The Pros and Cons to Longer School Days

Requiring students to be in school longer has its advantages and its drawbacks.

Children in the U.S. spend, on average, 6.64 hours in school a day for 180 days a year.\*

Given that U.S. students’ test scores lag behind the scores in other developed nations,† the question has to be asked: Should we be devoting more time to K–12 education? The answer is not as simple as some may think. There are good arguments in favor of and in opposition to longer school days.

The Pros of Longer School Days

*More Time for Instruction*

The number one reason for lengthening the school day is to provide teachers with more time for instruction. Over the last century, humans have acquired a staggering amount of knowledge and understanding. It makes sense that we now need to spend more time educating children, especially in the STEM fields, where knowledge is advancing rapidly and where job opportunities remain plentiful. If the U.S. is to stay competitive globally, we must produce an educated populace. Extending the school day could be an important step toward securing a strong future.

*More In-Tune With the Modern World*

The 6.5 hour school day—and the long summer break most schools take—originated at a time when children had to help work family farms and ranches. But keeping this agrarian calendar makes little sense in the information age. If we want to move forward as a nation, we should ensure our children study in a way that complements modern lifestyles and needs.

*Easier on Parents*

Many schools dismiss students in the midafternoon, hours before most adults leave work. To fill the gap, working parents have to arrange for childcare, enroll their kids in an after-school program, or simply work less. This can cause a lot of headaches and financial stress. A longer school day can help alleviate some of the childcare burdens parents currently face.

The Cons of Longer School Days

*No Direct Correlation Between Longer Days and Higher Achievement*

While studies have found that longer instruction time can improve achievement, the correlation is not exact and depends on other factors, such as classroom environment, quality of instruction, and student ability.‡ In short, it’s likely that longer school days won’t be an effective way to raise achievement without other factors already being in place. Supporting this notion is the fact that U.S. teachers already spend more time in the classroom than most other developed nations,§ many of which have higher student achievement.

*Raises Costs*

Keeping students in school longer requires a lot of additional expenditures, including teacher salaries and facility upkeep. It’s possible that changes in teaching strategy and improvements in educational materials could offer a much more efficient way to boost academic achievement.

*Limits Time for Other Activities*

From sports to music to dance, many children participate in extracurricular activities designed to teach them new skills and enrich their lives. A longer school day could make participating in extracurriculars more difficult. It can also reduce the free time children need.