Proponents of year-round schooling advocate for an alternative calendar for many reasons. One of the primary reasons relates to the income-based achievement gap.

Recent data indicates that this gap is widening at an alarming rate. Professor Sean F. Reardon published a report through the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis where he states that “the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is roughly 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born twenty-five years earlier.” Surprisingly, the rise in income inequality does not appear to be the dominant factor in the widening of this gap, but instead there has been an increase in association between family income and children’s academic achievement.

In an effort to close the gap, some states are turning to year-round education. Year-round education can be a way to combat the “summer slide,” or summer learning loss. Students from low-income families can be particularly susceptible to summer learning loss because they may not have access to some of the programming and resources needed to maintain high levels of educational engagement over the summer. With shorter breaks, students will be critically engaged with their studies throughout the year. Year-round schooling also shortens the stretches of time that students on free and reduced lunch must obtain three meals a day without the aid of the school.

Despite these advantages, education advocates and legislators must weigh possible disadvantages to year-round schooling, such as the difficulties families with children in both traditional and year-round schools may face, a decrease in the available time for extracurricular programs, and the administrative burden of operating buildings and staff year round. There are also significant economic considerations tied to the conversation surrounding year-round schooling. A recent study conducted by the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism found that year-round schooling can have significant effects on the travel and tourism industries. While the study reports results that are both positive and negative, it notes that businesses in the tourism industry will need to react to year-round schooling to avoid negative economic impacts. An additional economic concern relates to the workforce. The American Economic Review reports that year-round schooling can have a negative impact on the employment rate for women with school-age children, an effect that is more prominent in low-income households. School is a source of child care for many families, and the shorter, more frequent breaks from school may make it difficult for parents to secure child care.

The research on the advantages and disadvantages of year-round schooling is informing an important conversation for states. According to the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics, year-round schooling is emerging as a popular option for many states and school districts. As of February 2014, 4.1 percent of all public schools and 8.4 percent of charter schools are operating on a year-round calendar cycle. Year-round calendar cycles can take many different forms. Students attend school for the same amount of time as students in other schools, but the placement of instructional days and breaks is transformed. Most year-round schools follow the traditional 180 days of instructional time, but it varies based on state requirements. Two popular models for year-
States advocate for and support year-round education in different ways. In 2012, Virginia’s Legislature conducted a Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission study on year-round schools and saw that year-round schooling led to an improvement in test scores for students. As a result, Virginia has created a grant program and awarded upwards of $7.7 million to 66 schools in 2016.

In addition to monetary support, states can provide program support for districts looking to implement year-round schooling. California’s government has a program guide on their website, which provides step-by-step guidance on how to implement year-round education. In addition to clear steps, the guide provides information on the pros and cons of different models of year-round schooling, and how it might be tailor-made to fit different districts.