developing codes and categories, I read the survey data many times to gain a full understanding of my participants’ responses to open-ended narrative questions. I kept writing memos as reminders to myself. I began to analyze the memo data to see what codes and categories would emerge to help me answer my research questions. “One of the most critical outcomes of qualitative data analysis is to interpret how the individual components of the study weave together. Code weaving is the actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 276). Based on Saldaña’s explanation, code weaving was the next logical step for me to take by analyzing my codes and categories to help me see any themes emerging from the puzzle.

After determining what themes had emerged from the data, I analyzed the themes to develop narrative answers to my research questions. Themes I discovered were compared to my literature review to determine if there were similarities or differences between the two. These comparisons were used to develop recommendations and challenges pertaining to revising North Dakota PK-12 school calendars.

Throughout these steps in my coding process, I kept reflecting on my research questions and my survey questions to make sure I truly captured the perception of each respondent. Through the methodology of qualitative flexible research design, I found emerging themes from the data, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated happen through grounded theory. Through the analysis process, I also recorded direct quotes from respondents' answers to survey questions (Appendix E). Within respondents' answers, I color-coded quotes relating to each research question. Having participants' exact words continued to meet my goal of giving a voice to superintendents, principals, and teachers of North Dakota with their perceptions about revisions to the North Dakota PK-12 school calendar.

Reflexivity

Being a practicing elementary principal in North Dakota and utilizing my 31 years of educational experience in North Dakota, I relied on my background knowledge and experience to help develop the questions I used in my survey. Hammersley (2000) believed that a researcher cannot be detached from his or her own previous experiences and knowledge and that experience and knowledge should not be ignored while conducting research. I believe Hammersley's explanation validates that as researchers we should use our experiences to aide our research, but we should also be cautious not to

detract from the validity of the data. In addition to my own knowledge in the field of education, I used information gathered from my literature review to help me develop questions for my survey.

Throughout my research and data analysis, I continued to check myself and make sure I was not inserting my bias into my research findings. As an educator in North Dakota, this is a topic I am closely connected to. I trust I kept my beliefs and judgements separate from my research.

Validation Techniques

As Maxwell (2013) stated, “Methods and procedures do not guarantee validity, they are nonetheless essential to the process of ruling out validity threats and increasing the credibility of your conclusions” (p. 125). To test the validity of my research, and attempt to avoid researcher bias, with a subject matter with which I am closely connected, I followed the strategies laid out by Maxwell. The strategies I used were triangulation, memos, and feedback from my advisor and committee members. Since my survey was anonymous, I was not able to do member checking with the respondents of my survey. So, another validation technique I used was to ask colleagues I work with to read my survey questions and answers, and then my Chapter IV themes along with quotes I included from respondents’ answers. Once my colleagues completed the reading, I asked them to provide me with feedback on whether I captured the true perceptions of North Dakota administrators’ and teachers’ responses.

Triangulation

“Triangulation requires the use of [various] methods of collecting data from a [wide] range of participants to reduce the risk of bias” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). My data

collection was obtained from a wide variety of educators in North Dakota PK-12 schools because it included superintendents, secondary principals, elementary principals, and both secondary and elementary teachers. Participants were also from schools in North Dakota with a variety of student enrollment numbers. Schools with an enrollment of under 500 students had ten respondents. Schools with an enrollment of 501-1,000 students had four respondents, and schools with an enrollment of over 1,000 students had seven respondents. The triangulation process I used directly related to the validity of my research because I did not just rely on responses from leaders in schools, or just one size of school district.

Memo Writing

Throughout my study, I kept a journal to write memos for myself, to be used as a tool to help me remember thoughts throughout the analyzing process. Memos were also used as a source for keeping track of my reflections from readings, and reflections on responses to my survey questions. I handwrote the memos and kept them with my research. I chose to keep them on notebook paper rather than on computer because I prefer to look back on paper for comparison and reminders. By having paper copies, it was beneficial for me to highlight items I wanted to remember and focus on. I organized the memos by the data collection method I was engaged in at the time. I had a section for my recent literature review, and a section for my historical literature review. The final section was for survey responses, and how each related to my research questions. Within each of those sections, I organized data by dividing it into my three research questions and a section for extra information I felt may be useful later. I made use of memos throughout my research process by recording feelings and experiences I had while

analyzing research data. According to Maxwell (2013), a memo can be brief or very long. My memos ended up being a combination of lengths.

My assumption was that participants in my survey would be able to answer the questions about *what*, *how*, and *why* we should revise the length of North Dakota's school calendar (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d.) or why we should not revise it. Through comparison, and all my analysis and validation processes, I compared North Dakota educators' perceptions with the literature review research. My comparisons examined whether educators' perceptions were echoed in recent research.

Ethical Considerations

I have completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) training through the University of North Dakota. I received IRB approval for human subjects research in December of 2020 (Appendix F).

I conducted my research in an ethical manner, and I protected the confidentiality of all participants. I safeguarded the data collected by storing it on my laptop computer and in files within my desk either in my office at work or in my office at home. After my study was complete, I moved all the information on my computer to a flash drive and kept it in a safe location in my home office along with all paper products developed throughout the study. All information will be kept safe and private for 3 years after the study has ended as required. Participants' identities will not be disclosed in this study as it is not significant to the purpose of the study. The only identifying information is that North Dakota PK-12 educators, specifically superintendents, principals, and teachers, were the source of study data.

In my letter seeking voluntary participation in my survey, I also implemented ethical strategies. Included within the letter were details about the purpose of the study, and methods used for the study. Embedded within the letter was information explaining how participants gave their consent to be participants in the study by completing and submitting survey questions.

I made efforts to protect the integrity of the data collected and did not change or manipulate that data in any way. I tried to be conscious and purposeful to not invoke my own bias or insert my ideas into this research process.

Summary

In summary, Chapter III provided a detailed description of my qualitative flexible research design. This qualitative study was used to collect and analyze data acquired from North Dakota school superintendents, principals, and teachers. Chapter III provided details about the participants in the study, and how participants were recruited. The chapter also explained my data collection method of using a Qualtrics survey. The chapter included my analysis process and how I coded data collected from my survey. The chapter concluded with validity techniques and my ethical considerations throughout the study.

Throughout this research study I was searching for themes to emerge that would help me answer my research questions. My goal was to discover if North Dakota should consider revising PK-12 school calendar requirements and how calendar requirements affect the academic and social-emotional development of students. I was also searching for innovative strategies that would be beneficial in revising North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 school calendar requirements and provide conclusions on the appropriate

amount of time students should be in school to benefit our students both academically and socially-emotionally so they are prepared for life in the 21st century.

In Chapter IV, results are presented using tables and narrative themes that were developed by reviewing, coding, and interpreting survey responses. Themes that emerged were used to help answer research questions. Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, a connection to the theoretical framework of the study, recommendations for further research and action, limitations of the study and final thoughts.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This qualitative flexible design research study explored North Dakota PK-12 school calendar requirements. The rationale for this qualitative flexible design study was to determine how many hours elementary and secondary students should spend in PK-12 North Dakota schools to fully develop their academic and social-emotional skills. Perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers, an extensive review of recent and relevant literature, and a review of historical literature were all analyzed to help answer the research questions and provide recommendations.

There is limited guidance provided to North Dakota PK-12 schools about how many days or hours students need to spend in school to fulfill students' academic and social-emotional needs. The state of North Dakota has listed requirements in the North Dakota Century Code at Section 15.1-06-04 for number of hours students must engage in schooling (educational instruction) in the state. My study researched whether North Dakota's hour requirement is an accurate determination of amount of time students need for necessary academic and social-emotional development. Is it time North Dakota develops school calendars based on educational needs of students and not just society's needs? Are students' needs and society's needs two separate factors or are they related? It is the responsibility of all educational leaders to establish a system that prepares students

to be academically and socially-emotionally prepared to enter a world that is ever-changing. The North Dakota educational system must also evolve to meet those changing needs.

Throughout this research study, I was looking for themes to emerge that would help me answer my research questions. My goal was to discover if North Dakota should consider revising PK-12 school calendar requirements and would such a revision improve the academic and social-emotional development of students. Themes that emerged from survey data are presented in this chapter along with direct quotes from respondents. Respondents' direct answers and quotes can also be found in Appendix E.

Thematic Findings

For this study, I gathered data utilizing a 22-question survey. The survey was emailed to North Dakota superintendents, principals, and teachers and asked their perceptions of North Dakota PK-12 school calendar requirements as those requirements relate to academic and social-emotional development of students.

Throughout my analysis of the survey data, I continually reviewed participants' perceptions to accurately develop codes and categories that would turn into themes depicted in my presentation of findings. In this section demographics of who respondents to the Qualtrics survey were are presented, then themes that emerged from the survey data and analysis are presented. Included with the themes are four tables which address four dichotomous questions asked about North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 school calendar required hours. Themes also contain quotes from respondents as evidence of North Dakota administrators' and teachers' perceptions.

The survey was answered by participants from schools with enrollments of large, small, and middle-sized schools in North Dakota. It was a benefit to my data that I received responses from participants from all three categories of enrollment size. There can be differences in school calendar schedules depending on the size enrollment of a school district. One such difference can be in the beginning and ending times of days for elementary and high school students. I have been an educator in a school where the enrollment for grades PK-12 is under 500. I would consider that a small school. Students in that size of school district all use the same transportation (bussing) schedule. To meet hour requirements for students in Grades 7-12, elementary students in Grades PK-6 attend school the same number of hours as Grades 7-12 students. So, administrators and teachers from a small school may have differing perceptions than those from a school where enrollment is over 500, and students do not utilize the same bussing schedule.

In total, I attempted to recruit 444 educators through email to answer the survey. The email, sent in December of 2020, contained information about my research and assurances that respondents' answers to the survey would be anonymous. After two reminders, only 21 North Dakota educators chose to complete the survey (Table 1). I do believe that COVID 19 exhaustion many educators were feeling in the fall of 2020 caused many to not answer the survey and that is why I had a small response rate.

Table 1

Total Enrollment of School District

Less Than 500 Students	47.60%	10
Between 500 and 1,000 Students	19.10%	4
More Than 1,000 Students	33.30%	7

Following Maxwell's (2013) statement of purposeful selection, where he stated, "The settings and participants are deliberately selected to provide information that is particularly relevant to questions and goals of [a] researcher" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97), I purposefully chose to send the survey to North Dakota administrators and teachers representing different roles within the school system. As you see in Table 2, more superintendents answered the survey than principals or teachers. The reason for this may be that superintendents are responsible for developing local school district yearly calendars in North Dakota, which then need approval by their school boards. Teachers were not as likely to answer the survey, which is disappointing as they were given a chance to have their voice heard and contribute to the discussion about North Dakota school calendars of the future.

Table 2

Occupation in the School District

Superintendent	38.10%	8
Secondary Principal	19.10%	4
Elementary Principal	23.80%	5
Teacher PK-6	4.80%	1
Teacher 7-12	14.30%	3

"Research questions should formulate what you want to understand through your research" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 77). "You develop questions and ask questions to gain that understanding" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 67). Each of the three research questions guiding my study were referenced when developing survey questions to ask North Dakota administrators and teachers. I chose specific survey questions to address each of my

research questions. While analyzing survey question responses, I identified themes that expressed perceptions of the respondents to my survey. I have assembled those themes under each research question they were intended to answer, along with direct quotes from respondents to the survey to let their voices be heard.

Research Question 1

My first research question was: “What are North Dakota school administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions about PK-12 school calendars specific to *the number of hours and length of school day and school year*?” The goal of this research question was to find out if administrators and teachers thought the number of hours required for a North Dakota PK-12 yearly school calendar was benefiting students of North Dakota. I wanted to know if they thought there should be more or less hours in a year or keep the hours the same. Along with that question, I also wanted to find out their perceptions of the length of a school day. The people who work with students everyday should know if the required hours in North Dakota are sufficient to meet students’ academic and social-emotional needs. There were four dichotomous survey questions (Survey Questions #3, #4, #5, #6; Appendix D) specific to North Dakota Century Code law regarding number of hours required in North Dakota’s school calendar (Appendix A). Responses to those questions are reported in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6. These questions were asked to determine a basic percentage of how many administrators and teachers in North Dakota think the school calendar hours requirement should change.

The following tables provide information about respondents’ perceptions on whether there should be more required hours per year for elementary students for academic development (Table 3) and social-emotional development (Table 4).

Table 3*Survey Question 3*

Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the <i>academic</i> development of elementary students?		
Yes	9.50%	2
No	90.50%	19

Table 4*Survey Question 4*

Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the <i>social-emotional</i> development of elementary students?		
Yes	14.30%	3
No	85.70%	18

Based on the answers to these two questions, most North Dakota administrators and teachers believed we should not require more hours in each school year for elementary students. These percentages differed from the narrative responses to Question #7 when respondents were asked how many hours they thought elementary students should spend in school each day. There was also a small difference between perceptions on requiring more hours for academic development and on requiring more hours for social-emotional development for elementary students. The next two tables provide information on how

many survey respondents thought there should be more required hours per year for 7-12 grade students based on academic development (Table 5) and social-emotional development (Table 6).

Table 5

Survey Question 5

Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school to meet the <i>academic</i> development of 7-12 grade students?		
Yes	4.80%	1
No	95.20%	20

Table 6

Survey Question 6

Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school to meet the <i>social-emotional</i> development of 7-12 grade students?		
Yes	4.80%	1
No	95.20%	20

Most North Dakota administrators and teachers believe we should not require more hours in each school year for 7-12 grade students. The answers to this dichotomous question were more consistent with narrative responses to Survey Question #8, which asked

respondents for their perceptions on how many hours students in Grades 7-12 should spend in school each day.

In this section pertaining to how many hours students should spend in school, there were two narrative survey questions (Survey Questions #7 and #8) that asked specifically about the length of a school day. Two more narrative questions (Survey Questions #17 and #18) were asked to see if the respondents thought there should be less time required in a school year. The narrative questions were included to give the respondents the opportunity to have their voice heard. The questions provided them the opportunity to explain why, or why not, they felt the number of required hours in school should change for North Dakota school calendars. As the researcher I wanted to keep the data gathered as non-bias as possible, so I felt including questions about less time in school was the best way to do this. I did not want the respondents to think that more time in school was the only goal of this study. These are the themes identified based on respondents' answers regarding questions about required time in school: (a) hours in the school day, (b) personalized hours, (c) school hour efficiency, and (d) social-emotional needs.

Hours in the School Day

In findings dealing with how many hours students should be in school in a day, there were many suggestions for number of total hours, and some respondents provided comments to follow up why they thought a specific number of hours would work. I think it is important to note that among schools in North Dakota most students in elementary schools associated with a high school in a small Class B size school district attend school the same number of hours as students in Grades 7-12. Elementary students in these

schools almost always attend school more hours than required. The reason for this is transportation. In smaller school districts, and I think I am sure that would include almost every school district with an enrollment of less than 1,000 students, all students must utilize the same bussing schedule. Through analyzing survey answers, I have come to the understanding that not all educators understand the required hours law, and therefore do not know that elementary students sometimes go to school more hours than required. For that reason, some answers to the question about how many hours elementary students should go to school (Survey Question #7) reference the same hours as being “6 to 6 ½ hours as we currently do” or “the current 7 hour days.” In reality that is more hours than required, and that may have skewed some answers to “we do not think we need more hours” when in reality they are attending more hours.

