

Expanded Learning Time

This IPRO report presents arguments for and against expanding the amount of time students spend in school. The report also summarizes recently proposed and passed state legislation that increases the length of the school day and school year.

Background

Expanded learning time increases the amount of time students spend in school by either increasing the number of hours in the school day or the number of days in the school year. State governments set the number of hours and days students spend in school. However, many states allow school districts to set their own requirements, as long as they remain in compliance with the state standards. A 2009 study by the Council of Chief State School Officers reports that 42 states require a certain number of days in the school year. Of these, 33 require a school year of at least 180 days, five require a school year of between 175 and 179 days, and four require a school year with 174 or fewer days. This same report notes that 31 states require a school day of five or more instructional hours.¹ The average school year in the U.S. is 180 days, and the average length of the school day is six hours.² Kansas requires the most school days with 186, and Missouri requires the fewest with 173.³

Students in the U.S. spend less time in school than students in many other industrialized countries. In Europe, the school year ranges from 190 to 210 days per year, and the Japanese school year is 240 days per year.⁴ U.S. students also tend to score lower on international assessment tests than students in many other countries. This has led to concerns that the low U.S. test scores are the result of spending fewer hours in class. Proponents of this view cite evidence such as a recent study by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). It ranked the math proficiencies of 15 year olds in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and out of 29 places, the U.S. ranked 24th in terms of performance and also ranked low on the number of instructional hours per year.⁵

Some U.S. educators, parents, and legislators have advocated for increased instructional time. The three most common reforms are year-round schooling, expanded learning time, and block scheduling. Year-round schooling usually distributes the same number of days more evenly over the calendar year, and block scheduling increases the length of class periods so more continuous time is spent on each subject. In most cases, year-round schooling and block scheduling do not increase the absolute number of hours spent in school. Under an expanded school year policy, the school year extends into late June or early July or begins earlier in August, leaving time for a summer break.⁶

¹ Stillman, Lauren and Rolf K. Blank. "Key State Education Policies on PK-12 Education: 2008." Council of Chief State School Officers. Washington, D.C.: State Departments of Education, 2009.

² Ellis, Thomas I. Extending the School Year and Day. Eugene, OR: Clearing House on Educational Management, 1984. ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED259450.

³ National Center for Education Statistics. "Table 126. Length of school year and selected statistics on mathematics education for students in public schools, by state or jurisdiction: 2000, 2002 and 2003." 2003 Digest of Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.

⁴ Silva, Elena. "On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time." January 2007. Education Sector Reports. Washington, D.C.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Considerations on the Adoption of Expanded Learning Time

The public is evenly split on the issue of extending the school year, with a recent opinion poll showing 48 percent in favor and 49 percent opposed. There is greater support for extending the school day, with 67 percent supporting a one-hour extension of the school day.⁷ The following is a summary of the main benefits of and concerns with expanding the amount of time students spend in school.

Benefits of Expanded Learning Time

- **Increased coverage of material**—Expanded learning time provides teachers more time to cover the growing body of information required in the curriculum.⁸
- **Benefits for low-income and minority students**—More and higher-quality education time benefits low-income and minority students in particular. This is because fewer learning opportunities, such as summer camps, are available to them outside of school due to the cost and location of these programs.⁹
- **Benefits for working parents**—A longer school day, which would better align with the schedule of many parents' jobs, would decrease the need for after-school childcare.¹⁰
- **More supplemental and elective programs**—The extra time spent in school could be used for students to participate in remedial courses, physical activity programs, fine arts curricula, or information technology electives, programs that are often eliminated or shortened because of current time limitations.¹¹

Concerns with Expanded Learning Time

- **Quality matters more than quantity**—Some research shows that student achievement is more a function of the quality of education than the number of hours spent in school. With time spent on classroom administrative and procedural tasks, discipline, recess, assemblies, and other non-instructional activities, a typical school year of 1,080 hours may result in less than 400 hours spent on instruction. Thus, critics argue that educational reforms should focus on the quality of education rather than the time spent in school.¹²
- **Increased cost**—There is concern, especially in light of the current economic recession, that the financial cost of extending time in school may outweigh its benefits. Besides the increases in pay for school faculty and staff, costs would be accrued for additional building maintenance, increased use of utilities and transportation, supplemental curricular materials, and necessary upgrades to school facilities (e.g. adding air-conditioning to allow for school

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ellis, Thomas I. Extending the School Year and Day. Eugene, OR: Clearing House on Educational Management, 1984. ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED259450.

⁹ Silva, Elena. "On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time." January 2007. Education Sector Reports. Washington, D.C.

¹⁰ Ellis, Thomas I. Extending the School Year and Day. Eugene, OR: Clearing House on Educational Management, 1984. ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED259450.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

operation in the summer months). Extending the school year is generally estimated to be more expensive than extending the school day.¹³

- **Teachers' concerns**—Teachers' unions have expressed concern that their members would not be fully compensated for the extra hours they would work under extended school programs and would like these extended time schedules to be voluntary for teachers. There is also a concern that both teachers and students may “burn out” and educational quality may diminish if too many hours are spent in school.¹⁴

Action to Extend Time Spent in School

Efforts to increase learning time have occurred at the federal, state, municipal, and school district levels. Municipalities and school districts must comply with the requirements set by state and federal governments, so legislation at the federal and state levels has the most bearing on the future of expanded learning. To date, no legislation requiring an extended school day or school year has yet been passed at the state or federal level. The following sections summarize bills proposed in the U.S. House and Senate and an expanded learning time program implemented in select Massachusetts schools.

Federal Action

In 2009, the Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act was introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Act, which is modeled after the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative (see below), was introduced in the Senate by the late Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Tom Harkin (D-IA), and Bernie Sanders (I-VT). Donald Payne (D-NJ) and George Miller (D-CA) introduced companion legislation in the House (H.R. 3130). The TIME Act would “provide federal funding for initiatives to expand learning time in low-performing, high poverty schools in order to boost student performance, close academic achievement gaps, allow more time for teachers to participate in quality professional development, and expand enrichment opportunities for our nation’s most under-served students.” Both the House and Senate bills are currently in committee.¹⁵

State Action

In 2006, the Massachusetts Legislature allocated \$6.5 million to the Expanded Learning Time Initiative, which lengthens learning time by 30percent, or two hours per day.^{16,17} Any school district in the state may apply for an extended learning time grant, and those selected receive an extra \$1,300 in funding per student to cover the costs of a longer school day. The program, which began with ten schools and has expanded to 22 schools, has garnered praise from President Obama and served

¹³ Silva, Elena. “On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time.” January 2007. Education Sector Reports. Washington, D.C.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “The Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act (TIME Act).” National Center on Time and Learning. 2007. National Center on Time and Learning. 7 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.timeandlearning.org/timeact09.html>>.

¹⁶ Silva, Elena. “On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time.” January 2007. Education Sector Reports. Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ “Extended Day and Year Initiatives.” Issues and Research: Education. 2009. National Conference of State Legislatures. 7 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.ncsl.org/Default.aspx?TabId=12848>>.

as the model for the proposed TIME Act that was recently introduced in the U.S. House and Senate.¹⁸

¹⁸ Kocian, Lisa. "Looking for lessons after a longer day." The Boston Globe. 9 Aug. 2009 <http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2009/08/09/year_of_extended_school_day_draws_mixed_reaction>.