DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 657 EA 024 590

AUTHOR Rasberry, Quinn
TITLE The Extended School Year: Is More Necessarily Better?
PUB DATE [Nov 92]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Comparative Education; *Cost Effectiveness; Dropout Rate; *Educational Benefits; Elementary Secondary Education; *Extended School Year; Foreign Countries; Professional Development; Program Evaluation; Public Support; *School Business Relationship; Student Employment; Time on Task
IDENTIFIERS Japanese Education

ABSTRACT

The concept of an extended school year was first defined in "A Nation at Risk," which recommended lengthening the school calendar to 200-220 days per year (compared to the current average of about 180 days). Little research is available to prove the benefits of an extended calendar, and many question if this practice is a cost-effective way to achieve educational excellence. A summary of research on this topic suggests that the high cost of additional school days is disproportionate to any improvement in student achievement. There is no guarantee that additional time will be used for better education. Most studies place a greater priority on improving time on task before increasing the school year. Cost estimates for lengthening the school year are prohibitive; the Education Commission of the States estimate projects a $20 billion annual cost increase for the nation's schools. As Americans consider lengthening the school year to mimic highly touted international systems, the Japanese are shortening their school year to foster more well-rounded students. Although public opposition to the extended school year has diminished somewhat, NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard!) is prevalent. In several states, politicians praise the idea, but cannot find tax support for the program. Other disadvantages include increased dropout rates, diminished student employment opportunities, less experiential learning time, less professional development chances for teachers, and less growth and development time for children. (Contains 13 references.) (MLH)

The Extended School Year: Is More Necessarily Better?

Quinn Rasberry

Introduction

The concept of an extended school year was first defined in a 1983 presidential commission report entitled A Nation at Risk. The report recommended that education officials and state legislators consider lengthening the school calendar to 200-220 days per year. The recommendation was based on declining academic performance and comparisons with the education systems of other industrialized countries.

Students in the United States now attend school an average of 180 days per year, ranging from 170 days in Minnesota to 182 days in Ohio. Since A Nation at Risk was issued, several state legislatures have considered extending the school year, with mixed results. Those schools that piloted a longer school year proclaimed it a failure. Even today, less than 15 schools in the country operate on an extended year schedule. State legislatures that approve a longer school year are unwilling or unable to budget the extreme cost of adding extra days.

Nationally, President Bush appointed a presidential commission to again study the effects of time on learning. In April, 1994, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning will report its findings and make recommendations on the appropriate length of the school year and school day.

Frustrated with the condition of public education, business leaders and policymakers have joined educators to explore reforms that bring excellence to education and increase our students' global competitiveness. Businesses are forming "partnerships" with local schools to provide assistance and support. Educators are learning methods to maximize instructional time. All seem willing to make changes that will bring about positive results.

However, little research is available to prove the benefits of an extended calendar. As school budgets get tighter, many question if extending the school year is a cost effective way to achieve excellence in education. Or, as a *Boston Globe* editorial contends, is the extended school year "another quick and easy suggestion to cure schools?" Is more necessarily better?

Extended School Year - A Reform With Few Results

Researchers show little evidence that an extended school year leads to greater academic achievement. The high cost of additional school days is disproportionate to any improvements in achievement.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, does not endorse the longer school year. Shanker believes "simply giving students more of the same is unlikely to solve our educational problems." He points to the "enormous costs," including a one-third increase in salaries and $80 billion a year, not counting capital outlays. Shanker says more effective ideas are to implement ways to make better use of technology, or experiment with new teaching methods and materials, not "keep students in their seats a couple of extra months." (*Scripps Howard News Service*)

Gary Watts, senior director of the National Education Association's Center for Information, cautions that "restructuring is more important to produce quality than adding more time." Watts says adding five or 10 days to the school year will be ineffective if the program remains the same. (*Fairfield Citizen*, January 31, 1992)

Following are conclusions from some who have studied the extended school year concept:

- Nancy Karweit, a research scientist at Johns Hopkins University, believes adding more days to the school calendar is no guarantee that additional time will be used for better education. Because school resources are limited, other reform options "have a greater potential payoff than simply keeping the school doors open for a longer period of time" (Karweit, June/July, 1985).

- A task force of the National Association of State Boards of Education researched the longer school year and found little evidence that extensions of the school year would lead to increased student achievement (*Principal*, May, 1984).

- In a review of available research, the National Education Association (NEA) comes to an "inescapable conclusion: Given the way schools currently use time, an increase in school days . . . is not enough to reach defined achievement goals in most schools" (NEA, October, 1987). Karweit agrees that "learning takes time but providing time does not in itself ensure that learning will take place."

- Researchers Barbara and Kenneth Tye studied American schools for six years and concluded that "excellence is not likely to result from simply prescribing more of what we already have in schools" (*Principal*, May, 1984).

