

# Extended School Year Fast Facts

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## 1. History

- a. Increasing the amount of time in school was a big issue in the 1980s after The National Commission on Education Excellence's report, *A Nation at Risk*, suggested that expectations, content, and time needed to be improved in American education. Thirty-seven states entertained such legislation on the heels of the report, but few states passed legislation.
- b. The issue reappeared in the late 90s, with 14 states considering bills.
- c. The last couple of years have seen a resurgence of interest in response to NCLB, with dozens of proposals around the nation to extend the school year (Silva, 2007).
- d. In January of this year, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland proposed extending his state's school year from 180 to 200 days.

## 2. International Comparisons: Contradictory Information

- a. "The world's average school year is 200 days per year. In the United States it is 180 days per year; in Sweden it is 170 days; in Japan it is 243 days" (Fast Facts, 2006, p. 9).
- b. According to *Education Sector*, instructional hours per year are as follows: Finland, 861; Korea, 1079; Netherlands, 911; Japan, 926; and United States, 799 (Silva, 2007).
- c. "Students in the U.S. receive 10 percent fewer instructional hours per year than students in other OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] nations" (Silva, 2007).
- d. "American students are not so far behind in the amount of absolute time they spend in school each year as compared to their foreign counterparts . . . some countries whose students outperform ours in mathematics and science actually have a shorter school year. In Sweden, for example,

whose students were among the high scorers. . . the school year is only 170 days long” (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carlos, 1998, p. 9).

- e. “Students in most countries in Western Europe, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Japan, and Singapore . . . spend an average of 701 hours per year in school” (Baines, 2007, p. 98).
- f. “In Finland, where students have scored near the top in international comparisons of achievement for a number of years, students spend only 600 hours in school” (Baines, 2007, p. 98).
- g. “In the United States . . . children go to school for six or more hours per day, five days per week, for approximately 185 days . . . The average time spent at school in the U.S. totals over 1,100 hours, almost double that of children in Finland. By the time children reach the age of 14 in Finland, they will have gone to school for 2,500 fewer hours than students in America (the equivalent of two to four years of schooling). Despite much longer school days, American students routinely score 10% to 20% lower than Finnish students on international tests of achievement” (Baines, 2007, p. 99).
  - i. The author suggests that these differences are attributable to social policies regarding poverty and healthcare; this discrepancy is not a “school problem.”

### 3. Empirical Findings

- a. Many studies have found “no significant connection between the length of the school year and student achievement” (Sims, 2008; Lee & Barro, 2001; Eide & Showalter, 1998; Grogger, 1996; Card & Krueger, 1992; Rizzuto & Wachtel, 1980).
- b. “Experimental studies have repeatedly found no correlation between time spent at school and levels of achievement” (Baines, 2007, p. 99; Fisher & Berliner, 1985).
- c. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) “found

no clear pattern between the number of in-class instructional hours and mathematics achievement” (Beaton, et al., 1996, p. 16).

- d. Using both Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and TIMSS data, a “weak positive relationship or no statistically significant relationship between more time and improved scores” was found (Silva, 2007).
- e. On the other hand, Silva (2007) cites a few studies that found a positive relationship between instructional time and student outcomes for *certain* students (e.g., students with lower initial test scores and students in small classes). She also notes a finding of a “moderate positive association between total school days per year and mathematics and science scores” for eighth grade students in 39 countries (p. 2).
- f. In addition, Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2007) found that the achievement gap between students from high socio-economic backgrounds and students from low socio-economic backgrounds is the result of summer-learning differences rather than school-year learning differences.

#### 4. Quality Versus Quantity

- a. “The issue isn’t time per se, but how it is spent” (Raizen as quoted in Aronson, Zimmerman & Carlos, 1998).
- b. “The key to increasing achievement is not necessarily more time in school but maximizing the amount of academic learning time” (WestEd, 2001, p. 2).
- c. “Any addition to allocated time will only improve achievement to the extent it is used for instructional time, which must then be used for engaged time, which, in turn, must be used effectively enough to create academic learning time” (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carlos, 1998, p. 3).
- d. “Quality is the key to making time matter . . . Educators must – to the greatest extent possible – make every hour count” (Aronson, Zimmerman

& Carlos, 1998, p. 7).

- e. "Improving the quality of instructional time is at least as important as increasing the quantity of time in school" (Silva, 2007).

## 5. Cost

- a. "Most calculations suggest that a 10 percent increase in time would require a 6 to 7 percent increase in cost" but could save parents money in child care costs (Silva, 2007).
- b. In 1990, cost estimates ranged from \$2.3 to \$121.4 million per day, depending on the state.
- c. Peter Mills proposed such an extension in 2007, stating that it would cost the state of Maine \$50 million (LD 470).

## 6. Alternatives

- a. Making Better Use of Existing Time
  - i. Learning can be improved by improving teachers' classroom management techniques, improving curriculum and instruction, and increasing student motivation with meaningful and engaging instruction (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998; WestEd, 2001).
  - ii. "The TIMSS research . . . suggests that instead of adding time, greater attention should be paid to the focus and review of curriculum (i.e., the depth and breadth of subject matter covered)" (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998, p. 6).
- b. Targeting At-Risk Students
  - i. Extended school years are often recommended for at-risk students and/or at-risk schools by the National Association for School Psychologists and others (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998; Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman & Anderson, 2003; Silva, 2007; WestEd, 2001; Woelfel, 2005;).
- c. Longer School Day
  - i. Extending the length of the school day might result in more

learning time than extending the length of the school year (Chmelynski, 2006).

- ii. Longer school days can mean adding the equivalent of “35 extra days of schooling each year” (Chmelynski, 2006, p. 42).
- iii. A survey found that “83% of parents and 72% of employees preferred a longer day over a longer year” (Chmelynski, 2006, p. 42).
- iv. Longer school days appear to be less expensive than longer school years (Silva, 2007).

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