Make the School Day Longer

by Trevor McDaniel

[1] No matter what we want to learn—baking bread, water-skiing, or computer coding—we expect to put in enough time to master it. Time matters! If we want our students to master their learning, they need to put in the time. And a longer school day helps them do just that.

[2] First of all, student achievement rises with more time focused on schoolwork. One study analyzed math and language-arts test results of 47,000 ninth- and tenth-graders in 72 countries. The results pointed to the benefits of extra time in class. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development releases school rankings based on those same standardized test scores. According to their study, Shanghai, China, has the highest-achieving school system in the world. Shanghai high-schoolers spend nine hours a day in school.

[3] In other countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, too many students are falling behind in achievement. There's a big gap between test scores of students from high-income and low-income homes. One reason for that gap is opportunity. Low-income students simply don't have the chance for private tutoring, after-school enrichment programs, and other learning experiences that wealthier families can afford. A longer school day can help bridge that gap. It allows time for targeted academic tutoring, along with programs in sports, art, music, technology, and more. These experiences help students discover that learning is not only satisfying—it's exciting!

[4] Why does a school day typically end at 3:00 or 3:30 in the afternoon? That schedule came about long ago, when children had to help their families on farms. Few students are doing farm chores after school these days. In fact, the hours between 3 and 6 PM are the most dangerous times for kids to be on the streets. According to the FBI, violent crimes involving young people reach their highest point between 3 and 4 PM on school days. Most working adults are not at home in the afternoon, so they're unable to supervise their children. School is a safer place to be.

[5] Critics argue that a longer day isn't likely to make students in those schools suddenly score higher on tests. Supporters of expanded hours actually agree with that point. Chris Gabrieli, author of *Time to Learn*, argues for longer school days. However, he notes that, "Nothing considered by itself is enough to turn schools around—not the most gifted teachers, most inspiring principals, newest

buildings, or most up-to-date equipment." He stresses that, "It's the quality of the time that makes the difference."

[6] A longer school day makes it possible to improve schools in many ways. Teachers have more time to share ideas and plan lessons. Students have time to complete projects in core academic subjects. There's more time for art, music, sports, and enriching experiences. Time matters—especially at school!