

# Is It Time For Longer School Days?

by Diane Trautman

Should kids spend more time in school each day? Should the school year be extended?

I asked these questions of my younger son, a high school senior. He groaned and buried his head in his hands. And when I asked a mother I know, she protested that her kids can't have a longer day in the classroom and still complete four to six hours of homework each night.

Extended school days was among the education reform recommendations contained in the 1983 report "Nation at Risk," published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Since that time, there has been no national movement to incorporate that suggestion. Some charter schools have experimented with longer days, but the concept seems to have been shunned on a large scale.

I raise this issue because two recent news articles caught my eye. One cited a study about high school seniors underperforming despite taking more challenging courses than their predecessors. The other concerned a recent pilot program in Massachusetts that merits attention.

The state of Massachusetts earmarked funds for an initiative, targeting mostly poor urban schools, that extends the school day for elementary and middle students. The extra two hours each day provide some time for core curriculum, but also expand physical education, allow time for tutoring, and give students an opportunity to explore a greater range of electives, including the arts.

More recently, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass) introduced the Teaching Fellows for Expanded Learning and After-School Act as part of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. Under this proposal, a national service corps of aspiring teachers would work with students in the extended-day programs and help teachers during during the regular day.

At a time when U.S. students are becoming less competitive than their peers in other countries — who spend significantly more time in the classroom — it makes sense to reconsider extended school days. Perhaps with more time to learn and more variety in their lessons, our children wouldn't need the volume of homework some endure. With more in-depth lessons, and fewer but more meaningful tests, our kids will be able to hold their own against the competition.

You can read more about the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time To Support Student Success Initiative and access a copy of the report by visiting:

<[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/massachusetts.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/massachusetts.html)>

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