Students in an elementary school following the required 962.5 hours would typically attend school for 5.5 hours per day for 175 days. When analyzing answers and keeping in mind required school hours at the time of this study was 5.5 hours, the percentage of respondents who perceived elementary schools as needing more hours were those that stated a number more than 5.5. This ended up being 52% (11 out of 21) of the respondents. One respondent stated, “I would prefer to see the number of academic hours for elementary school equal that of the 7-12 grade students.” Another respondent agreed. “That is the system we are currently using at the local level. It is hard to imagine working with less time.” Only 9% (2 out of 21) of respondents stated the 5.5 or 962.5 hours as an adequate and appropriate amount of time for elementary students. There were 29% (6 out of 21) of respondents who said the current amount was adequate/fine. I am not sure what number of hours their students attended school, so I do not know what hours they were

basing their answers on. I think these answers are a true indication that our educators do not fully understand what is required regarding a North Dakota school calendar. There were two who did not provide an answer in number of hours. They provided answers that were directed at personalized learning and being more efficient with the hours we have. One respondent who answered that 6 hours is adequate, did go on to say, “because students lose attention, and they need to be with their families as well.”

Personalized Hours

Another theme that emerged from survey answers about North Dakota school calendars dealt with personalized learning. This theme centered around the idea that any required number of hours is not always what each specific student needs. Some respondents had ideas about how the North Dakota school calendar could be more personalized to each learner and not have all students be required to attend the same number of hours. One passionate respondent answered:

I believe in personalizing to meet the needs of each learner. There is no one size fits all. . . . There is no magic number of hours or days. Learners should get to progress through their learning-academic/social emotional based on their proficiency. . . . The current school model sets many learners up to fail.

This respondent gave the impression students should not start and end their school year in August/May with a specific grade, but instead progress to the next grade when they become proficient (when they are ready). That might happen in February, or it might take them 2 years to be proficient. Personalized learning is certainly a topic that has been circulating in education the last few years. This may become a new innovative idea that changes requirements for a traditional school calendar in North Dakota.

Another personalized idea from a respondent was to have “4-7 hours depending on age level, majority, and what they need.” There was no other information given for this answer, so I do not know the intent of how personalized that would be. There was a similar answer for the 7-12 grade students (Survey Question #8), “6-7 [hours for Grades 7-12] depending on what they need academically or emotionally.” This comment supports the following statement: “I think that they should have more options for start and end times at the middle and high school level,” which would personalize time requirements for students to be able to arrive later or leave earlier in the day if they meet proficiency levels or need to leave for a job-related training. Job-related training was a suggestion that came up in response to Survey Question #18 which asked if we should require less hours in a school year. The respondent answered, “Yes – If they are providing learning outside of school such as job related training.” There are many ways to personalize learning for students, and I believe some personalization would also depend on the age of the student.

School Hour Efficiency

Another theme that emerged from the survey answers was that there are administrators and teachers in North Dakota who believe some schools, or teachers, are not using their school hours efficiently. One respondent said schools need to “become more effective and efficient with the time we have[. This] is our responsibility.” I have been in education in North Dakota for over 30 years, first as a teacher and now as a principal, and I totally agree with the following statement by one of the respondents, “Perhaps a refinement on some of the content or curriculum would be a better resolve. More and more initiatives get mandated, . . . and the hours of educators remain the

same.” In the past few decades, teachers do get more and more responsibilities/tasks *put on their plates* in their classrooms and nothing seems to leave their plates. This may be one reason we should increase number of hours required to instruct students in schools. A teacher and/or a school can only be so efficient in the time allotted each day and still meet all the mandates and curriculum needs put in place.

“It’s not the number of hours that are currently required that concerns me. It’s that the law allows schools to loosely interpret how hours translate into quality educational time. . . . We’ve done a 180 from ensuring that student contact time is protected to allowing almost anything as long as a minimum is met.” This statement may be very true regarding storm days in North Dakota. Yes, schools can now utilize distance learning for a snow day, but is that quality education time, or is making up the day a better use of time? Ensuring quality educational time is happening within classrooms each day makes efficient use of required hours we have legislated, whatever they may be.

Social Emotional Needs

The theme of social emotional needs of students was addressed within some respondent’s answers. I was surprised by the lack of empathy shown in some of the answers. We are still coming to realize the emotional setbacks some students and families endured during the COVID 19 pandemic. A respondent stated it well. “COVID has highlighted what we already know about the importance of students having contact with teachers and peers for academic growth and the social/emotional well-being.” Effects of the pandemic were compounded by emotional needs some students have struggled with for years and continue to struggle with each day, emotional needs unrecognized and

unmet by some educators. Yes, there are still North Dakota educators who seem to have little compassion for what a student's social-emotional state of mind may be.

Social emotional skills can best be met through consistent, school-wide statements regarding behaviors and consequences. Consistency for all students in the building being the most important thing! When did schoolteachers become therapists? I do not have a degree in counseling or therapy! Don't take that the wrong way – I build great relationships with my students and I check in on their well-being often. I care very deeply for my students, both academically and emotionally. I simply do not feel that teachers should be expected to prepare or implement a social emotional learning curriculum.

All I can say is that that answer made me say WOW! We are in the business to help kids no matter what and the previous quote had me thinking at first that the respondent did not care before I dug deeper and realized he/she may have had a valid thought about consistent enforced rules throughout a building. Obviously, the previous respondent felt social emotional learning should not be part of a curriculum, but should be addressed through other venues such as a school's behavior policies.

Another comment that caught me off guard was, "This is a family issue. Schools cannot address all the problems of society." Sometimes the family is the issue, and the student needs adults at their school to help. This next respondent has a very realistic view on the social-emotional importance of what an educator does. "In many instances, school is safer than home. Sending kids home earlier in some situations is not a great idea."

When reflecting on my theoretical framework and the work of Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow's pyramid of needs shows us that an individual's basic

needs, a student's basic needs, must be met before they have the capacity to grow to higher levels of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). If we want students to academically achieve at higher and higher levels, we must take some responsibility for providing social-emotional support as this respondent said, "Some increased time to address social emotional skills is warranted. . . . It would not be a bad thing to see this time a required part of the school day for all schools."

Research Question 2

My second research question was: "What are North Dakota PK-12 school administrators' and teachers' recommendations for revision of school calendar requirements to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?" Eight survey questions (#9, #10, #12, #14, #19, #20, #21, #22) were developed to answer this research question. There were two goals to this research question:

1. Get North Dakota PK-12 administrators and teachers to think outside the box and give them an opportunity to have their ideas be heard concerning what beneficial revisions to the North Dakota school calendar might look like, and
2. To gain perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers about how supportive they may be to revisions to North Dakota's school calendar.

I was searching for answers that would provide me with ideas of how much support there would be among administrators and teachers for revising and making changes to North Dakota school calendar requirements at the time of this study. One thing that stood out to me after reading all the narrative responses was that there are educators in North Dakota

who do not know about and/or do not understand the requirements placed on school calendar development through the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC). This is not information I was searching for, but I do think it is important for all school administrators to inform their staff about requirements governing the development of school calendars in North Dakota. A quote from a respondent stood out to me that had me thinking education on North Dakota school calendars should not only be directed at our communities, but also the very people working in the school system. “I really wish that we would start the year after Labor Day and end the year before Memorial [Day] Weekend. Other districts do this across the nation – I’m not sure why we can’t.” This statement tells me some educators do not understand there are required hours that need to be met for a school year.

Respondents’ perceptions that emerged as themes in this section told me more about how receptive North Dakota educators may be to changes to their traditional school calendars or a year-round school calendar. The mindset of the citizens of North Dakota would need to change, through education, if these revisions were to come to fruition. The themes that were identified from respondents’ answers to survey questions were: (a) traditional mindset, (b) modified year-round school calendar, (c) mixed feelings, (d) social emotional needs, and (e) school closures.

Traditional Mindset

These were two very bold statements from respondents when asked about a year-round school calendar. “Nope, I do not feel this would be beneficial to students or staff” and “Absolutely not! Burnout of both students and teachers and dealing with absenteeism in the summer months. No thanks!” This is very much the traditional mindset. The

question did not ask what was beneficial to staff. Schools are meant to benefit students, not staff. Unfortunately, that is somewhat the mindset, everyone looks out for what is only best for themselves. This next respondent made a valid point.

More is not always better. I believe the skills that most learn during the summer months, i.e. working, attending camps of all sorts, family vacations and such, are very valuable to our students. I also believe the emotional toll of teaching in a year around setting would have a negative impact on our school staff.

Making changes just to change is not the answer either. But, basing North Dakota PK-12 school calendars on research and what is best for students could be a positive change, if that is what the research shows to be most beneficial. Another statement regarding year-round schools was, “Would not support year-round school and believe teacher retention would become an even bigger issue.” Teacher retention could very well become an issue that would need to be addressed.

Modified Year-Round School Calendar

This theme that emerged from the 20 answers to this question (Survey Question #9) were split into two perceptions. One perception, 65% of respondents, was to not have year-round school in North Dakota. The other perception, 35% of respondents, was in favor of a modified year-round school calendar. Respondents’ opinions were varied as to why or why not they would support a year-round school calendar.

Of those who would support a year-round school calendar there were some ideas on how to format the days. One respondent’s idea was to have “3 months per quarter, with breaks between each quarter. Additionally, the state should fund remedial reading and math instruction for students who regress during those breaks.” Another idea was to

have “a couple of short breaks in the spring.” This respondent elaborated, “I would like to see a week off in February that could coincide with basketball tournaments.” They also said, “A week off in April would be nice. July should be off, but we should have school in June and August.” These two ideas were common suggestions among respondents.

Those in favor of a year round calendar agreed that having more breaks throughout the year would be beneficial. It was also a common suggestion to take the whole month of July off and begin the new year in August. In a year-round school someone suggested to still continue with the current required hours but put more longer breaks throughout the year-round calendar. One respondent addressed issues that could arise in a year-round school with extracurricular activities and shared academic schedules with other schools:

If our school year went 12 months, the day would need to release earlier and the year would need opportunity for families as well as educational staff to take vacations. How would the compensation package look? . . . Schools would need to be unified for the most part because of extracurricular activities, ITV schedules etc.

There was also thought and a response addressing personalized learning: “I think for the average student, the time would be the same, but with more breaks. The students that struggle would get more time, and the student[s] that excel may get more time off.” Out of all the survey questions asked this next response was the only response that addressed students with special needs:

I think a year-round school calendar would be beneficial to all students, especially students with special needs. The long summer break involves significant

regression, and too much time is spent at the beginning of the school year to get students where they were when they left.

The literature review did provide research about summer regression. This may be even more pronounced in students with special needs. They are a demographic whose education should also be considered when deciding if the PK-12 North Dakota school calendar should be revised. I was happy to see this response and see that someone has done some research about a modified year-round school calendar. “I would be thrilled to have year round school as it only makes sense with the research we have in learning.”

Mixed Feelings

It’s only natural there would be mixed feelings about a topic most have not researched or thought much about, so I felt this next respondent’s answer was very honest. “My feelings are mixed. . . . I believe both educators and students need breaks . . . if there was a model of some kind of 12 month calendar that demonstrated breaks throughout the year, I would always welcome the review.” As a state we should welcome a review and find out what the perceptions of educators have been regarding the best school calendar for academic and social-emotional development of our students. Another respondent had the same thought.

While I do not necessarily believe that the calendar should be revised, it should be reviewed. If we went to a 12 month program; would teachers and families be up for it. There is no way it could be a 12 month program if significant breaks were not imbedded into the calendar.

Being open to something other than what you have traditionally done, is the beginning of change. In all of the survey question answers there was only one response that addressed higher education.

70% of our students attend a 2 or 4 year college. Our college system has not changed very much over the years so the ideas that are floating around would have to be accepted by our college and university system for us to change much. . . . it also depends on who you listen to and the definition of what innovative schools look like.

I'm not sure of how a year-round school would affect higher education, if the year ended in June. But it is an avenue that would need to be taken into consideration.

Social Emotional Needs

When asked for ideas of what an ideal, innovative, school year calendar might look like, two respondents provided answers addressing the social-emotional needs of students. The first stated:

Mental health is an area that is becoming a growing need. Especially now. I would like to see individuals come in to service our students and staff who are facing anxiety and having suicide ideation. Even in a small school, we could fill this person's schedule 2 mornings per week.

And the other respondent said, "SEL is an all year thing and must be addressed daily/weekly to be successful." A modified year-round calendar would provide an opportunity for school staff of all areas to have eyes and ears on students for more of an extended time. Even if hours required were not changed, but spread out over 11 months,

that would be 11 months that students were being kept track of rather than the nine months at the time of this study.

School Closures

Snow days in North Dakota have been a hot topic for all my years in education, and they can affect a PK-12 school calendar. Both as a student and an educator, snow days have become a yearly winter occurrence. One theme that emerged, as a lesson learned from the COVID pandemic, was the ability for online teaching means there should be no more need for storm make-up days in North Dakota as schools can use an online format for storm days if needed. One respondent answered, “The only flexibility I feel is needed in terms of the school calendar is allowing for distance learning when students are absent or during inclement weather.” Yet there were some respondents who felt online learning, distance learning, virtual learning, or whatever terminology you put on it is not an academic or emotional equivalent solution to not being in school. One respondent wrote, “COVID has highlighted what we already know about the importance of students having contact with teachers and peers for academic growth and social/emotional well-being.” Another comment about COVID and distance learning was:

It has really brought home how essential face-to-face learning is for a good portion of our students . . . most students do not thrive in a completely distance learning environment. For learning, and for emotional health, some face to face time is needed.

Something we all learned was stated by another respondent “SEL has been hurt a lot by COVID-19 closures, even more so than academics.” COVID-19, or a pandemic, may

never have an impact on education again like it did in the spring of 2020, and during the 2020-2021 school year. We can still learn valuable lessons from that pandemic. One lesson that seems to have been learned by North Dakota administrators and teachers is that online or distance learning is not a reliable replacement for face-to-face learning within a school. For this reason, distance learning may not be the best innovative way to make changes to the North Dakota PK-12 school calendar.

Research Question 3

The final question of the survey was a dichotomous question about respondents' overall opinions on current North Dakota school calendar requirements (Table 7).

Table 7

Survey Question 22

What is your overall opinion about North Dakota School Calendar requirements as stated in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 that states: “At least nine hundred sixty-two and one-half hours of instruction for elementary school students and one thousand fifty hours of instruction for middle and high school students” (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d., para. 15.1-06-04.1.a)?		
<hr/>		
School calendar requirements should be revised	40%	8
School calendar requirements should remain the same as they are	60%	12

I purposefully put this question last hoping respondents would think about the other questions in the survey, and their responses to them, and really give this last question serious thought before answering.

