

Examining the Extended School Day: Increasing Achievement or Just a Waste of Time?

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Background

The idea of extended learning time (ELT) has taken on new urgency, thanks to growing concerns about competing in a global economy in which students in most industrialized nations are out performing students in the United States. The Department of Education has made extended learning time a centerpiece of its reform efforts and has encouraged community partnerships to expand learning in ways that help students succeed and bring new resources into their schools. The extended school day is implemented in many schools in the District of Columbia in order to bridge the academic achievement gap in many of the public schools in the nation's capital.

It is known that a longer school day has been a staple for the charter school, KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) National Network. This charter school is open to underprivileged students in more than 20 states. At the KIPP Charter Schools, the students are generally two to three grade levels behind. The school day begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m. (The school also holds classes on many Saturdays and has added three weeks in August to start the school year.) The KIPP school has structured its whole schedule to include professional development, planning time and additional time for enrichment and academics.

Rationale

This research is designed to survey the attitudes of teachers who are participating in the pilot program of extended school day and comparing their attitudes to those teachers who are not yet participating in this program. This survey sought to answer the following questions:

Does the research show that extended day programs improve student outcomes?

How are we closing the achievement gap by adding more time to the school day?

Does DCPS have enough funding, time and energy to properly sustain an extended day program?

Is higher academic achievement obtainable through the extended school day programs offered in the District?

Literature Review

In a study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), a nonpartisan investigative arm of Congress, the researchers found that 26 states, who implemented the extended day and year program, were not able to sustain the program's extended learning time reforms after their federal grants expired. These programs were too expensive to sustain without substantial private or public federal funds. Only ten states reported that they could continue their extended day programs without additional funding from outside sources.

The GAO also found that schools receiving grants for their funding are challenged by the planning required to implement increased learning time. The schools all agreed that it was a complex and time consuming planning process. It was also not in line with the most important stakeholders in the school including the students, parents and teachers.

The nonprofit research magazine, *Think Tank Education Sector* found that school results from extending the school day depended to a great degree on how they implement the extension. The study found that schools had success if they took the opportunity to look at how extended school day time was used and how the curriculum implementation works as part of a comprehensive plan. In other words, simply extending the school day and offering more of the same will not be enough to improve the academic performance of schools.

Methodology/Data Analysis

2. In the study that was conducted, a survey was used to collect the data. There were 10 questions that the teachers had to answer. The questions ranged from teacher expectations, and the readiness of inexperienced teachers. The survey also asked for the motivation of the teachers who participated in this program and how the extended school day affected their personal life.

Data Results

The attitude and expectations of the participants varied significantly between teachers from Brightwood EC and Kelly Miller MS. From the 20 Brightwood teachers, seven teachers were expecting an improvement in academic performance, compared to 19 from Kelly Miller. When asked about continuance of the program, only five Brightwood teachers were willing to

continue with extended day in comparison to 20 from Kelly Miller even as there was an improvement in results. If we compare the result of where the focus must be during the extended school day, 2 teachers from Brightwood and 17 from Kelly Miller, agreed that it has to be on academic rigor.

For the Brightwood teachers the financial compensation was an important motivator to participate in the extended school day. While the teachers at Kelly Miller were concerned about how an extended school day would affect their personal life.

Both groups agreed that the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and their school administrators were responsible for the curriculum and the communication with parents regarding the rationale and implementation of this program.

Recommendations

- * Teachers must be adequately compensated for extended day programs and engage in the goal-setting process.
- * Teachers and support staff should be given a choice as to whether or not they to work the extra hours of an extended school day prior to its implementation.
- * Policymakers and stakeholders should survey for current models of extended school days before its implementation since current research depicts academic success.
- * There must be a focus on the teachers' professional development, data-driven instruction, and administrative support to close the academic achievement gap.

Bibliography

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