- More recently, a local school committee in Ohio spent one year researching the effects of a longer school year and reported no correlation between the amount of time students were in school and test scores. Gerald Martau, committee chairman and deputy schools superintendent, says more productive time is the key to success and there are too many variables in education to believe time is a real factor. His committee found a longer school year adds significant cost which available research cannot justify. (*Lakewood Sun Post*, May, 7, 1992).

Time On Task

Most studies of the extended school year place a greater priority on improving time on task, the actual time students spend in academic learning, before increasing the school year. "The urgent need is not lengthening the school year, but using more effectively the time schools already have," said Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Pearman, March, 1987).

In a study of time on task, Richard Rossmiller showed that during a typical school year of 1,080 hours, students actually receive academic instruction for 364 hours. A similar study calculates that students spend only 38% of the school day engaged in academic learning. Rossmiller suggests, "Before we start extending the school year, we ought to make better use of the time we have" (Mazzarella, May, 1984).

The Price for Extra School Days - Dollars and Sense

"If the problem with our educational system is time, let's give more. If the problem is money, we'll spend more. But if the problem is in the system, more of an incorrect thing won't make it work," says columnist Gretchen Rice in the *Sacramento Union*. Just how much money must we be willing to spend to extend the school year? Here are some estimates of the cost:

- Alan Odden of the Education Commission of the States estimates that lengthening the school year from 180 to 200 days would cost the nation over $20 billion annually (Principal, May, 1984).

- On the local level, Massachusetts lawmakers estimate to extend the school calendar in their state by 40 days, to 220 days, would cost an estimated $26.4 million per extra day, for a total of over $1 billion.

- Louisiana legislators defeated a bill to lengthen the school year from 175 to 180 days by 1993 that would have cost the state up to $30 million a year.

In a time of severe budget cuts, education officials must determine the programs that will maximize academic achievement at minimal costs. The NEA recommends "before committing to this type of investment, policymakers should insist on concrete proof that they could expect to get something for their money, or that of all the possible uses of available educational funds, buying more instructional time is the best option" (NEA, Oct. 1987).

In almost ten years of study, researchers have not found concrete proof that lengthening the school year will increase academic learning.

Keeping Up With the Japanese - An International Comparison

The most common argument to increase the school year is "that's the way the Japanese do it." However, as Americans consider lengthening the school year to try to mimic international education systems, the Japanese are shortening their school year. By decreasing in-school time, the Japanese hope to limit the unenviable pressure of the longer school year and foster more well-rounded students, like those in the United States (*Washington Post*, March 4, 1992).

The highly touted new book, "The Learning Gap," documents extensive research and comparisons of Asian and American education by psychology professors Harold Stevenson and James Stigler. The book emphasizes teachers and teaching, curriculum and the role of parents and does not focus on a longer school year. Stevenson says, "Unfortunately, suggestions to modify the school year have been made on the basis of casual observation of what appears to occur in Asia, rather than on reliable information."

Stevenson and Stigler say the real differences between Asian and American systems that have affect education are how Asian schools are run and the cultural and parental attitudes toward school and achievement. Asian parents believe academic learning is child's primary responsibility, spending less time playing sports and doing fewer chores.

Sugekawa Kenji, superintendent of schools in Hiroshima, Japan, met with teachers and administrators in Virginia Beach, Virginia to compare education notes. When asked of the disadvantages of a longer school year and longer school week, Kenji said the six-day week in Japan was probably too long and should be reduced. Kenji says Japanese students seem overloaded with work and couldn't learn it all. He believes the additional school days contribute to emerging problems with truancy, vandalism and dropouts (*Virginian Pilot*, August 2, 1991).

The *New York Times* says, "Japan's education system is often the envy of other countries because it produces a well-educated and disciplined work force. But some scholars say the system robs children of their childhood and turns them into automatons in matching uniforms and backpacks." (September 11, 1992)

Although the Japanese school year is longer, the additional class time does not mean additional instruction. Jill Klein, an American teacher teaching in Japan, confirms that the extra class time is often used for the large number of holidays, special sports practices, preparation for festivals, field trips, club and extracurricular activities; not for additional instruction time. Klein believes although the Japanese school year is longer, actual time spent in class is less than in the United States.

When making international education comparisons, education reformers must understand the significant differences in education systems that create the differences in test scores. Differences in society and demographics make international comparisons of schools difficult. Japanese society places a higher priority on education, making comparison between Japanese and American students like comparing apples and oranges. In addition, the Japanese educate a homogeneous society and have a national curriculum. Teachers in Japan have been elevated to government level, reflecting the high regard for the profession.

Comparisons of test scores show Americans would do well to emulate certain aspects of other education systems. A longer school year would not benefit American students until these other factors, such as improved curriculum and better teaching techniques, are implemented.

Little Public Support

Educators and policymakers know that education reforms must have public support, particularly teachers, parents and students, to be effective.

