

## How Much Time is Enough?

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The relationship between time and student achievement is once again being examined. A recent publication, *On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time* by Elena Silva of Education Sector, funded by The Broad Foundation, notes that the “addition and improvement of the use of time was at the top of the list of recommendations in a report, *Getting Smart, Becoming Fairer*.” Various proposals are now under consideration in public and private education to either lengthen the school day and/or the school year. Quite apart from the practical implications of such a move, what are the research findings?

### Recent Research

*On the Clock* first distinguishes between academic learning time (actual class time spent on learning), instructional time (class time allocated to formal learning/teaching), allocated class time (time spent in class including non-instructional time), and allocated school time (time spent in school). It makes the clear point that increasing time is of no value unless we “focus on providing the right kind of time.”

Studies have found that increased academic learning time positively affects test scores, but that increased allocated and instructional time had no effect on scores. Silva cites a Fisher study (*Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study*), which found that students were getting a “mere four to 52 minutes a day of actual academic learning.” She also quotes a 2005 study (*Time for a Change: The Promise of Extended-Time Schools for Promoting Student Achievement*)<sup>5</sup> that found the following factors were critical to support increased academic learning time:

- strong leaders;
- excellent teachers;
- high expectations for students;
- monitoring performance; and
- a safe, supportive, and nurturing school environment.

### ISM's Analysis

ISM's examination of research on time and observations in many schools supports these findings.

- All time is not equal.
- The use made of time is more important than the amount of time itself.
- When teaching in-depth (rather than breadth) takes place in classrooms, students suffer less short-term memory loss and little long-term memory loss.
- In-depth teaching is typically associated with more intense experiences and varied teaching approaches carried out in longer class periods.

- Most upper school and middle school teachers are practiced in teaching for relatively short periods (40-50 minutes).

ISM suggests that schools carry out the following review.

- Assess the use of time according to the four kinds of time noted in On the Clock.
- Count the interruptions that occur daily, weekly, and by semester and assess the quality of actual academic learning time. Such interruptions may include athletic dismissals, field trips, special assemblies, interruptions when students are pulled from class, announcements on the intercom (or in person), and the like.
- Count the actual number of teaching days and compare it with the number of days published in admission materials (which includes all school days, such as Founder's Day, Field Day, midterm and final exams, etc.).

As a result of this review, carry out the following actions.

- Design an annual schedule with a view to ensuring a minimum number of actual instructional days as determined by policy. (Anecdotal data from ISM scheduling workshops suggest that "true" teaching days total around 165 in private-independent schools.)
- Design a daily schedule that promotes deep learning.<sup>6</sup>
- Provide professional development to faculty around the use of time and the engagement of students in deep learning.<sup>7</sup>
- Carry out the time conversation at the Management Team level, connecting it to school-growth items at your meetings.<sup>8</sup>
- Carry out the time conversation at the Board level in setting policy connecting this to competitive advantage, i.e., ensuring that your policies enable you to maintain excellence in the delivery of your mission and thus enable you to maintain competitiveness in the marketplace.<sup>9</sup>

Taking action about time can have a profound impact on a school's culture and student achievement. This research helps bring up important issues that can spur better practices in our own schools.