

Achua County Public Schools will pilot year-round school program in Metcalfe, Rawlings elementary schools

Achua County Public Schools is one of three Florida school districts and one laboratory school selected for the state's Year-Round School Pilot Program. Under that program, a year-round school year calendar will be put in place at both Metcalfe Elementary and Rawlings Elementary beginning this July and running through the 2028-29 school year.



The Year-Round School Pilot Program was established under a state law passed during the 2023 legislative session. Districts had to apply to participate and will be required to provide data about the results of year-round schooling to the Florida Department of Education, which will then make recommendations to the governor and the Florida Legislature about possible expansion.

In addition to Achua County Public Schools, Marion County, Brevard County and the PK Yonge Developmental Research School in Gainesville will also be participating.

In its application, the district outlined its goals for the program, including the improvement of student academic performance, behavior and attendance. Among the benefits highlighted are a reduction of the learning loss that often happens over the long summer vacation, more opportunities for ongoing academic support and targeted intervention, continuity in programs and structure and stronger bonds between students and staff.

"As a former teacher and principal, I saw so many students who lost a lot of ground academically over the summer," said Superintendent Shane Andrew. "I'm excited about the great potential this program has to provide the students at Metcalfe and Rawlings with the consistent support they need to keep learning throughout the year."

Now that it has the state's approval, the district is working on the details, including a calendar for both schools. Students would still attend school for 180 days each school year, but under the program, the school year would begin in July and the summer break would be much shorter. Every effort will be made to align the new calendars with existing breaks, such as Thanksgiving. The district is also working on plans to adjust transportation, school meals, after school programs and other schedules.

In anticipation of applying and being selected for the year-round pilot program, principals at both Metcalfe and Rawlings have already discussed the option with members of their school community. Rawlings Elementary principal Dr. Stella Arduser has spoken with her faculty and School Advisory Council, which includes parents. She says she recognizes that a change to the school-year calendar will require adjustments, but that it could be a game-changer for the students.

"This is a possibility that hasn't been tapped into, and maybe this is what we've needed all along," she said. "Some of our students already come to summer school, so why not make year-round instruction part of the educational experience and fabric here at Rawlings Elementary School?"

Metcalfe Elementary principal Christiana Robbins has also discussed the program with her staff and some of her parents.

"They're definitely open to the potential benefits, but of course they're also interested in hearing the details," she said. "We want to make a long-lasting impact on our students' achievement, and this could be the answer that everyone is looking for."

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