Since 1982, the Gallup organization has polled the nation about extending the school year. Opposition to the theory of a longer school calendar has decreased since the question was first posed. But NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard!) always prevails when the calendar is actually considered.

The few school districts that tried a longer school year after A Nation at Risk in the early 1980s, quickly abandoned their experiments because of strong community protest.

More recently, the 1991 Virginia Board of Education poll shows 77% of parents with school-age children oppose a longer school year. North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction reports 75% of those polled oppose the calendar. In 11 years of discussion, only 12 schools in the country operate between 200-220 days per year.

Several states are discussing lengthening the school year. Politicians praise the idea but are unable to find the money to implement the program. Taxpayers oppose the reform and will not allocate the money.

Research Data

Supporters of the extended school year often overlook pertinent research data of international comparisons. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is the standard source for international comparisons of achievement.

In studies conducted since 1964, the IEA has consistently concluded that the total instructional hours during a school year has no significant relationship to achievement. In addition, IEA studies show that, except for foreign language instruction, increasing the hours of instruction for specific subjects is not likely to improve the educational achievement of American students (NEA, Oct. 1987).

True, American students often do not compare well in academic comparisons with students in other countries. However, those making the comparisons must consider that the United States mandates education to students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. As in Japan, most other industrialized countries have a more elite educational system and enroll only the most talented and advantaged youths - often based on competitive examination. (Blai, September, 1986).

According to IEA studies, when top-quality American students are compared with comparable students in selective Western European school systems, American students fare favorably.

More Disadvantages of the Extended School Year

Legislators and educators must consider the high cost of adding days to the school calendar and the lack of evidence that more school days increase academic achievement. There are other detrimental effects to consider:

Increased dropout rates: "Those critical of a longer school year say the problems afflicting education are so entrenched and complex that simply lengthening the academic year will have little impact on the caliber of schooling. In fact, it could increase the dropout risk for many students," says an article in the *Boston Globe* (April 22, 1991).

Researchers at John Hopkins University studying the academic performance of students with part-time jobs agreed. They warned that working students would not decrease their work hours to handle increased academic demands and run a greater risk of dropping out. ("The Impact of Reform Recommendations on Potential Dropouts," McGill, et.al., Pelavin).

Little opportunity to earn money: Additional school days would eliminate time for many high school students who must work full-time during the summer to earn money for college tuition or to supplement the family income.

Less time for experiential learning: Extended school years mean less time during the summer for family vacations, recreation and organized sports activities, camp, or remedial summer school. These experiences are important to the well-rounded education of a child.

Prohibits professional development: With shorter summers, teachers have less time to pursue higher education or recertification courses.

Growth and development: A child requires developmental time that can be sapped by the increased pressures of additional school days. Education researcher Henry Levin writes that "in the last decade three major national reports argued that many of the problems of adolescence and causes of inadequate development for adulthood are created by the fact that youth spend too much time in school rather than too little" (Blai, September, 1986).

Conclusion

Proponents of the extended calendar hope that additional school days will mean additional learning. Research shows little evidence that the quantity of school days improves the quality of education.

Most researchers agree with research analyst Thomas Ellis: "The quality of time spent in learning is more important than the quantity. Moreover, the costs of extending school time are disproportionate to any resulting instructional gains" (Ellis, 1984).

Adding days to the school calendar is a very costly decision. The high cost of an extended school year does not justify the minimal benefits in education. In the case of the extended school year, more is not necessarily better.

Revised: October, 1992

References

Blai, B. (1986, September). Educational Reform: It's About "Time." The Clearing House.

Ellis, T. (1984). Extending the School Year and Day. ERIC Digest, Number Seven, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Hevly, N. (1991, July 2). In English, French or Japanese, School Spells Trouble. Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Jordan, Mary (1992, March 4). For U.S. Students, Few Days Off: Americans Turn to Longer School Year Just As Japan Trims Calendar. *Washington Post*

Karweit, N. (1985, June/July). Should We Lengthen the School Term? Educational Researcher.

Mazzarella, J. (1984, May). Longer Day, Longer Year: Will They Make a Difference? Principal Magazine.

_____ (1987, October). What Research Says About: Extending the School Day/Year: Proposals and Results. National Education Association.

Olsen, L. (1991, August 25). Beach, Japan Swap Ideas on Education. The Virginian Pilot.

Pearman, B. (1987, March). These Seven School Reforms Could Backfire. The American School Board Journal.

Pittman, R. et al (1986, Summer). The Extended School Year: Implications for Student Achievement, Journal of Experimental Education.

Ribadeneira, D. & Hart, J. (1991, April 22). Mass. Asks: Would More School Help? Boston Globe.

Shanker, Albert (1991, September 10). More of the Same Won't Help Situation. Evansville Courier.

Yatvin, J. (1984, March). Two Muddled Recommendations from A Nation At Risk. Principal Magazine.