My third research question was: “How can North Dakota PK-12 educators be innovative with their PK-12 school calendar to influence the academic and social-

emotional development of students?” This question may sound a lot like Research Question #2, but I was searching for innovative ideas about what else could be done within the confines of school calendar requirements that would be beneficial, but not necessarily pertain to student hours in school. There were four survey questions (#11, #13, #15, #16) developed to answer this research question. Survey Question #15 was a lead into Survey Question #16. Survey Question #15 asked, “Is your school doing anything non-traditional in regards to school calendar?” Of the respondents who answered, 70% said “No,” and 30% answered “Yes,” their school was doing some non-traditional things. Those that answered yes were then asked in Survey Question #16 to give a narrative explanation about what non-traditional things they were doing entailed. Some of the non-traditional practices were: (a) implementing full days for professional development rather than early-outs each month, (b) personalized learning and working towards a full competency based educational system, and (c) providing days for students to come in and get extra help and get caught up ;on work. This next respondent sounded very passionate about their school providing an education that is based on, and I quote: “WHAT IS BEST FOR LEARNERS, not adult preference. Every time we say we ‘can’t’ do something we explore why. It is usually adult preference, therefore, we forge ahead with a growth mindset.”

The two other survey questions asked more specifically for thoughts on summer contract time for teachers (Survey Question #11) and the biggest challenge if North Dakota would decide to not follow a traditional school calendar (Survey Question #13). The following themes were identified: a) summer contract time, and b) challenges of a non-traditional school calendar.

Summer Contract Time

The theme of 81% (13 out of 16) of respondents was that summer would be an excellent time for teachers to get uninterrupted professional development and collaboration time. “Having extended time for teachers to engage in professional development, collaborate with other teachers, and to develop curriculum would be beneficial. This initiative would prepare teachers for instruction for the upcoming [school] year” was one comment. Another positive comment was, “All of that would be amazing. Good teachers do that anyway over the summer, it would be great if it would be a part of their contract.” Respondents’ felt it would be beneficial, but only if funded and teachers were paid with additional compensation. There were three (19%) respondents who were not in favor of summers being used for extended contract time for professional development. One comment written by an individual not in favor of summer contract time was, “It should be up for [to] each teacher. Some may need a break [from school].”

Challenges of a Non-Traditional School Calendar

With change comes challenge. Any monumental changes to the traditional North Dakota school calendar could also come with monumental challenges. A proposed change to the old mindset of a traditional school calendar with 2½ to 3 months off for summer break could be met with resistance. If the state of North Dakota were to mandate adopting a non-traditional school calendar, there would need to be a lot of education provided to all citizens about the importance of such a change before it occurred. Changing North Dakota’s traditional school calendar is not something to be jumped into quickly without foresight, but requires a timeline that addresses concerns of stakeholders involved in the education system and citizens of North Dakota. Answers about challenges

to developing an innovative school calendar that does not follow the traditional model fit into these sub-themes: (a) traditions, (b) funding, (c) burn out, and (d) summer activities.

Traditions

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a tradition is “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom)” (“Tradition,” n.d., para. 1a). Traditions can be emotionally charged. Anytime someone must break from their tradition, or a family tradition, there are often emotions attached. If the state of North Dakota were to adopt a non-traditional PK-12 school calendar, there would be many emotions involved.

Huerta and Zuckerman’s (2009) institutional change theory is based on the relationship between schools and their cultural environments. A school needs their community, and a community needs their school, and both seem to adapt to each other needs. It is that need that has maybe determined the structure of North Dakota’s school calendar and has kept it traditional. As one respondent put it when asked what the biggest challenges would be in developing an innovative calendar, “CHANGE. Lack of a growth mindset. Willingness to try and fail and try again, as long as it is what is best for kids and not an adult preference schedule.” Reference to an adult preference schedule points out probably one of the biggest challenges with tradition. Adults want their time to follow a set schedule so they can keep the same activities in their lives they are used to. Some may have summer jobs to supplement their salaries, so this is understandable. But, again, what is best for students? That is the question that has guided my research, and sometimes what is best might not always be what is popular.

Society's cultural norms shape organizational structure by encouraging schools to conform to the accepted rules and rituals of an institution (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). The community is an institution in which a school district resides. The changing needs of students may have not been a determining factor when requirements for school calendars are established and changed. Respondents gave a few reasons why tradition would be a challenge to any innovative changes to the PK-12 North Dakota school calendar:

- “Community/parents/learners tradition and ‘it worked for them’ or ‘kids need the summer off.’”
- “In our region, summers are like gold!”
- “Summers are a time for our brains to recharge!”
- “Buy-in from students, parents, and staff.”
- “Change is never easy for most people. People generally like the routine.”
- “Getting out of the mindset that its always done this way and being open to change.”
- “Buy-in and support from the local communities and parents.”
- “Parent, student, and teacher opposition.”

I agree these are challenges and changing our school calendar would not be an easy sell to communities, parents, teachers, or students. But should the challenge and difficulty stop our students from having an educational experience they deserve if research proves a non-traditional, modified school year is better for students' academic and social-emotional development?

Funding

“If the school year is extended, what does the compensation package look like?”

This was a very realistic question from one respondent. Teacher contract changes would have to line up with whatever school calendar changes were implemented. If an innovative change the state of North Dakota implemented added time to a teacher’s contracted days, which are typically about 182-184 days per year, there would need to be compensation added. If a change to school calendars was a modified year-round calendar, but still required the same number of hours from teachers, would teacher contracts need to change? That issue could become a huge obstacle. If teachers are still teaching 182-184 contract days, but spread out over 12 months instead of including 182-184 contract days into the 9-month contract they have now, are they entitled to more money? There were not a lot of narrative answers to this question other than to say funding or teacher negotiations would need to change. That comment was made by a few. The other funding issue that was raised by a respondent was, “No air conditioning in buildings.” If schools are in session in June or longer in August, air conditioning would become a factor.

Burnout

Teacher burnout could become a challenge if there were not breaks built into a modified year-round school calendar. When Survey Question #14 asked about “innovation” and following a non-traditional school calendar, it did not state that meant a year-round calendar, but from respondents’ answers, I think that is the direction respondents thought an innovative calendar would go. That is one option, but there are many other innovative ideas to pursue to develop academic and social-emotional skills. It was not mentioned but student burnout is a factor to consider as well.

Summer Activities

This sub-theme somewhat follows the sub-theme about traditions, but there were enough examples of summer activities, I felt it warranted its own section. One comment about a challenge was, “Families wishing to spend time at their lakes. Summer employment. Tourism and vacations.” This is very true, but again what is best for students academically and social-emotionally, and not what is adult preference should be the guiding factor in determining what requirements make up the best PK-12 school calendar. I am not saying families, summer employment, and vacations are not important. They may very well be equally important. This purpose of this study was to find out what is best for student achievement and retention regarding academic and social-emotional skills. Whatever type of calendar is determined to be the best, it should not have students attending school 365 days of the year. There should be breaks throughout the year for family, employment, and vacation opportunities.

Summary

Chapter IV included an overview of the chapter, and presented thematic findings based on survey questions asked of North Dakota administrators and teachers using a Qualtrics survey. Thematic findings were supported by direct quotes from respondents as evidence of their perceptions. Voices of North Dakota administrators and teachers were valued and shared in this chapter.

Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, a discussion of the study’s connection to two theoretical frameworks, recommendations for further research and action, and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with my final thoughts about how school leaders in the state of North Dakota should proceed with reviewing and

possibly revising the North Dakota Century Code at Section 15.1-06-04, School Calendar
– Length, so North Dakota students are provided the best education possible to develop
academically and social-emotionally.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, FINAL THOUGHTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore PK-12 school calendar requirements within the state of North Dakota. My goal was to discover if the traditional North Dakota PK-12 school calendar in use at the time of this study was the best format for educating students, or if North Dakota should consider revising North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 that addresses school calendar length requirements (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d.). Would revision of the code improve the academic and social-emotional development of students? I was also searching for innovative strategies for revising the North Dakota school calendar should my research prove revision would be beneficial to students. I also looked at the amount of time students need to spend in school to be of most benefit in the academic and social-emotional development of students. There has been limited guidance provided to North Dakota PK-12 school leaders about how many days in school or hours in school meet students' academic and social-emotional needs.

Do North Dakota students need more time in school to meet academic and social-emotional challenges of their future? Societal needs, and not student educational needs, have dictated school calendars throughout history. Is it time North Dakota develops school calendars based on educational needs of students and not just society's needs? Are society's needs and students' needs different or are they related? It is the responsibility of all educational leaders to establish a system that prepares students to be academically and

socially-emotionally prepared to enter a world that is ever-changing. The North Dakota educational system must also evolve to meet those changing needs.

In my research, I was looking for data about whether the practice of using a traditional school calendar, with the typical 2½ to 3 months off in the summer, has been the best practice for the academic and social-emotional development of students. Cooper et al. (1996) reported that the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, in 1994, urged school districts to develop school calendars that acknowledged differences in student learning and changes in American society. “The report reflected a growing concern about school calendar issues on the part of local school boards, administrators, and teachers, especially as the calendar relates to students at risk” (Cooper et al., 1996, p. 227) for academic failure. The study by Cooper et al. was 27 years ago, and we have not made many changes to the traditional school calendar in that time. If the state of North Dakota does not change the required hours for our schools, nor the format for those hours, school districts may need to innovate and find ways to provide students with environments that better promote the academic achievement and social-emotional stability students need and deserve, while adhering to the North Dakota Century Code’s school calendar requirements.

This research could bring awareness to education policy makers and educators of North Dakota and be used to review and revise NDCC 15.1-06-04, School Calendar – Length (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d.), to provide an improved, academic and social-emotional education for all students of North Dakota. Findings of this study provided perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers about school calendar requirements within NDCC 15.1-06-04, and their thoughts on how a revision to school

calendar requirements could reform North Dakota education. The study also included an extensive literature review of current (current at the time of the literature review) and relevant research pertaining to school calendars. There was also an historical review of literature regarding school calendars to gain insight into how school calendars were first developed and how they have evolved over the years.

Chapter V presents my discussion of thematic findings and recommendations for school districts, North Dakota state education agencies, and recommendations for further research regarding North Dakota's school calendar requirements. This chapter also makes connections to this study's data and the theoretical frameworks that guided the research. The chapter concludes with limitations of the study along with my final thoughts about school calendars.

The literature review and survey data provided information to help answer this study's research questions. Even though there has been limited research on the topic of school calendar revisions and reform, the literature provided valuable information about what has been successful in other states and what has been done internationally regarding school calendar revisions and reform. Of the 444 surveys emailed to North Dakota educators, only 21 individuals responded. This was not a huge response, but each respondent did provide feedback that was valuable in answering the research questions. Respondents' answers also provided information on opportunities for further research and discussion among North Dakota educators and educating agencies. The following research questions guided this study and helped me gather evidence about what would be the most beneficial school calendar to implement for the academic and social-emotional development of North Dakota PK-12 students.

1. What are North Dakota school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about PK-12 school calendars specific to the number of hours and length of school day and school year?
2. What are North Dakota PK-12 school administrators' and teachers' recommendations for revision of school calendar requirements to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?
3. How can North Dakota PK-12 educators be innovative with their PK-12 school calendar to influence the academic and social-emotional development of students?

Themes that emerged through analysis were grouped under each research question in Chapter IV to help me answer my research questions. For purposes of discussion, themes were re-evaluated and merged into five major overarching themes to reach the purpose and goal of my study. Overarching themes are: (a) hours in the school day and school year, (b) school calendar revisions, (c) school calendar innovations, (d) challenges of school calendar revisions, and (e) unique implications of school calendar revision.

Theoretical Framework Connections

Findings within those five overarching themes relate to the institutional change theory relationship between schools and their cultural environments (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). As stated in Huerta and Zuckerman, "Society's cultural norms shape organizational structure by encouraging schools to conform to the accepted rules and rituals of an institution" (p. 415). Through perceptions retrieved from North Dakota PK-12 school administrators and teachers, it was evident that if there were to be a change from the traditional school calendar to a non-traditional calendar such as a modified year-

round calendar, the parents, students, teachers, and communities in which school districts reside would not be supportive of changes. Communities have accepted rules and rituals they want their school calendar to conform to and operate within. Institutional change theory explains why there have not been notable changes in school calendars over the years. It is not necessarily what is best for the education of kids that drives school calendar choices, but rather what the cultural norms of a community might be. This was one purpose for my study: to find out what was best for students, not adult preferences to what a school calendar should look like. One respondent to the survey agreed with me as well and responded, “It [meaning school calendar] should be based on the research on learning and not on an agrarian society.”

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory is a motivational theory that suggests that before individuals can meet their full potential, they need to satisfy a series of needs (Maslow, 1943). According to Maslow, our basic need for physical survival is the first step in motivation. If the basic needs of food, shelter, water, rest, etc., are not met, students are less likely to perform at their best academically. Within findings from my literature review and data on perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers, there was evidence that some students need social-emotional education and access to an adult to help with their emotional health for them to achieve their full academic potential. One North Dakota administrator/teacher stated:

Mental health is an area that is becoming a growing need. Especially now. I would like to see individuals come in to service our students and staff who are facing anxiety and having suicide ideation. Even in a small school, we could fill this person’s schedule 2 mornings per week.

Another respondent wrote, “SEL [social emotional learning] is an all-year thing and must be addressed daily/weekly to be successful.”

Discussion of Findings

Hours in the School Day and School Year

Over 90% of North Dakota administrators and teachers do not want to see an increase, or a decrease, in the number of required hours in North Dakota PK-12 schools. This is not consistent with what findings from my literature review show, and as I reflect on institutional change theory and how schools tend to follow the norms and rituals of their communities, I find my goals for this study reinforced. Are North Dakota PK-12 school calendars going to stay traditional or will the education agencies in North Dakota follow research recommendations, do more research, and maybe revise state school calendar requirements basing requirements on what is best for students and not what is best for adults. Cooper et al. (1996) compared 39 studies about academic decline of students spending summer months off from school. Cooper et al. used the phrase “summer fade” (p. 264) because their studies showed students lose academic skills over the summer, and researchers in the studies they compared determined about 1 month of grade level is lost each summer by students on a traditional school year calendar (Cooper et al., 1996). According to a study by Jez and Wassmer (2013) there is a relationship between more required learning time and student achievement. In a May 2015 article, “The Impact of Learning Time on Academic Achievement,” Jez and Wassmer found just “fifteen more minutes of school a day . . . (or about an additional week of classes over an academic year) relates to an increase in average overall academic achievement of about 1%, and about a 1.5% . . . for disadvantaged students” (Jez & Wassmer, 2013, p. 284).

“The same increase in learning time yields the much larger 37% gain in the average growth of socioeconomically disadvantage[d] [student] achievement from the previous academic year” (Jez & Wassmer, 2013, p. 284). More time in school does lead to increased student achievement (Jez & Wassmer, 2013).

There were some respondents who would like the number of hours for elementary students to increase to the same required amount as high school students. One respondent wrote:

I would prefer to see the number of academic hours for elementary school equal that of the 7-12 grade students. That is the system we are currently using at the local level. It is hard to imagine working with less time.

