

15,000 Hours, Is This Enough?

Summary

For decades the issue of educational time has plagued policy makers, education administrators, teachers, and students alike. Currently the average student will spend 15,000 hours from kindergarten to high school graduation in the classroom. But is this enough time to learn and master material? Are our calendars out of date? And where does the U.S. rank globally in regard to test scores compared to time in school?

U.S. Students spend an average of 10 percent fewer hours in school compared to international students, and are also being outpaced by the same students on standardized tests. Many have advocated lengthening the school day and school calendar will alleviate these problems by increasing academic rigor and allowing students to have more time with challenging material. On the other hand, lengthening the school day will not fix ineffective and unchallenging instructional time.

Instead, the redirection of human resources could go further to mitigate the growing international achievement gap. The education system across the United States would benefit from a critical examination of model schools including those in Finland where students spend fewer hours in school but are still meeting academically rigorous standards.

The Problem

- How much time, is enough time?

Background

- Individual state laws mandate the school year to be between 175 to 180 days 6 to 7 hour days.
- American students receive an average of 10 percent fewer hours compared to their international counterparts
- Cost estimates for introducing these changes would equal 1,300 per student per year, equaling between 40 billion and 70 billion per year if implemented on national scale.
- Massachusetts adopted the first state policy to support public schools in redesigning and expanded schedules.
- Charters programs like the KIPP schools and other urban public schools have adapted longer school days with success in achieving higher test scores in English and Math as well as a higher rate of college completion.
- Education reform advocates promote the lengthening of the school day for increased instructional time and accommodations for working parents.
- With the advent of technology and rapid communication devices, time in schools will become an increasingly complex subject

Our Position

We feel this is an incredibly complex issue which can no longer be ignored in our globalized world. Students need to have effective time in the classroom to master core academic skills, as well as build strong technology, team work and oral communication with adults and their peers. Currently, many advocates of lengthening the school day propose this action would decrease the disparity in the achievement gap between U.S. students and international students, as well as provide peace of mind to working parents. However, we feel there are other options which would also produce the same results (outlined below).

There are significantly more factors involved with changing the length of the school day and it important to consider student needs outside of the school environment. We would assert the root of this problem is the wish to improve national test scores as compared to our foreign counterparts; however, this should be the goal of effective education. Changing the length of the school would no doubt produce many unintended consequences which could potential result in the removal of learning as “exploration” from the classroom as we shift to focus on improving test scores.

Policy Options

- Model the U.S. School system off of international models such as Finland schools where students attend fewer hours and teachers are from the top 10 percent of undergraduate students are accepted into masters programs which are required for receiving a teaching license.
- Using the money which would be spent lengthening the school day (estimated between 4 billion and 7 billion), policy makers can choose to instead offer raises to the top third most effective teachers across the nation. Therefore not in-acting any change to school day length but offering incentives for more effective use of instructional time.
- No action– the school day remains at 6-7 hours for 180 days, or whatever is mandated in state legislature.

Advantages and Disadvantages

- In regard to the first policy option, advantages and disadvantages would include...
 - U.S. Students would be more academically competitive internationally through more effective teaching, while not increasing the length of the school day.
 - Although initially more money may have to be spent by tax payers to finance the reform, overtime the benefits of this shift will far out weight the initial costs.
 - Through this system, student will maintain the opportunity for exploration and learning outside of the classroom in their home, athletic, work, or social environments.
 - Significantly fewer teachers will qualify for education positions
 - More time and resources will be spent in high quality teacher education
- In regard to the second policy option, advantages and disadvantages would include...
 - Teachers would pursue more effective classroom instruction because of the raise incentives therefore benefiting students and raising academic achievement.
 - This system could not guarantee that all teachers would pursue academic rigor in their classrooms.
 - This system would rely on standardized test scores to measure teacher effectiveness.

- This option would cost the same amount of money it would take to lengthen the school day.
- Through this option students will maintain the opportunity for exploration and learning outside of the classroom in their home, athletic, work, or social environments.
- In regard to the third policy option, advantages and disadvantages would include...
 - U.S. Student may continue to fall behind academically compared to international students.
 - This option will save tax payers the cost of lengthening the school day or providing for higher quality (masters level or above) teacher education.
 - There is no incentive for teachers to independently raise the academic standards of their classrooms.
 - The burden of after school care, or remedial academic study time will fall to parents as knowledge is lost over interim periods (summer and winter breaks).

We Would Recommend

It is with careful consideration that we would recommend the first policy. This option would potentially provide the best options for policy makers, tax payers, administrators, teachers and students. We would successively raise academic standards across the United States compared to global standards of achievement. In addition, this would ensure the level of professionalism and dedication to teaching as a vocation and not just an occupation. In the long run this plan would increase college attendance as modeled by the Finland education system which boasts a 95 percent college acceptance and attendance rate after the completion of compulsory education, and therefore saving money.

References

James Noll, W. (2012). Taking sides: Clashing views on educational issues. (16th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

This text is debate-style and represents issues in education from leading educators and social commentators.

Christopher Gabrieli. , & Frederick M. Hess, (2009). Should the school day be longer?. U.S. News, Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2009/04/27/should-the-school-day-be-longer>

This article gives two different views on the issue of extending the school day.

Should the school day be longer? (2001) New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/09/26/should-the-school-day-be-longer/help-for-parents-and-society>

This article is a short introduction to a series of debates of extending the school day, and allows readers to comment and state their opinions. Debaters have also contributed to this series extending it to many articles with many diverse points of view.