In most small North Dakota Class B size schools this is already happening because all students share the same bussing, therefore all grade levels of students must be in school the same amount of time. I would agree with this as well. Throughout my 31 years of work in education, schools I have been at have elementary students attending the same schedule as middle and high school students. This has amounted to a 7-hour school day in places I have worked. It would be very difficult to cover all material and provide specials of music, physical education, art, and computer time in North Dakota’s required 5.5 hours per day. When addressing the social-emotional development of students extra time is needed in a day to implement a social emotional learning curriculum. We know SEL time is beneficial to students’ academic achievements as well as their emotional health. According to a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students, those who participated in evidence based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs showed an 11% gain in academic achievement (Mahoney et al., 2018/2019).

Research at the time of this study does show increased time in school is most likely beneficial to students. It makes me question why over 90% of North Dakota administrators and teachers do not want to increase the number of required hours students spend in school. One thought is that their response is not based on what is best for students' academic and social-emotional growth, but rather based on what they feel is best for school staff or maybe they are resistant to change and want to hold on to their traditional school calendar. Maybe they know something not evident in research yet; many factors, not just amount of time in school, can affect student achievement. Some may not want to give up any of their time off from school. I would also interpret their hesitation to make changes to school calendars as being out of concern for how parents and community would feel about calendar changes. Families and a community mindset would be a big challenge in converting school calendars in North Dakota to a modified year-round calendar. But if that type of a calendar is what is best for students it is a challenge we need to face. This is one of the exact reasons I did this research. I wanted to determine what school calendar would be best for students, not keep doing what we have always done just because we have always done it. I wanted especially to be sure school calendars are not based on what is best for adults and society.

One respondent suggested the number of required hours in school be based on personalized learning of each specific student.

I believe in personalizing to meet the needs of each learner. There is no one size fits all. . . . There is no magic number of hours or days. Learners should get to progress through their learning . . . based on their proficiency. . . . Let learners circle back. . . . The current model sets many learners up to fail.

I like the innovation in this idea and think there should be more research about it. If required hours a student spends in school were personalized, students would be in school the amount of time it would take them to show competency in their subject areas. They could also be spending time with job skill training. In the 2021 legislative session, North Dakota H. B. 1111 (2021) added language to the NDCC regarding competency-based learning. This new bill was passed and signed by Governor Burgum during the 2021 legislative session and provided for “a legislative management study of competency-based learning initiatives [to be] implemented in school districts under innovative education programs” (North Dakota H.B. 1111, 2021, para. 1). Research from my literature review showed more time in school does indeed raise student academic achievement. There are many options for providing more hours of instruction. North Dakota education leaders need to research the option that would be best for the students of North Dakota.

School Calendar Revisions

When asked for their opinions on year-round school calendars, respondents showed some strong feelings of not wanting North Dakota to pursue this revision. There were also some respondents who believed it would be beneficial to develop a modified year-round school calendar. A modified year-round school calendar that uses the same number of hours as a traditional calendar (the same number of hours required in North Dakota at the time of this study) but stretches the year out has been shown to increase student retention (Cooper et al., 1996). Through my literature review, I discovered research exists that shows increasing hours in school increases achievement as well, and the extra time provides opportunities for more social-emotional curriculum and counselor

guidance time. Research conducted by Jez and Wassmer (2103) showed important implications for the achievement gap. Jez and Wassmer found:

The impact of changes in learning time is greater for disadvantaged students than their more advantaged peers indicates that cutting school time would disproportionately affect the neediest students, potentially widening the achievement gap that already exists between the affluent and socioeconomically disadvantaged. (Jez & Wassmer, 2013, p. 303)

One revision North Dakota school leaders and North Dakota state education agency leaders should research is keeping the same number of hours as was required at the time of this study, or adding a few more required hours, and incorporating that time into a modified year-round school calendar. Within that calendar, school districts could implement a higher number of shorter breaks throughout the year and shorten the summer break to 1 month. Based on research in my literature review, a modified year-round school calendar is the best reform the state of North Dakota could implement to increase student achievement and retention of skills. Number of required hours would not need to increase, or we could simply add one extra week. The other revision I think may be important is to require PK-6 students and 7-12 grade students in North Dakota attend school the same number of hours. I have included preschool (PK) in this study because some schools do offer preschool. It was not required in North Dakota at the time of this study, but in the future, it may be, and I wanted this research to include preschool students for future reference. The school year could go from August through June, with the month of July being time off from school. Throughout the year, there would be more short breaks that could coincide with holidays. The exact days off would be left up to

local control of a school district as they are now. Some survey respondents also had some ideas about how to make a modified year-round school even more beneficial to North Dakota students. During breaks from school, there could be some remediation offered as well as enrichment and/or professional development for staff.

North Dakota schools already have control at the local level to develop their school calendar to fit their stakeholders' needs, if they meet the required number of hours set forth in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04. Schools can decide for themselves how long they want a holiday break to be, for example. North Dakota schools are not required to start and end on the exact same date, but typically schools end up starting and finishing a year within the same weeks.

School calendars in North Dakota are similar for coordinating extra-curricular activities. The North Dakota High School Activities Association is another state agency that would need to be involved in the coordination of a modified year-round school calendar. This might also benefit sports and extra-curricular activities because specific activities could be spread out more throughout the year into months or seasons not typically included in a specific sport's "season." An extended school year might prevent two different sports or activities from having to double up within a season, thus avoiding conflict between activities. One example that I think could be changed would be golf. This would be a great May to June activity rather than having golf in the fall for girls and in the spring for boys (as it was at the time of this study) when there are other sports to participate in.

I feel a modified year-round school calendar would need to be state-wide reform with all schools participating so all extra-curricular activities and sports could still be

scheduled in common blocks of time as they are now. Extra-curricular activities and sports are an important part of the learning experience for some students and should be considered in any school calendar revision. Schools can still have local control to start and end school on varying dates and put in their own number of days for holiday breaks.

Although the limited research I found supported a modified year-round school as a strategy for increasing student achievement and retention, there would also be some challenges to overcome. Before making such a change, we would need to do additional research. Change should not be based on “limited research.” Some challenges to changing North Dakota’s school calendar requirements to a modified year-round calendar might be overcoming teacher burnout, facing unhappy families due to changes in their yearly routines, societies’ unhappiness with new schedules for schools because of loss of income during summer vacations, or loss of teenage workers in the summer. Traditions are difficult to change, and the traditional school calendar in North Dakota that has approximately 2½ to 3 months of summer break, would also be a challenge to change in the mindset of North Dakotans. Educating all citizens about the positive effects a year-round school calendar could have on students would need to be a priority.

In spite of all the challenges of implementing a modified year-round school calendar in North Dakota, I feel strongly it is a reform our state should seriously consider and at least pursue further research on it. Educational leaders of North Dakota should put together a committee of North Dakota education stakeholders to conduct further research and develop a timeline for implementation of this type of calendar. Educating the citizens of North Dakota about any changes should be included with the responsibilities of this committee. Within this committee, there should also be representation from higher

education because decisions made in PK-12 education also have implications for higher education institutions.

School Calendar Innovations

Innovation in schools can be interpreted many ways. In North Dakota innovation in education has been encouraged and supported by the education leaders of the state and the governor's office. As school leaders, we should use these opportunities to develop a school calendar that is best for the students we are educating in the 21st century, and not keep relying on what was best for society one hundred years ago. As Gary Marx (2014) stated in his book *21 Trends for the 21st Century: Out of the Trenches and into the Future*, "As an industry, schooling looked remarkably similar for hundreds of years" (Marx, 2014, p. VII).

In North Dakota, the Governor's Summit on Innovative Education is held each year. In the documentation advertising the summit, it states:

We have strong schools in North Dakota, but it's clear that we can better support our educators and adapt our educational system to meet the opportunities and demands of the 21st century. Help us shape educational innovation in North Dakota and empower those wanting to creatively, meaningfully and effectively engage our students. Our state, economy, and future depend on it.

(North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2019a)

According to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (2019a), schools should be finding innovative ways to do what is best for student achievement and student social-emotional health. I discovered some innovative ideas through my literature review and through my survey data. Developing school hour requirements based on competency-

based learning and student personalization was one such innovative idea. One respondent described innovative things their school was doing already, such as “personalizing and working towards a full competency based educational system. We have a counselor from the Village on campus 2 days per week for learners and staff. We offer job shadows/internships for credit.” The fact that they were providing a counselor for staff is innovative, and I would think also benefited the students.

Emotional health in schools not only affects students, but also affects staff. Teachers’ emotional health is directly related to their teaching. Again, our North Dakota legislative body has provided provisions for innovation in education through legislative sessions. Following the 2017 legislative session, North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 15.1-06-08.2, “Innovative education program – Participation – Reports to legislative management” (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-08.2, n.d., para. 1) was established. This provision provided the superintendent of public instruction authorization to approve schools who apply for a waiver to implement innovative education for the purposes of improving “delivery of education . . . administration of education . . . educational opportunities for students; or . . . academic success of students” (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-08.1, n.d., para. 2).

When school districts develop school calendars, can virtual learning be an innovative beneficial consideration? In North Dakota, schools may need to cancel school for a day or more due to winter blizzards. Virtual learning can be conducted on those storm days so there is not an interruption to student instructional time. When a crisis occurs, virtual learning can be a viable option for keeping schools open.

During the COVID-19 crisis in education, one learning opportunity that arose was the ability for schools to conduct virtual learning as an alternative to face-to-face learning in the classroom and so prevent losing valuable learning time. This same concept of virtual learning could be built into a school calendar to provide at home learning time in different formats for a more personalized approach to teaching students academic skills throughout a modified or extended school year. Virtual learning does not have to be used only for emergency situations. If we were to implement more virtual (online) learning, though, we should keep in mind a lesson learned during the COVID-19 crisis was that some students do better in classrooms. They need face-to-face learning and the companionship of teachers and friends, so perhaps virtual learning could be used in personalized circumstances like Individual Education Programs (IEPs), or maybe limited to one or two classes, or only used in summer sessions.

Implementing innovative strategies into a school calendar does not have to always focus on student hours. Another innovative implementation could be to hire teachers to use summer months for professional development and curriculum planning. By providing professional development in the summer rather than during the school year, there would be less interruptions to student learning for professional development time. Another benefit would be teachers having time to implement what they are learning through professional development before school begins.

A four-day school week is another innovative idea that has been tried, sometimes using the fifth day of the week for remediation or make-up time. Through my research, I found that less time in school has not been ideal for increasing and maintaining student achievement. If a four-day week were to be implemented perhaps it should be

complemented by a modified year-round school calendar to be more beneficial regarding student achievement and retention. According to my research, this option would only be beneficial if students did not spend less required time in school overall.

Challenges of School Calendar Revisions

Any changes to the traditional school year calendar will have challenges. Maybe the first thing to consider is do we simply add more time to the school year, or do we rearrange the year so that students have longer periods of time in school, and shorter more numerous periods of time out of school as a school break. North Dakota educational leaders will need to think innovatively and develop school calendars that have the right balance between time in school and time out of school so students do not lose skills learned in a long break. If we do not plan and implement instructional time in school strategically, we will not close that achievement gap and improve on the academic and social emotional development of students. Simply adding time, or rearranging time, will not increase student achievement. The time must be engaging and used wisely.

One of the biggest challenges to any change in hours students are required to be in school, or the format of a school year calendar, could be financing. A quick calculation I did was based on 2019-2020 state finances from the Department of Public Instruction, finance section, finance facts, the summary of facts document (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2021). These figures are what the cost of education for all students in North Dakota in the 2019-2020 school year were according to average daily membership numbers. For the 2019-2020 school year, the cost to North Dakota was \$1,409,916,878.00. If we take that number and divide by 175 (the average amount of days in a school year based on hours required by NDCC), the daily cost of educating

students in North Dakota is roughly \$806,666.78 (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2021). It is easy to see how this financial burden would affect both the state of North Dakota and school districts if there were more hours/days required in a school year.

If the number of hours required were not changed, but the year was modified to a year-round school year, compensation for all school staff members would need to be addressed. There are staff members who supplement their incomes in the summer with summer jobs, and by having school at some of those times, they would not have the opportunity to pursue summer jobs. If teacher compensation were not revised, there could be school staff who leave the profession.

It goes without saying that adding more time to a school year calendar may require more money. If the school calendar is revised to a modified year-round calendar, with off times being utilized for remediation or teacher professional development, the cost to a school district and the state will most likely increase. The financial burden on either the state or local school districts could be significant. If it is determined that adding extra time to the school year is beneficial academically and social-emotionally to students, the state will need to find a way to provide that financial backing. Whether it be through more required hours, a modified year-round calendar, or a combination of both, a change in the school calendar could place a financial burden on school districts and the state of North Dakota.

Another perhaps biggest challenge to revising the traditional school calendar, based on research and data collected from North Dakota administrators and teachers, would be buy-in and support from community, parents, students, and school staff.

Changing a traditional mindset to another mindset requires research and education to show how the new mindset would be better and to help make a smooth transition. If it is determined by further research that implementing some type of a non-traditional innovative school calendar for the state of North Dakota is best for students, then educational leaders from all areas of North Dakota need to meet that challenge. There is already support from some North Dakota administrators and teachers that responded to my survey. One response was, “I would be thrilled to have year round school as it only makes sense with the research we have in learning.”

Unique Implications of School Calendar Revisions

A unique implication of school calendar revision for the state of North Dakota could be to address learning loss due to the COVID 19 pandemic. This was not my intention when I first began my dissertation work. The pandemic hit the nation and North Dakota while I was beginning my study. The pandemic impacted students and school districts in a way that has not happened in our lifetime. I felt it affected my research, since I was focusing on student academic and social-emotional development. Both were drastically affected by COVID 19 and the health guidance restrictions that accompanied the disease.

At the time of this study, there was no research available on long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student academic and social-emotional development, because the pandemic was a recent occurrence. As an elementary school principal, I see effects of what prolonged distance learning has done to the academic and social-emotional development of my students. Young students from my school did not always have support at home to help them with their distance learning. There were many reasons

for this including parents working and students being in the care of a babysitter who also had other children to supervise. Young students who are just learning new skills need continued practice and support until the skill is mastered. This is difficult to manage in an online or virtual setting. In distance learning there are not opportunities for students to practice social skills with their peers on a day-to-day basis. Emotional needs of students are not monitored by school personnel like they are while students are in a school building. As my research has shown, there is a direct link between the social-emotional state of students and how well, or not well, they can perform academically. For these reasons, I believe we will continue to see long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now is the time to make an impact and provide more time for students to fill in the gaps missed during the COVID-19 learning crisis, and innovatively use research to develop a school calendar that will make a positive academic and social-emotional impact on the students of North Dakota. We could try a temporary revision to the school calendar before making it part of North Dakota law. We hear about learning loss in the media and from our educational leaders. North Dakota education could lead the nation in developing and implementing innovative revisions to our school calendar to begin to overcome (among other things) learning loss.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

The purpose of this qualitative study was to research and analyze recent and relevant literature at the time of this study in addition to historical literature. Through a survey, I utilized North Dakota administrator and educator perceptions regarding revisions that might be beneficial to North Dakota's PK-12 school calendar and might benefit students in North Dakota.

My goal was to discover if the traditional PK-12 North Dakota school calendar (in place at the time of this study) has been the best way to educate students, or if North Dakota should consider revising PK-12 school calendar requirements for the academic and social-emotional development of students. I was also searching for innovative strategies that would be beneficial in revising our North Dakota school calendar. I wanted to find out what amount of time in school might be most beneficial to the academic and social-emotional development of students. As a state, we want to prepare students for life in the 21st century, and for being leaders of society.

Findings from the literature review and data from the study survey provided perceptions of educators and recommendations for North Dakota school districts and North Dakota state education agencies such as North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and the North Dakota Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee on how to review, research, and revise the North Dakota School Calendar Requirements, and practices within the state. There are also recommendations for further research about school calendars that can improve the North Dakota education system.

The study was conducted to start the conversation within the state of North Dakota regarding research, revision, and reform of our current school calendar requirements to develop the academic and social emotional skills of our students. The study by no means provides all the current and relevant research needed for such a monumental change to our traditional school year calendar.

It is my recommendation that all North Dakota state education agencies, such as the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and the North Dakota Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee, and school districts, begin immediately researching

school calendar reform. I would recommend that the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction convene a committee with representation from all education stakeholders within the state to begin the process of researching whether changing North Dakota's traditional school calendar to a modified year-round school calendar would provide the best academic and social-emotional education for students in North Dakota PK-12 schools. This will not be an easy task, and it may not be a popular task, but I believe it will prove to be of academic and social-emotional benefit to the students of North Dakota. They are the number one reason this task should begin as soon as possible.

A recommendation for further research, which I now regret not doing, would be to include North Dakota school counselors in the survey recruitment process. They could provide valuable insight into the social-emotional aspect of student development, and how that directly relates to student academic achievement. Another recommendation for further research would be personalization of a student's learning time that does not follow a required number of hours and/or days. This came from perceptions of respondents from my survey that I found very interesting and innovative. I feel this idea of personalizing the education of students deserves more research to understand the viability of implementation.

Limitations

A limitation is an influence a researcher cannot control, and one large and unique limitation to this study was research being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. Due to social distancing guidelines, and concerns with transmission of COVID 19 viruses, my data collection was done via a Qualtrics survey with open ended questions. This was a change from in person interviewing and focus groups. I also feel

the 2020-2021 school year was exhausting and overwhelming for educators while they were dealing with repercussions of educating during a pandemic. I believe this a one reason I did not get as many responses to my survey as I would have liked.

Another limitation of the study was the limited research available pertaining to school calendars that do not follow the traditional format. Data about schools who have implemented modified year-round calendars was hard to find and compare because of the variety of formats schools have followed. There was no consistency to how schools have structured their year-round schools. Research studies regarding long-term effects of not having an extended summer break were limited and almost non-existent. Another reason for limited research could be the fact that most years a student has a different teacher, and therefore, calendar reforms cannot be truly analyzed with fidelity since different teachers have different teaching styles. To truly know the impact of changes to a school calendar, comparison studies would need to be done on students who have the same teacher year after year as opposed to students who have a different teacher each year. All comparisons would have to study schools using the same structure in their school calendars.

A third limitation may have been the premise that student needs and society's needs are not related. On many occasions during this research I asked myself: "Is it time North Dakota develops school calendars based on educational needs of students and not just society's needs?" I did not try to determine if there was a relationship between students' needs and society's needs. It is possible the two are related and basing school calendars on society's needs may benefit students' needs as well, since students must be prepared to function in society. Perhaps both society and student needs should be addressed when reviewing school calendars.

A final minor limitation might have been the assumption our present calendar needs changing. We should review it regularly, yes, but it might have helped to research successful schools in our country where students achievement levels equaled or exceeded achievement levels in other countries. Then look at the school calendars of those successful schools and see how many days and/or hours those schools had incorporated into their calendars. As researchers, we need to be aware that many variables, not just length of a school calendar, can affect achievement levels in students.

Final Thoughts

This research was conducted so I could discover if the traditional PK-12 school calendar in place in North Dakota at the time of this study has been the best way to educate students, or if North Dakota should consider revising PK-12 school calendar requirements to improve the academic and social-emotional development of students. A second goal was to determine what a more beneficial PK-12 North Dakota school calendar might look like for meeting academic and social-emotional needs of students. A modified year-round calendar has emerged as one possible viable option for improving students' academic and social emotional development. Through a review of relevant research and data collect on perceptions of North Dakota administrators and teachers, I wanted to find out if the traditional school calendar starting in mid-August and ending in May was, in educators' opinions, the best way to educate students. Another issue with school calendars I wanted to address was if required hours in school for elementary students of 962.5 and 1050 for students in Grades 7-12, which is roughly 175 days in school, has been enough time for students to learn academic and social-emotional skills needed to be successful in the 21st century.

Schools in the United States have been following a traditional calendar for decades with little or no reform. As a nation, we reform schools and are constantly implementing new strategies to help students' achievements, but we have not made any major revisions to our calendar structure, at least not in North Dakota, or even most places nationally. Internationally, schools have implemented more non-traditional school calendars. But there is still research to be done on the success rate of these schools both nationally and internationally. One of the roadblocks to my research both in the United States, and internationally, regarding school calendars was there was no consistent way that schools develop their yearly calendars. A school may decide to try a modified year-round school year, but they do not provide data comparing results of how students reacted to the different setting, and those schools may not continue to utilize that modified calendar for enough years to get consistent data.

My final thought after completing my research is, I believe it is time for reviewing and revising North Dakota's school calendar requirements, Section 15.1-06-04 in the North Dakota Century Code. This is a reform that North Dakota state agencies such as the Department of Public Instruction and the North Dakota Legislative Interim Education Policy Committee, and others involved in public education must make a priority. North Dakota is constantly making decisions about innovative education in North Dakota. It is time for North Dakota education leaders to revise the school calendar and be innovative for ALL students and give them the opportunity to achieve to their best ability, both academically and social-emotionally. We, as citizens of North Dakota, have an obligation to prepare our students for their future, as well as help students be leaders of our society. Research shows us there may be a way to do better for students, and we

must make every effort to do better. As Maya Angelou stated, “Do the best you can until you know better Then when you know better, do better” (Maya Angelou, 1994).

Now is the time to do better for North Dakota students.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

North Dakota Century Code, Section 15.1-06-04, School Calendar – Length

(Appendix was copied directly from North Dakota Century Code December 1, 2021)

CHAPTER 15.1-06 SCHOOLS

15.1-06-04. School calendar - Length.

1. A school district shall provide for a school calendar that includes:
 - a. At least nine hundred sixty-two and one-half hours of instruction for elementary school students and one thousand fifty hours of instruction for middle and high school students;
 - b. Three holidays, as selected by the board in consultation with district teachers from the list provided for in subdivisions b through j of subsection 1 of section 15.1-06-02;
 - c. No more than two days for:
 - (1) Parent-teacher conferences; or
 - (2) Compensatory time for parent-teacher conferences held outside of regular school hours; and
 - d. At least three days of professional development not including meals or breaks.
2. For the first three days of professional development required under subdivision d of subsection 1, a day of professional development must consist of:
 - a. Six hours of professional development, exclusive of meals and other breaks, conducted within a single day;
 - b. Six hours of cumulative professional development conducted under the auspices of a professional learning community; or
 - c. Two four-hour periods of professional development, exclusive of meals and other breaks, conducted over two days.
3. If because of weather or other conditions a school must cancel hours of instruction or dismiss before completing all hours of instruction for the day, the school is responsible for making up only those hours and portions of an hour between the time of cancellation or early dismissal and the conclusion of all hours of classroom instruction for the day if the dismissal will result in the school failing to meet the requirements of subdivision a of subsection 1. A school district may satisfy the

requirements of this section by providing virtual instruction pursuant to section 15.1-07-25.4.

4. For purposes of this section, a full day of instruction at a physical school plant consists of:
 - a. At least five and one-half hours for kindergarten and elementary students, during which time the students are required to be in attendance for the purpose of receiving curricular instruction; and
 - b. At least six hours for high school students, during which time the students are required to be in attendance for the purpose of receiving curricular instruction.
5. If a school district intends to operate under a school calendar that consists of four days of instruction per week, the school district shall apply and be approved for a waiver by the superintendent of public instruction.
6. If a school district intends to provide virtual instruction, the instruction must comply with the requirements under subsection 4. The attendance of students participating in virtual instruction must be verified by monitoring the student's progress on academic pacing guides developed by the school district to ensure students are in attendance and receiving sufficient curricular instruction, as defined in rules adopted by the superintendent of public instruction.

REFERENCE:

N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04 School calendar – Length. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15-1c06.pdf#nameddest=15p1-06-04>

Appendix B

Email Cover Letter Requesting Survey Participation

Research Title: *The Impact of School Calendar on the Academic and Social-Emotional Development of Students*

North Dakota Educational Leader,

I am enrolled in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, Cohort #8, at the University of North Dakota. I am in the process of gathering data for my dissertation research. ***My study focuses on the State of North Dakota school calendar requirements as stated in North Dakota Century Code.*** Information gathered from this research may be shared with the 67th North Dakota Legislative Assembly in 2021, so they may consider the recommendations while reviewing the NDCC as it relates to public education.

You are invited to participate in this research study by completing an online survey focusing on your perceptions, and recommendations regarding North Dakota's school calendar requirements (NDCC 15.1-06-04) and how the statute could be revised to better impact the academic and social-emotional development of students in North Dakota.

The researcher is gathering data ***to answer the question of whether the ND hour requirement is an accurate determination of student academic and social emotional success.*** The information you provide will be used to aid the researcher in gathering data from the voices of North Dakota educators.

All completed survey results will be stored on a secure, password protected computer, in a secure office. The survey will take approximately fifteen-twenty minutes to complete. Approximately 444 ND school administrators, and teachers, were emailed this survey. There is no cost, nor is there any compensation, for completing this survey. The survey will remain open for two weeks.

Before beginning the survey, please read through the study information on the opening page. The University of North Dakota IRB has approved this research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop taking part at any time. If you choose to not take part in the study, it will not be held against you. All information gathered will be confidential.

Your completion of the survey will serve as your consent to take part in this study.

I would really like the chance to provide the educators of North Dakota a voice in recommendations to the North Dakota Legislators pertaining to ND school calendar requirements. So, please consider providing answers to this survey, as a way to have your voice heard. If you have any questions, or concerns, please contact me. Thank you so much for your time, and input.

Sincerely,

Jackie Bye, Elementary Principal

Dakota Prairie School District

jacqueline.bye@und.edu

University of North Dakota Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort #8

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Survey

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
Institutional Review Board
Study Information Sheet
Online Survey

Title of Project: *The Impact of School Calendar on the Academic and Social-Emotional Development of Students*

Principal Investigator: *Jacqueline Bye, Jacqueline.bye@und.edu*

Co-Investigator(s): *None*

Advisor: *Dr. Sherryl Houdek, 701-777-3577, sherryl.houdek@und.edu*

Purpose of the Study:

You are being invited to participate in this research study by completing a survey about your perceptions and recommendations about North Dakota's school calendar requirements and how they could be revised to allow innovation in North Dakota education. The researcher is gathering data to answer the question of whether the ND hour requirement is an accurate determination of student success, both academically and social-emotionally.

Procedures to be Followed:

You will be asked to answer 21 open-ended questions on an online survey. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. A link will be provided to the survey. Once you open the link to the survey and begin participation in the survey, you are giving your consent for the information provided to be used in my research.

Risks:

There are no anticipated risks in participating in this research.

Benefits:

The information collected may not benefit you directly, but it may be helpful to others. The benefit of this study is to provide information to the State of North Dakota Legislators about revisions and innovations that could be made to NDCC, to impact the education of North Dakota students.

Duration:

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Statement of Confidentiality:

All information gathered will be confidential. The survey, does not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. The survey only asks for your current position and the size of your school. Therefore, your responses are recorded anonymously. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be included since your name is in way linked to your responses. All survey response received will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in our study, we want you to be aware that certain “key logging” software programs exist that can be used to track or capture data that you enter and/or websites that you visit.

Right to Ask Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jackie Bye. You may ask any questions you have now via email response. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Jackie Bye at Jacqueline.bye@und.edu, or research advisor Dr. Sherryl Houdek, at sherryl.houdek@und.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@UND.edu. You may contact UND IRB with problems, complaints, or concerns about the research. Please contact UND IRB is you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is an informed individual who is independent of the research team.

General information about being a research subject can be found on the Institutional Review Board website “Information for Research Participants” <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/researchparticipants.html>.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Voluntary Participation:

You do not have to participate in this research. You can stop your participation at any time. You may refuse to participate or choose to discontinue participation at any time without losing any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this research study.

Completion and return of the survey imply that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

Appendix D

Qualtrics Survey Questions

Superintendents, Principals, Teachers

1. Please choose the total enrollment of your school district K-12.
2. Please choose your occupation.
3. Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *academic* development of elementary students?
4. Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *social emotional* development of elementary students?
5. Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *academic* development of 7-12 grade students?
6. Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *social emotional* development of 7-12 grade students?
7. How many hours do you think elementary students should spend in school each day to develop academic and social emotional skills that prepare them for the 21st century? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.
8. How many hours do you think middle and high school students should spend in school each day to develop academic and social emotional skills that prepare them for the 21st century? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.

9. If the state funded year-round school, please state your opinion on a year-round school calendar for North Dakota students. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
10. If North Dakota adopted a year-round calendar, with innovative decisions left to local school districts, how do you think the year should be divided including how many days and hours in the year. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
11. What are your thoughts on summer months as extended contract time for teachers: You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
 - a. *For professional development*
 - b. *For teacher collaboration time*
 - c. *For teacher curriculum and content development*
12. How would you recommend the state fund flexibility, innovation, and extended school year? You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
13. What would be the biggest challenges for schools in developing an innovative school calendar that does not follow the traditional model? You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
14. Describe an ideal, innovative, school year calendar for developing academic knowledge and social-emotional skills among North Dakota students. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
15. Is your school doing anything non-traditional in regards to school calendar?
16. If you answered yes to Question 7, please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points.
17. Do you think North Dakota should require less hours in school for elementary students in a school year? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.
18. Do you think North Dakota should require less hours in school for middle and high school students in a school year? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.

19. Please describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced your thoughts about school calendar requirements in meeting the academic and social emotional needs of students. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.
20. How do you think North Dakota should address school closures days in regard to school calendar requirements? You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points.
21. Is there anything else you would like to add about North Dakota school calendar requirements?
22. What is your overall opinion about North Dakota School Calendar requirements as stated in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 that states: “At least nine hundred sixty-two and one-half hours of instruction for elementary school students and one thousand fifty hours of instruction for middle and high school students” (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d., para. 15.1-06-04.1.a).

Appendix E

QUALTRICS Report – Survey Questions and Answers

Default Report

Impact of School Calendar on the Academic and Social Emotional Development of Students-Jackie Bye

September 12th 2021, 9:38 am MDT

Q1 – Please choose the total enrollment of your school district K-12 (see Figure E1 and Table E1 for participants' answers).

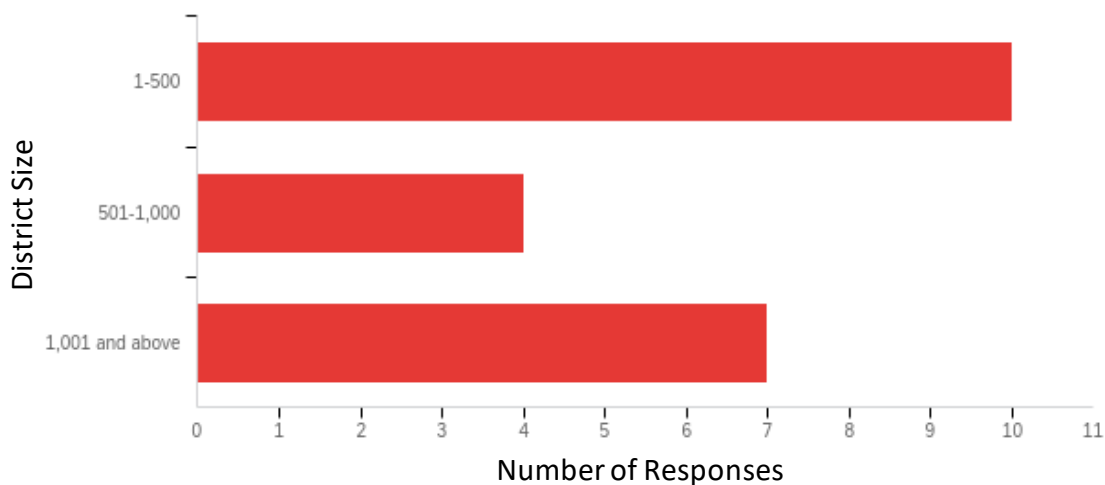


Figure E1. Number of Responses for Each Size District.

Table E1

Number and Percentage of Responses to School District Size

	Answer (Size of School District)	%	Count
1	1-500	47.62%	10
2	501-1,000	19.05%	4
3	1,001 and above	33.33%	7
	Total	100%	21

Q2 – Please choose your occupation (see Figure E2 and Table E2 for participants' answers).

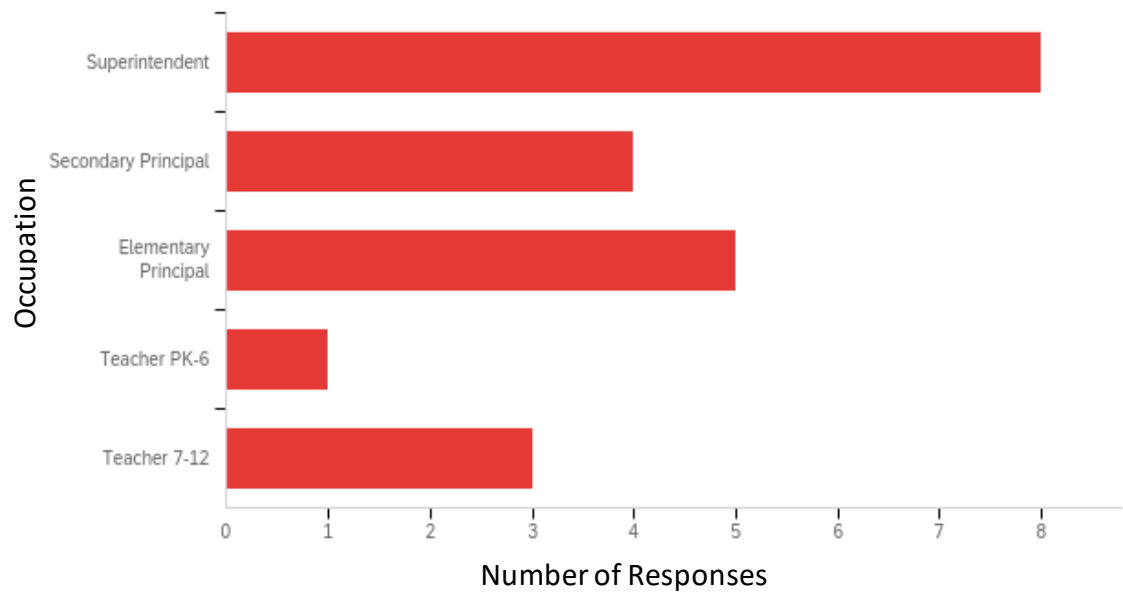


Figure E2. Number of Responses for Each Occupation.

Table E2

Number and Percentage of Responses to Occupation

#	Answer (Occupation)	%	Count
1	Superintendent	38.10%	8
2	Secondary Principal	19.05%	4
3	Elementary Principal	23.81%	5
4	Teacher PK-6	4.76%	1
5	Teacher 7-12	14.29%	3
Total		100%	21

Q3 – Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *academic* development of elementary students (see Figure E3 and Table E3 for a summary of participants’ answers)?

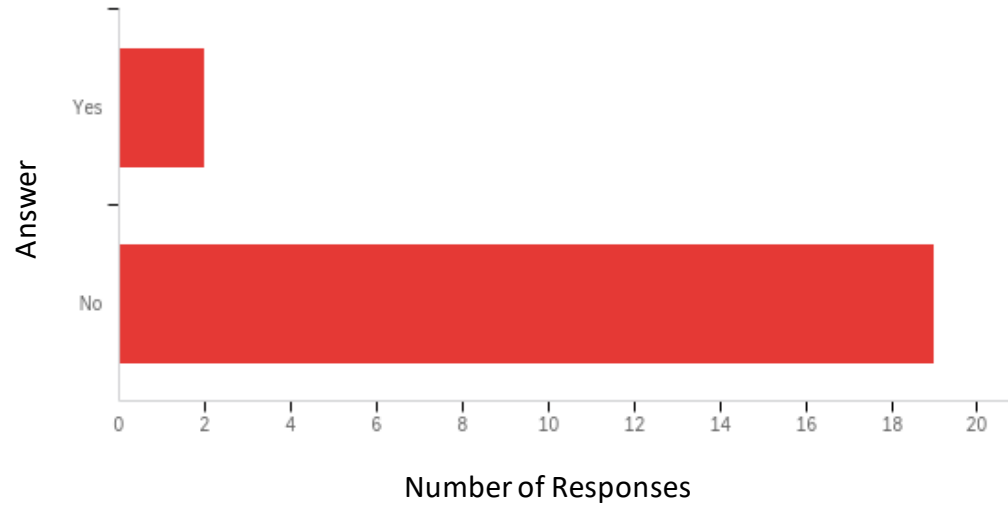


Figure E3. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 3.

Table E3

Number and Percentage of Yes and No Responses to Survey Question 3

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	9.52%	2
2	No	90.48%	19
	Total	100%	21

Q4 – Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 962 1/2 hours per year for elementary students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *social emotional* development of elementary students (see Figure E4 and Table E4 for a summary of participants’ answers)?

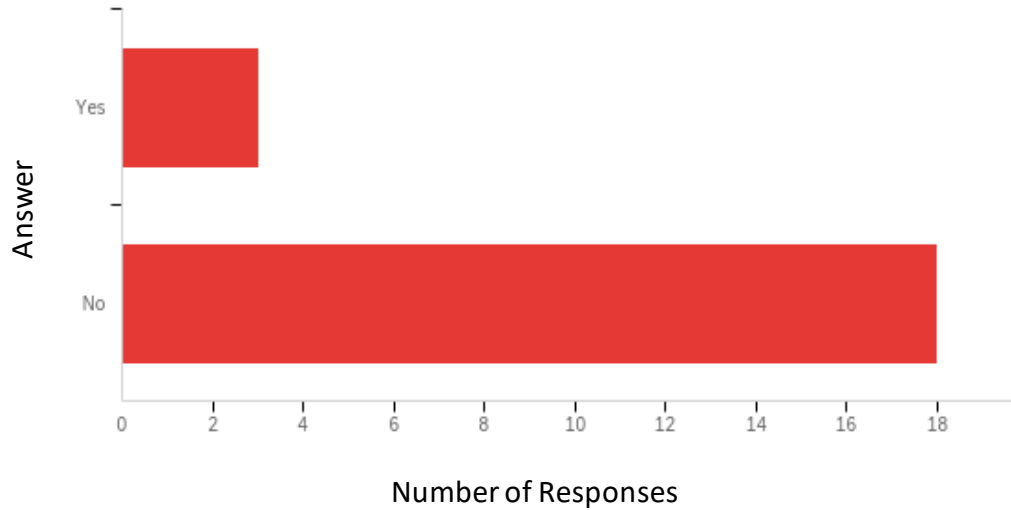


Figure E4. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 4.

Table E4

Number and Percentage of Yes and No Responses to Survey Question 4

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	14.29%	3
2	No	85.71%	18
	Total	100%	21

Q5 – Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *academic* development of 7-12 grade students (see Figure E5 and Table E5 for a summary of participants’ answers)?

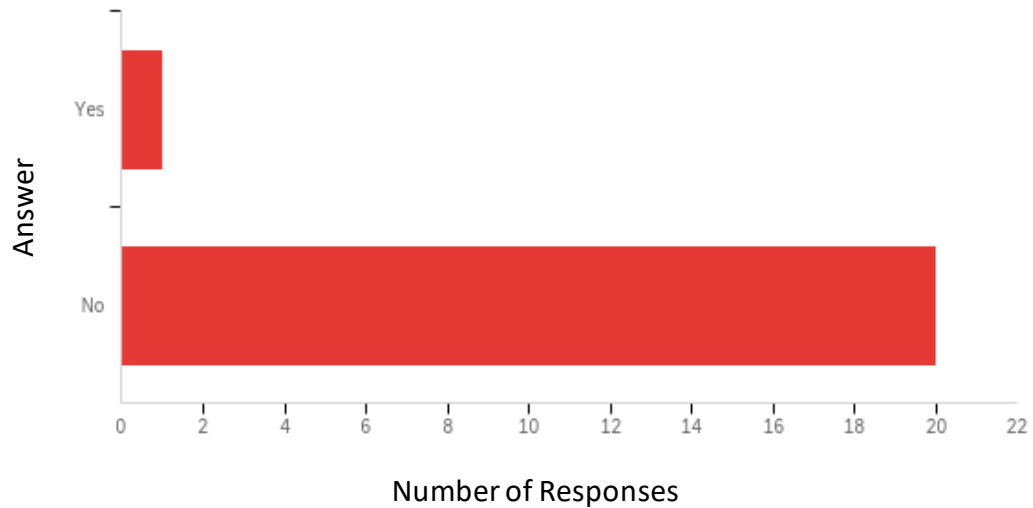


Figure E5. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 5.

Table E5

Number and Percentage of Yes and No Responses to Survey Question 5

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	4.76%	1
2	No	95.24%	20
	Total	100%	21

Q6 – Based on your experience, do you think the North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 School Calendar length, that requires 1050 hours per year for 7-12 grade students, should be changed to include more required hours in school, to meet the *social emotional* development of 7-12 grade students (see Figure E6 and Table E6 for a summary of participants’ answers)?

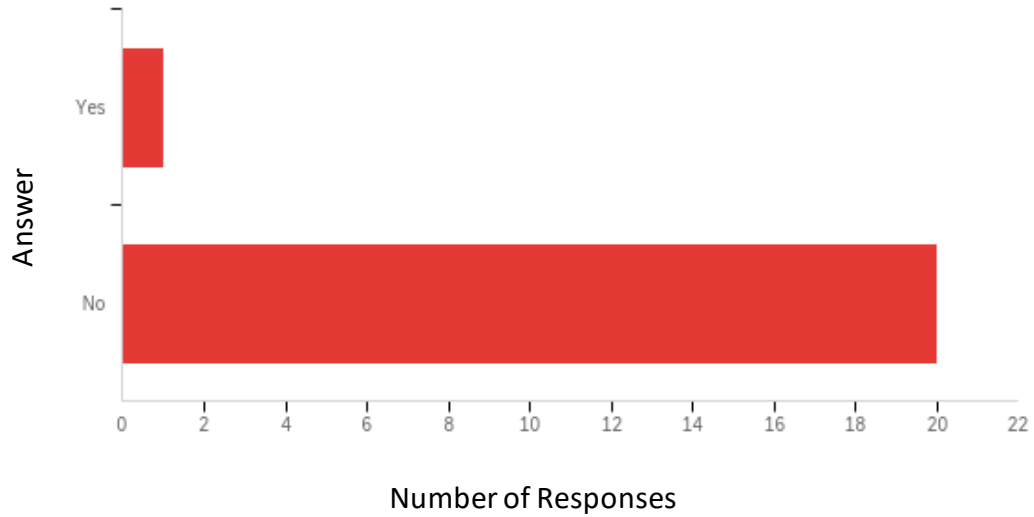


Figure E6. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 6.

Table E6

Number and Percentage of Yes and No Responses to Survey Question 6

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	4.76%	1
2	No	95.24%	20
	Total	100%	21

Q7 – How many hours do you think elementary students should spend in school each day to develop academic and social emotional skills that prepare them for the 21st century? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (see Table E7 for a summary of participants’ answers).

Table E7

Number of Hours Respondents Felt Elementary Students Should Spend in School

5.5 hours - Including skills learned in specials, such as phy ed, music, library, and school-specific specials (such as Spanish, keyboarding, or health)
6 hours - most schools already have an extended school day of more than the required 5 1/2 hours, either for busing reasons or just out of necessity.
I believe that what is currently in place is sufficient.
I would prefer to see the number of academic hours for elementary school equal that of the 7-12 grade students. That is the system we are currently using at the local level. It is hard to imagine working with less time.
I think 6 is adequate because students lose attention, and they need to be with their families as well.
I believe in personalizing to meet the needs of each learner. There is no one size fits all. Some learners need lots of support, others prove to learn better on their own. There is no magic number of hours or days. Learners should get to progress through their learning-academic/social emotional based on their proficiency. Some may take 2x as long to learn, but learning is learning, there should not be cut offs. It's May you fail because it is end of the school year. Until graduation, learners should have the opportunity to go back and prove they have learned something that earlier was a bit difficult. Let learners circle back. I could go on and on about this subject. The current school model sets many learners up to fail.
I believe our elementary students attend school long enough each day. Become more effective and efficient with the time we have is our responsibility.
I think the current day which is approximately 7 hours is adequate. I don't think the day needs to change to best address academic and SEL skills. Instead I think there needs to be less testing but more time to play and work with classmates on SEL skills.
6 to 6 1/2 hours as we currently do.
30 minutes
7
(continued)

Each student has a unique circumstance and background. I believe the quality educators put in a ton of their own time to prepare and find ways to serve his/her students. Giving a hard number, I would state that our current hour dedication of hours is fine. Perhaps a refinement on some of the content or curriculum would be a better resolve. More and more initiatives get mandated, which and the hours of educators remain the same.

7

The current 7 hour days are long enough for students.

Academic skills can be met with our current hours. Social emotional skills can be best met through consistent, school-wide statements regarding behaviors and consequences. Consistency for all students in the building being the most important thing! When did school teachers become therapists? I do not have a degree in counseling or therapy! Don't take that the wrong way - I build great relationships with my students and I check in on their well-being often. I care very deeply for my students, both academically and emotionally. I simply do not feel that teachers should be expected to prepare or implement a social emotional learning curriculum. Students will learn much from understanding which behaviors are acceptable and appropriate in a school setting, and which are not acceptable or appropriate. Combine that with caring teachers, and I see a recipe for success!

It's not the number of hours that are currently required that concerns me. It's that the law allows schools to loosely interpret how hours translate into quality educational time. Schools can choose to cancel all or portions of days and not make them up for a variety of reasons, as long as they have extra hours accounted for in their approved calendar. We've done a 180 from ensuring that student contact time is protected to allowing almost anything as long as a minimum is met.

This is a family issue. Schools cannot address all the problems of society.

The number of hours (962.5) are adequate and appropriate and should not be changed.

7

6-7 hours a day.

4-7 hours depending on age level, maturity, and what they need

Q8 – How many hours do you think middle and high school students should spend in school each day to develop academic and social emotional skills that prepare them for the 21st century? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (see Table E8 for a summary of participants' answers).

Table E8

Number of Hours Respondents Felt Middle and High School Students Should Spend in School

6 hours is plenty. 50 minute class periods are substantial enough, anything past an hour would be difficult to keep students engaged.
I believe that what is currently in place is sufficient.
The amount of time for academic skills is adequate. Some increased time to address social emotional skills is warranted. I believe many schools already exceed the minimum number of hours and include some sort of "extra" time (often called WIN time or "whatever your school mascot is" time) for social emotional learning, enrichment, or intervention. It would not be a bad thing to see this time a required part of the school day for all schools.
I think 6 hours is adequate. Students need to have a life outside of the school day as well for sports and other extracurricular activities. They also need time with their families, and many have jobs to help support their families.
I believe in personalizing to meet the needs of each learner. There is no one size fits all. Some learners need lots of support, others prove to learn better on their own. There is no magic number of hours or days. Learners should get to progress through their learning-academic/social emotional based on their proficiency. Some may take 2x as long to learn, but learning is learning, there should not be cut offs. It's May you fail because it is end of the school year. Until graduation, learners should have the opportunity to go back and prove they have learned something that earlier was a bit difficult. Let learners circle back. I could go on and on about this subject. The current school model sets many learners up to fail.
I believe our elementary students attend school long enough each day. Become more effective and efficient with the time we have is our responsibility.
I think 7 is an adequate number of hours for students to be in school to work on academics and SEL skills.
6 1/2 hours as we currently do.
45 minutes

(continued)

7.5
My response to this is the same as the above question.
7
The current 7 hour days are appropriate for students.
Our current hours are sufficient.
Same answer as above.
This is a family issue. Schools cannot address all the problems of society.
The number of hours (1050) are adequate and appropriate and should not be changed.
8
6-7 hours
6-7 depending on what they need academically or emotionally

Q9 – If the state funded year-round school, please state your opinion on a year-round school calendar for North Dakota students. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (see Table E9 for participants’ answers).

Table E9

Respondents’ Opinions on Year-Round Calendars for Schools

I would elect a similar number of required hours, with breaks between quarters or trimesters
Absolutely not! Burnout of both students and teachers and dealing with absenteeism in the summer months. No thanks!
If the year-round school is required of all students, I would not be in favor. Many students use the summer months to pursue favored interests in the form of camps and summer programs with which a year-round school would interfere. I am satisfied with the current model of the state offering some aid for schools wishing to offer summer classes to interested students.
(continued)

I think a year-round school calendar would be beneficial to all students, especially students with special needs. The long summer break involves significant regression, and too much time is spent at the beginning of the school year to get students where they were when they left.

I would love year around school with a few larger breaks throughout. I think learners would experience more success without the summer break. Again, personalized learning could afford this opportunities to allow learners to work at their pace and adjust their schedules according to what they need.

More is not always better. I believe the skills that most learn during the summer months, i.e. working, attending camps of all sorts, family vacations and such, are very valuable to our students. I also believe the emotional toll of teaching in a year around setting would have a negative impact on our school staff.

I think in North Dakota it is important to have a break during the summer. We do not have warm weather that often and we need to take advantage of it. That is the time for family and friends and a time to relax. Not all learning is done in school. Students need that time for relationships and learning outside of school.

I currently like how it is now. If it were to change to year round we would need to have more breaks. Students lose focus in the spring and I am thinking the same would be true for the summer.

I would be thrilled to have year round school as it only makes sense with the research we have in learning.

I would not like a year-round school in ND.

My feelings are mixed on this topic. I believe both educators and students need breaks. Do we need the long summer break? Probably not so much because students regress quite a bit when school resumes in the fall. But if there are not significant opportunity for staff breaks, attrition will be the larger topic due to staff burn out. If there was a model of some kind of 12 month calendar that demonstrated breaks throughout the year, I would always welcome the review.

I would not be in favor of this. There are many students who currently take courses year-round either to catch up or for dual credit purposes.

We already offer summer school courses in my school and have 500+ students that take at least one class so it really does not matter. They should not have full days as teachers and students do need breaks from each other.

Nope, I do not feel this would be beneficial to students or to staff, so I have no opinion as to what the calendar would look like.

I interpret "year-round school" to mean that the required contact time between students and teachers would be increased. If it's just a question of spreading the existing contact

(continued)

time out to help students retain information and avoid a long summer break, that's a different issue. Funding year-round school is probably less of an obstacle than getting parents, students, and staff to accept the idea of it.

Not for this as we are an ag. state. Many of our students help out on the farm/ranch each school year. Note: If passed, by legislature, are you also including air conditioning for all older schools who have to meet in the heat of the summer?

I do not believe year round school is a good idea. I would be opposed to this.

Would not support year-round school and believe teacher retention would become an even bigger issue.

I would not like year round school. The weather in North Dakota is unpredictable so it is nice to have time off during the summer to enjoy some sunshine.

Year round school would give teachers and students more options for education. The learning could be held at a constant rather than time.

Q10 – If North Dakota adopted a year-round calendar, with innovative decisions left to local school districts, how do you think the year should be divided including how many days and hours in the year. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (see Table E10 for participants’ answers).

Table E10

Respondents’ Opinions on How to Divide Year-Round Calendars for Schools

3 months per quarter, with breaks between each quarter. Additionally, the state should fund remedial reading and math instruction for students who regress during those breaks.

I think there should be a couple of short breaks in the spring. I would like to see a week off in February that could coincide with basketball tournaments. A week off in April would be nice. July should be off, but we should have school in June and August.

Days and hours are the variable as long as learning is not the variable.

I don't believe we should be in year-around school.

I think the individual districts should still take the summers off.

We would possibly set it up with 175 contact days for students and build breaks in accordingly.

(continued)

Two months on and 2 weeks off; 3 weeks off for winter holiday and all of July off (after the 4th).

Most educators have not been exposed to anything different than what we are currently experiencing other than some minor refinements to an existing format. If our school year went 12 months, the day would need to release earlier and the year would need opportunity for families as well as educational staff to take vacations. How would the compensation package look? What is the level of buy in from educators to pursue this. Schools would need to be unified for the most part because of extracurricular activities, ITV schedules etc.

I believe we would have a difficult time keeping the attention of students during the summer months. I also feel that high school students use this time to work, which is valuable life experience as well.

Probably a week break between quarters, 3 week break at semester and an extended break for summer term.

Nope - don't do it!

If ND adopted a year-round calendar, then I think the state would have to establish a higher minimum number of hours and leave it up to local boards to decide how best to schedule it.

Not for this.

I do not believe year round school is a good idea. I would be opposed to this.

I like our current system

Not in favor of a year round calendar.

I think for the average student, the time would be the same, but with more breaks. The students that struggle would get more time, and the student that excel may get more time off.

Q11 – What are your thoughts on summer months as extended contract time for teachers: You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points. a. For professional development b. For teacher collaboration time c. For teacher curriculum and content development (please see Table E11 for respondents’ answers)

Table E11

Respondents’ Thoughts on Summer Months as Extended Contract Time for Teachers

Having extended time for teachers to engage in professional development, collaborate with other teachers, and to develop curriculum would be beneficial. This initiative would prepare teachers for instruction for the upcoming year, and would allow focused time to engage in these activities.
Summer is an excellent time for all three points and I do believe teachers should be compensated for their time put in on the summers.
It is a great thought, but teachers would oppose this unless they were paid well for those months. I think this would be hard for the state to afford.
We already offer this for our educators and offer stipends. If the work needs to be done and done well, there needs to be uninterrupted time to do it and it should be paid.
I believe creating some time for teachers to do summer work is important. Teachers are able to focus all of their attention on the task at hand, not worrying about lesson plans, sub teacher, and progress of students. We currently have teachers participate during the summer in PD and curriculum design. Usually these days are self-selected by the teachers and departments and typically last three to ten days of work.
I think the summer months should be for optional professional development.
I would not be opposed to any of them if they were funded. With increased costs for salaries and benefits compensating them may be a challenge for some districts.
We need funding to do all three. We use our own budget to do these things, but it can never be at a high enough level.
I feel it should be up for each teacher. Some may need a break and some may need the extras.
In the current calendar model, I would like to see these development type of activities take place. The reality of the matter is in the spring, everyone wants to be anywhere but school.
I think that using summer months to provide professional development is an excellent idea. There are times when it can be difficult to get teachers to commit to summer PD.
(continued)

Not in favor of extended contracts as we can hardly afford to pay all of our staff the way it is.
I suppose that depends on the exact meaning of this. Teachers do these things all summer already – just without pay. If we could actually receive pay for the work that needs to be done but is currently done for free, that would be awesome! If this is required, I'm not sure how well it would work as many teachers have summer jobs.
School districts already have the opportunity to extend contracts through the negotiations process to allow for PD, collaboration, curriculum development, mandatory trainings, etc. More time for this would be good, but boards need to be willing to pay for it.
A. Already being done during summer months. B. Again, being done in summer. C. Many schools, with grant monies are already doing this in the summer.
PD – I would be in favor of having state funded monies for this during the summer months. Teacher Collaboration time – I would be in favor of having state funded monies for this during the summer months. Curriculum and Content Dev. – I would be in favor of having state funded monies for this during the summer months.
I believe in all three of these bullet points.
I would be in favor of this as long as additional stipends were paid based on their salary.
All of that would be amazing. Good teachers do that anyway over the summer, it would be great if it would be a part of their contract.

Q12 – How would you recommend the state fund flexibility, innovation, and extended school year? You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (please see Table E12 for respondents’ answers).

Table E12

Respondents’ Recommendations on Funding Flexibility, Innovation, and an Extended School Year

Allowing districts to place a sales tax would be helpful.
The state should be pushing for innovation and flexibility. It should be funded. I do not have an exact formula. If we want our learners to be choice ready (21st century is 20 years in) we need to prepare our learners by offering job shadowing and internships to better prepare them. These should not be limited to just Aug-May and 8:30-3:30.
(continued)

Extended school year or year round school, if thought out well, could afford the opportunity for learners to backfill skills missing, explore passion areas, and truly have a "good fit" pathway for life figured out before they graduate. ND needs to rethink education. Our old model was made for the industrial revolution age, not 2020! The state needs to fund districts willing to take risks for the benefit of the learners.

I believe in local control and believe school plans should be decided locally. Currently we do receive foundation aid for summer school and extended school year. I don't believe it would be too big of a stretch for the state to come up with a formula to support year-around education. The question will be how will it be funded?

I'm not sure how they would fund it as I am not familiar with the state budget.

Possibly a base payment with a per pupil payment for extended school year.

For those that have an innovation plan in place, they could be funded at an additional level.

Given we now have experience with the Pandemic, all schools will have taken their innovation to another level. Through this, we have communicated better, deepened our use of technology. This also has forced schools to hire additional individuals to provide instructional staff breaks and preparation time. The challenge would be is once we have hired certain staff that is paid largely on grant funding, how can those services be sustained?

I feel they need to change their definition of innovation. Currently I feel only certain schools are provided with the opportunity. Many times I feel as though the money goes to favorite administrators, or only to schools who are willing to completely change what they are doing. I feel that there are many other schools out there who have great ideas, and are doing great things to provide opportunities for their students. I don't think they should be disqualified just because they aren't changing everything or because their ideas aren't new or grandiose.

If would have to be on a per pupil basis or it is not equitable for all schools.

I honestly have no idea – I am not very knowledgeable on our current funding, so additional funding . . . I don't know.

People can reasonably argue about aspects of the funding formula, but the overriding idea of the state paying for education based on enrollment is still a sound basis in my opinion.

Give this to the local school board to decide.

Allow additional levy amounts with matching from the state.

State won't fund it but give more local control to use local tax dollars if a school chooses to go this route.

Not sure because I do not have a funding background.

I have no idea.

Q13 – What would be the biggest challenges for schools in developing an innovative school calendar that does not follow the traditional model? You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (see Table E13 for respondents’ answers).

Table E13

Respondents’ Ideas on Biggest Challenges to Developing Innovative School Calendars

Tradition – families do not necessarily like to break from the expected school calendar.
Getting out of the mindset that its always been done this way and being open to change.
Buy-in and support from the local communities and parents. Change is always met with resistance. People are comfortable with the way things are.
Parent, student, and teacher opposition.
CHANGE. Lack of a growth mindset. Willingness to try and fail and try again, as long as it is what is best for kids and not an adult preference schedule.
Our school district has been consistent in starting around the 25 of August and graduating Sunday before Memorial Day. Our community expects that and with how short our summers are, I believe our community will continue to support that.
I think that there would be pushback from the parents, staff, and students.
Families wishing to spend time at their lakes. Summer employment. Tourism and vacations.
Community/parents/learners tradition and 'it worked for them' or 'kids need the summer off.'
Allowing enough breaks for school staff and families. How flexible will daycares be in a different model? If the school year is extended, what does the compensation package look like? How does the state plan to address teacher burn out?
Conflict with student work schedules, parent expectations, family vacations, etc.
Teacher contract changes.
*Lack of support from staff, students, and families. *In our region, summers are like gold! With the ravages of winter not allowing as much outside activity, summers are a time for our brains to recharge! *Inability of some to comply with such a change. *Conflicts with summer activities (sports, farming, jobs, vacations, etc.).
Public acceptance and contract negotiations.
Funding

(continued)

Buy-in from students, parents, and staff.

Change is never easy for most people. People generally like the routine.

No air conditioning in buildings.

Getting the community on board. Change is hard, and it would take a large effort to make such a monumental shift.

Q14 – Describe an ideal, innovative, school year calendar for developing academic knowledge and social-emotional skills among North Dakota students. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (please see Table E14 for respondents’ answers).

Table E14

Respondents’ Descriptions of an Ideal, Innovative, School Year Calendar

I am not sure.

Start early August/breaks in Oct 1 week, Nov 1 week, Dec-Jan 4 weeks, Mar/April 2 weeks, Month in July . . . I'd have to really dig into it and plan it out. Could go 4 vs 5 days a week. One day weekly for PD for educators. A flexible schedule for secondary to come and go according to their classes and what lectures or labs they need to attend (thinking of a personalized model), class credit for internships and job shadows, opportunity to do service work for credit. Schools offering onsite counseling services from a professional. Get learners well rounded, and focused, teach them goal setting and self-care/wellness.

70% of our students attend a 2 or 4 year college. Our college system has not changed very much over the years so the ideas that are floating around would have to be accepted by our college and university system for us to change much. Many of the innovation strategies that our staff has heard of, have been common practice are our school already so it also depends on who you listen to and the definition of what innovative schools look like.

Not sure.

See previous answer.

Mental health is an area that is becoming a growing need. Especially now. I would like to see individuals come in to service our students and staff who are facing anxiety and having suicide ideation. Even in a small school, we could fill this person’s schedule 2 mornings per week.

(continued)

SEL is an all year thing and must be addressed daily/weekly to be successful.
More in-house training. Example . . . I want to be a nurse. Give them credit and time to explore this option.
none
Take December and July off
?
More of a flexible model. There are help days built into the calendar where only the students who need additional time would come in.

Q15 - Is your school doing anything non-traditional in regards to school calendar
(please see Figure E7 and Table E15 for respondents' answers)?

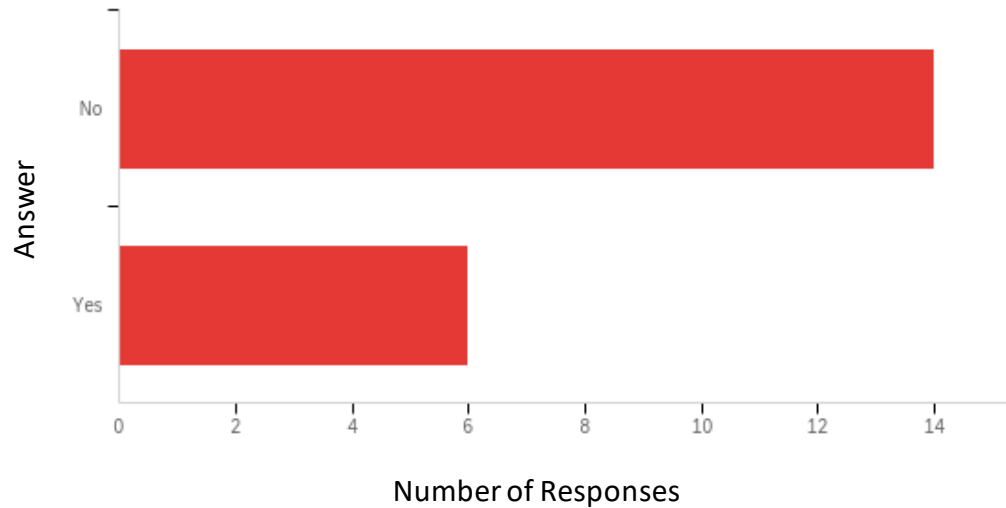


Figure E7. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 15.

Table E15

Number and Percentage of Yes and No Responses to Survey Question 15

#	Answer	%	Count
1	No	70.00%	14
2	Yes	30.00%	6
	Total	100%	20

Q16 – If you answered yes to Question 7, please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format, or use bullet points (Respondents’ answers are in Table E16).

Table E16

Non-Traditional Practices Respondents’ Schools Are Using Related to Calendars

Full day PD days instead of early-outs every month.
N/A
Personalizing and working towards a full competency based educational system. We have a counselor from the Village on campus 2 days per week for learners and staff. We offer job shadows/internships for credit. Our system will continue to grow and change, but every decision is based on WHAT IS BEST FOR LEARNERS, not adult preference. Every time we say we 'can't' do something we explore why. It is usually adult preference, therefore, we forge ahead with a growth mindset. We allow learners to show proficiency of standards after they have finished their class, sometimes it takes a while for the brain to catch up. We are not about punishing learners for a brain that doesn't fully reach maturity until 20 something. We are standards referenced grading PK-12. This is not easy, but it is what is best for learners.
Our school does walk2learn at the conclusion of an assessment. Teacher sort students and have a stretch activity or a re-teach activity for the next day or two. We also offer most all of our CTE classes in a two hour block. We do accountability of learning for students who miss instead of having students make up time hour for hour or pulling credit from students who miss too many days. These are just a few examples that I'm not sure many schools do at the high school level but it's what we do.
We have built in backfill days to help learners get caught up on standards.
We have Innovative Fridays. Students come in to get extra help and get caught up.
While our calendar remains to be traditional, we will be making some attempts on how we address storm days. For example, we do a Distance Learning mode from home. We have not had the opportunity to try this yet this year but it will depend on the number of students who check in/participate.
We may utilize a weather related day to go online for the day if we have advance notice on the weather event.
Question 7 is not a yes or no question.

Q17 – Do you think North Dakota should require less hours in school for elementary students in a school year? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (Please see Table E17 for respondents’ answers).

Table E17

Responses to Requiring Less Hours in School for Elementary Students

No – there is a lot for elementary students to learn!
no
No.
No
I believe we are currently in school just the right amount of time.
I think 6 hours would be ideal. Students often are lacking motivation and are tired during the last hour of school.
No. We struggle some days to meet all the curriculum requirements from PE, music, technology, library, counseling, etc.
I feel the hours now are appropriate (in a traditional calendar).
no. In many instances, school is safer than home. We provide a great breakfast and lunch and our staff is supporting. Sending kids home earlier in some situations, is not a great idea.
I feel it is hard to have less time for elementary students because it affects the parents with their jobs and daycare.
N/A
No, what we are doing now is good.
No
Sure. However right now they are (elem.) required to spend 5 and a half hours in school. High school is required six. Schools do not run a separate route for buses as it would not be cost effective. If the legislature would want to fund more transportation (good luck), we could and would dismiss them early for two routes in the afternoon. One for elem. and one for high school.
no - the amount is adequate and appropriate.
NO
No.
no

Q18 – Do you think North Dakota should require less hours in school for middle and high school students in a school year? Please explain. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (Please see Table E18 for respondents’ answers).

Table E18

Responses to Requiring Less Hours in School for Middle and High School Students

No - they need the time they get to focus on the instruction.
no
No.
No
I believe we are currently in school just the right amount of time
I think that they should have more options for start and end times at the middle and high school level.
No.
No
no
Same response as Q17
I don't feel that less hours should be required.
No
No, what we are doing now is good.
No
No
no - the amount is adequate and appropriate.
NO
No.
yes - if they are providing learning outside of school such as job related training.

Q19 – Please describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced your thoughts about school calendar requirements in meeting the academic and social emotional needs of students. You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (Please see Table E19 for respondents’ answers).

Table E19

How Respondents Felt COVID-19 Has Influenced School Calendar Requirements

I don't believe it has

It has changed my thoughts on either.

It has really brought home how essential face-to-face learning is for a good portion of our students. Distance learning offers many advantages, especially in the extended course offerings for our smaller schools. However, most students do not thrive in a completely distance learning environment. For learning, and for emotional health, some face to face time is needed.

SEL has been hurt a lot by COVID-19 closures, even more so than academics.

we can learn anytime and anywhere supports can be offered virtual and in person

Our school has a much larger presents on-line than ever before. We are realizing that trying to do face2face instruction in an on-line environment does not work for all students. As we look to the future, we know that we will be offering on-line instruction for some of our students but need to develop the format in which that is delivered. I also believe that snow days will be a thing of the past and that we will be able to teach from home on those days moving forward.

I think my answers would have been the same with or without Covid-19.

The calendar has allowed us to be flexible when it comes to PD and providing distance education to our students. We have been fortunate as we have been face-to-face all year. In my opinion this meets the social and emotional needs of our students as they are around their friends and peers and have daily routines. It is much more difficult when they are at home.

It proves learning can take place anywhere which means you can have summer off but still do an abbreviated day in the summer (seminar concept).

I definitely need them in class more than twice a week. I can see how the contact time has affected their education. They do not like to do outside work on their own. It is a huge struggle for most kids.

(continued)

Many students who remain "on site" put on a brave face. I have visited with numerous parents this year and anxiety is at an all-time high. Students are seeing therapists are also at an all time high. The calendar is not the issue. Getting students to interact in-person without a mask, being able to hug our relatives, enter stores and certain facilities without safeguards are what I believe is more the issue.

The only flexibility I feel is needed in terms of the school calendar is allowing for distance learning when students are absent or during inclement weather.

It really hasn't changed.

COVID has not influenced my thoughts about school calendar requirements.

COVID has highlighted what we already know about the importance of students having contact with teachers and peers for academic growth and social/emotional well-being.

A very big problem for administration is the Governor's mandate that if a parent wants their student educated by Distance Learning, that is their right. What happens to the student that refuses to work on assignments and fails? What recourse does the school have? If the student is not in school, there is little we can do.

It has not other than we are finding more needs for mental health clinicians.

I do believe COVID will allow storm days to be automatically converted to distance learning days and make up days will be a thing of the past.

Students are missing a lot of school due to quarantines. Household quarantines are creating student to miss a lot of school.

kids need to be in the building receiving direction instruction for new content. However, once they are ready to practice the content, some are more independent than others, and can work freely at their own time. Kids need to be taught time management and the importance of deadlines if this is to become the norm.

Q20 – How do you think North Dakota should address school closures days in regard to school calendar requirements? You may elect to answer in narrative format or use bullet points (Table E20 gives respondents’ answers).

Table E20

How Respondents Think We Should Address School Closure Days in Calendar Requirements

No - this should be left to the school district
Leave it up to local district
It is good to have the ability to "forgive" a day or two of school due to emergencies. It makes the decision a bit easier on whether to close the school knowing we are not locked into finding a make-up day.
I think allowances should be made for distance learning if there is enough advance notice. I fear that a decision the day of school would mean that many students wouldn't have what they need to do it.
Distance learning on snow days or closure days
I also believe that snow days will be a thing of the past and that we will be able to teach from home on those days moving forward.
I think if closures are due to Covid then districts should be required to have distance learning. Snow day closures should be up to the district.
I like how it is now with the hours instead of days. It allows us more flexibility while still meeting the needs of the students.
No closures are needed anymore.
Like we have been, with built in snow days.
I believe storm days could possibly be a distance learning day. This would need some trial and error but believe it is possible. Holidays need to remain holidays and time to be with family and friends.
I believe schools should be allowed to provide distance learning when schools need to be closed. I do not believe putting the safety of our students at risk is worth forcing schools to try to open. Nobody like to give up vacation days or holiday breaks to make up school days. I believe everyone would be willing to put in time with distance learning to avoid those situations.

(continued)

Yes. There should never be another one as schools can use online education on those days.
Are you referring to snow days? Schools should retain having 2 days for snow days that would not need to be made up. Any snow days past that could be asynchronous or synchronous learning.
I like that we have some flexibility regarding weather cancellations. We've had some instances where it's impossible for schools to make up every day missed because of bad weather. But I still think it's good to expect a calendar to address an accepted minimum number of days.
Not an issue with hours now.
Allow schools flexibility to address closure days as they see fit and what best fits their community needs.
Give the flexibility to convert to distance learning and count it as a day in the future
Use the additional time added to each day to make up for school closures. Making days up a the end of the year does not benefit students.
Give schools the option of those days being virtual learning days or not.

Q21 – Is there anything else you would like to add about North Dakota school calendar requirements (Table E20 gives respondents’ answers)?

Table E21

Responses to Question for Additional Ideas on School Calendar Requirements

No
NA
No
No.
No
No
(continued)

I believe the move a few years ago from days to hours was a step in the right direction.

No

No.

It should be based on the research on learning and not on an agrarian society.

no

I initially left this response blank. This will be in response to Q22: While I do not necessarily believe that the calendar should be revised, it should be reviewed. If we went to a 12 month program, would teachers and families be up for it. There is no way it could be a 12 month program if significant breaks were not imbedded into the calendar.

no

no

I really wish that we would start the year after Labor Day and end the year before Memorial Weekend. Other districts do this across the nation - I'm not sure why we can't.

No

This is a local control issue.

-I appreciated the change away from days and I hope the legislature leaves it as is without any additional changes. -I hope the legislature makes permanent the flexibility to allow distance education if the need arises and let schools utilize as they see fit for weather or other emergency related issues.

I like the flexibility the hours have given us.

No

No

Q22 – What is your overall opinion about North Dakota School Calendar requirements as stated in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-04 that states "At least nine hundred sixty-two and one-half hours of instruction for elementary school students and one thousand fifty hours of instruction for middle and high school students (N.D. Cent. Code § 15.1-06-04, n.d., para. 15.1-06-04.1.a; see Figure E8 and Table E22 for respondents' answers)."

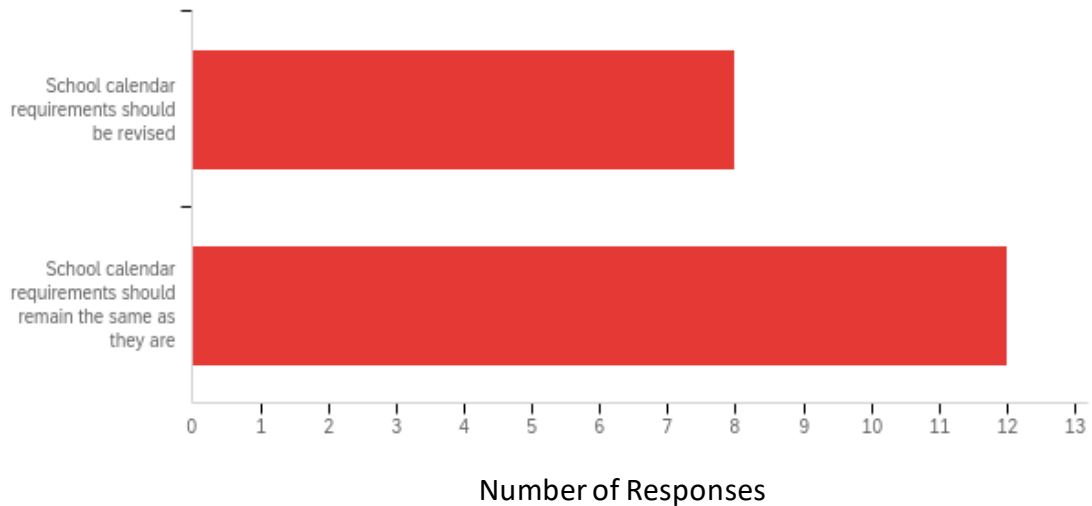


Figure E8. Number of Yes and No Responses for Survey Question 22.

Table E22

Respondents' Opinions About North Dakota School Calendar Requirements in the North Dakota Century Code

#	Answer	%	Count
1	School calendar requirements should be revised	40.00%	8
2	School calendar requirements should remain the same as they are	60.00%	12
Total		100%	20

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter



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**Office of Research
Compliance & Ethics**

Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050
4201 James Ray Drive Stop 7134
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7134
Phone: 701.777.4279
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December 15, 2020

Principal Investigator:	Jacqueline Bye
Project Title:	The Impact of School Calendar on the Academic and Social-Emotional Development of Students
IRB Project Number:	IRB-202012-081
Project Review Level:	Expedited 7
Date of IRB Approval:	12/14/2020
Expiration Date of This Approval:	12/13/2021

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

The waiver of written consent has been approved under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2).

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website:
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle L. Bowles'.

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
RC&E Manager

MLB/sy

Cc: Sherryl Houdek, Ed.D

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